

SUMMARY OF PARENTS' CONSULTATION MEETING RE ACADEMY STATUS

Governors Present: Mr J Snell (Headteacher) Mr S Green (Chair), Mr D Hall (Vice-chair), Mrs G Chinnery, Mr M Keeling, Mr E Parrott-Pentreath

MSNSP

Representatives: Mr A Williams (Headteacher Norton Hill & Somervale Schools and CEO of MSNSP Multi-Academy Trust)
Mr G Griffith (Headteacher High Littleton Primary School)
Mrs M Parsons (Headteacher Clutton Primary School)

The meeting was attended by 20 parents from Welton Primary School, various members of the school staff and 2 staff representatives from the Bumbles Pre-school.

Mr Snell welcomed all attendees and explained that this was a consultation meeting to give parents the opportunity to ask questions, air their concerns and voice their opinions regarding the proposal for Welton Primary School to become an Academy and join with the MSNSP (Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership) which is a MAT (Multi-Academy Trust) presently consisting of Norton Hill and Somervale Secondary Schools, High Littleton and Clutton Primary Schools). No final decision has yet been made by the local governing body and the school can pull out of the process at any stage – it is by no means a 'done deal'.

Mr Snell explained that although formerly maintained by the LA, due to a political and cultural shift national government now want schools to become more directly responsible for their own management with the aim that all schools both Secondary and Primary should be Academies by 2020.

Governors have been researching the process and carrying out fact finding exercises for the past 18 months looking into a variety of possible options. Last year there were presentations from:-

- i) A local Midsomer Norton Primary School not based in Radstock and presently the sole member of their own MAT. (NB: Stand-alone Academies are now discouraged by the government, with the preference being for collaboration between a number of linked schools within a MAT).
- ii) 2 local MATs (one Secondary led and the other a partnership between a Special School and an out of area Middle School).
- iii) A large multi-national Trust

At the time it was felt that these presentations were informative but with both a General Election and Ofsted Inspection in the near future it was not the appropriate time to make a decision. However, since then the political agenda has changed, the school has received a 'Good' Ofsted Inspection and the quantity and quality of services provided by the LA are diminishing rapidly due to reduced government funding. In January the FGB therefore arranged for two further presentations to be given by local Secondary led MATs:-

- 1) MSNSP (Norton Hill, Somervale, High Littleton and Clutton Schools)
- 2) The Dragonfly Trust (Writhlington and Peasedown St John Schools)

After lengthy debate and very in depth discussions as to the best way forward to meet the future requirements of Welton School, its pupils and staff, the governors unanimously agreed to start the consultation process for becoming an Academy with a view to joining the MSNSP which seemed the more appropriate of the two MATs for a 'best fit' with Welton Primary's ethos and quality of opportunity for pupils.

ACADEMIES?

Schools which become companies limited by guarantee with trustees and governors.

- *They give greater freedoms over teaching, services, estates, etc.*
 - *They allow you to sponsor other schools*
 - *You can work more closely with other schools*
 - *There is an increase in budget due to centralised funds coming straight to the school – typically 7-8%*
 - *You can procure better and cheaper services*
 - *There is a greater imperative to work together*
 - *MATs?*
-
- The Trust oversees the financial administration of member schools.
 - Governors and staff of member schools remain the same – no redundancies
 - Individual schools are still masters of their own destiny
 - Schools can shape their own curriculum
 - Procurement is easier and schools can choose which services to buy into and where from. Economies of scale mean better deals with suppliers of goods and services
 - Still an element of ‘top-slicing’ by the MAT instead of the LA. Statutory funding per pupil is the same as from LA (amount set by national government) – no school favoured above another.

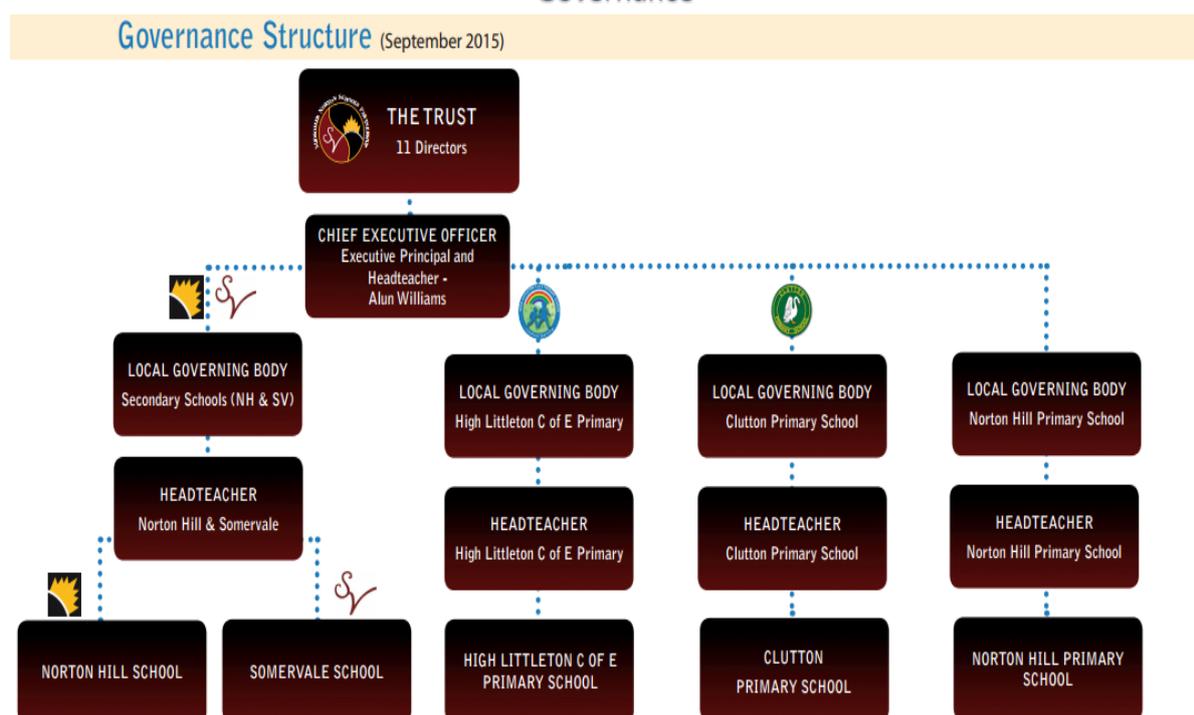
NB: Academy of Trinity which is presently in difficulties was one of the very early ‘stand-alone’ Academies (The preference now is for groups of schools working collaboratively together to avoid the kind of problems that developed at this establishment). The MSNSP has been asked to help sort out Trinity & Dundry schools as a Sponsor by the Regional Schools Commissioner Sir David Carter (who has ultimate power to make decisions concerning all schools in the South-West).

Why be a partner with MSNSP schools?

- We believe in education not just cost saving
 - We want a shared approach to improving education locally
 - We have significant experience of working with primary schools – they are an integral part of the Trust already – we’ve done this already and all schools are happy and have a voice
 - We are the go-to organisation in the area to support schools
 - We have preferential bidding rights for capital build
 - We have developed significant back office capacity already
 - Economies of scale allow for improved facilities, services, etc across all schools.
 - Access to specialist teachers and support staff – teachers of reading, mathematics, etc.
 - We are the largest MAT locally and the one trusted to open a new primary – yet we remain focussed on local education
- The CEO is on the Regional Headteacher Board

Q Who has the say in MSNSP?

Governance



- The Trust is monitored by the Regional Schools Commissioner.
- The 11 Directors are ex-governors of NH and SV schools, GG and MP and the Chair of Governors from H/L Primary School. (They are unpaid volunteers.)
- Governors and Headteachers in member schools have the same powers as before.

Q Is information regarding expenditure within the MAT available?

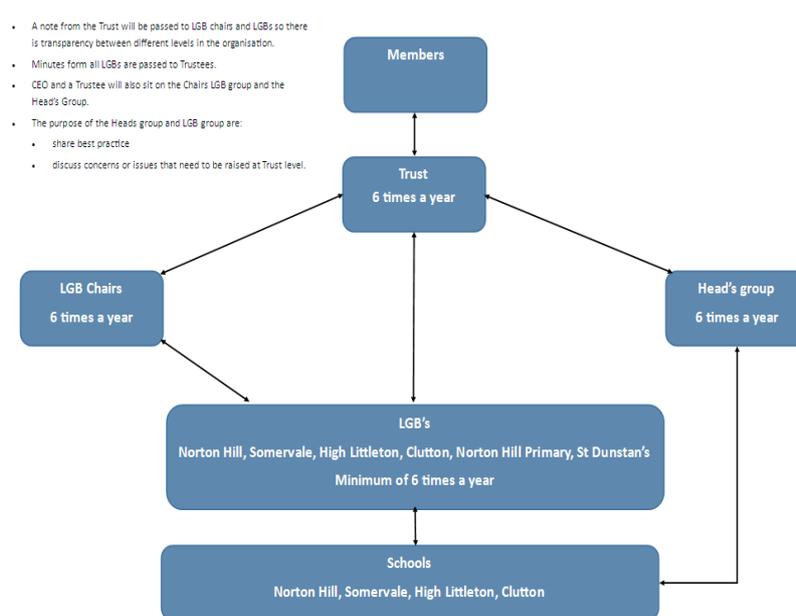
- AW as CEO is legally accountable for funds and details of expenditure is publically available. As CEO/HT he has a personal authorisation limit of £30,000 which must be co-signed. Anything above this figure has to be authorised by the Trustees. The accounts are audited by both the LA and Baker Tilley Accountants with records kept at Companies House. AW could be called to answer questions regarding financial accountability in front of Parliament.

Q If no confidence in the CEO who to appeal to? (Parents concerned that Trinity took 2 years to be investigated).

- A number of avenues depending on the nature and severity of the complaint. The Trust and all members at all levels are scrutinised, checked and monitored by the RSM and are totally accountable.
- Headteacher/Local Governing Board of your child's school, the Directors of the Trust, the RSC Sir David Carter, Ofsted.

Q How big will the Trust get? How many schools can be accommodated? How will it be managed with an increased number of member schools?

- It is anticipated that as well as the new NH Primary School in due course (due to open in September 2017) both Trinity and Dundry schools will join the Trust as well as St Dunstan's (a small Secondary School in Glastonbury) who the Trust is currently sponsoring. If Welton join and another local Primary School which has expressed an interest together with other local feeder schools it could realistically become 10-15 schools mainly from the Norton Radstock area and surrounding village feeder schools. If that was the case the management structure detailed above would become unwieldy and not fit for purpose as the HTs and Chairs of local governing boards would not get a united voice.
- The new model governance shown below would then become more appropriate.



- Power sharing would be between the LGB Chairs and Heads' Group.

Q If the MSNSP MAT includes most of the schools in the local area would a parent who wanted to move their child for any reason find their choice restricted?

- Individual schools will still maintain their individual ethos, staff and management structures as now. The curriculum will still be led by HT/SLT/Governing Body. The MAT will have an overview and would step in if things start to go wrong.

Q Payments requested from Parents – there were concerns that uniform, school trips, etc were very expensive at Trinity. Also Fund Raising was very pressured with intense competition encouraged between classes. Would this be the case with schools in the MAT?

- Welton and any school under the MAT umbrella will still have its own budget to manage with a clear formula for allocation of funds under government guidelines with a set amount per head for pupils in the school. Schools will have their own uniforms, organise their own trips and have their own PTA fund-raising as before.

Q What happens about Statements and Pupil Premium? Can the schools buy in better services under the MAT?

- This will be the same as before - Pupil Premium depends on parents being eligible for benefit related Free School Meals with applications being made to the LA. SEN

Statements have to be applied for to the LA with children being assessed and needing to meet appropriate criteria for funding to be granted.

- Support within the MAT will be better with good practice being shared between schools, better access to SENCO expertise and local services due to economies of scale.

Q What happens about repairs and site/structural maintenance?

- The MAT maintains a team of maintenance and repair staff who will be on call to all schools within the MAT and can provide back up and support much more quickly than the LA. Schools will pay in to an Insurance fund with the MAT (in the same way as they do to the LA at present) the main difference being the speed of the response with the majority of requests being dealt with in days rather than weeks.

Why should primary and secondary schools work more closely?

- Vision - outstanding education for all in the local area.
- Support for one-another that is systematic not ad-hoc – in learning, in leadership, problem solving, etc
- Collective responsibility
- Safety in numbers
- Better transition – most of your children go to one of the two secondary schools in the MSNSP
- Opportunity for staff – promotion, training, sharing of best practice
- Shared teaching - flexibility of staffing
- Shared curriculum – D and T, outdoor education
- Shared professional development – joint INSET
- Shared facilities - Astroturf
- Economies of scale – shared buying, services

Q What happens to the school staff under the MAT? Parents do not want unqualified staff teaching their children. Will staff be moved to other schools?

- JS affirmed that Welton School will still be 'us'. Staff Terms and Conditions are secure and recruitment will be on the same basis as previously. AW confirmed that there are no 'unqualified teachers in the group. If a secondment request is made it is the decision of the HT and Governors to grant it or not. However staff have to be given professional development opportunities and could choose to apply for a post at another school. No member of staff will be forced to work elsewhere as this would be counter-productive. Once assimilated by the MAT, the roles and responsibilities of some Admin and support staff may well change due to centralisation of processes and subsequent restructuring, although some level of admin staff will still be needed in each school. Initially there will be extra work for the SBM in preparing for a change to Academy status but once set up there will be extra support available if needed.
- There are exciting sharing opportunities with pupils from the Primary sector having access to Science Labs, Sports Facilities and DT areas (Food Tech etc).
- Improved transition between KS2 and KS3 due to familiarity with Secondary School premises/staff.

Q Will children at Primary schools be encouraged to attend the Secondary School(s) within the MAT? Concerns from parents who live outside the geographical area that pupils may be indoctrinated in favour of the MAT Secondaries.

- There will be no need to 'recruit'. Secondary Schools involved are usually oversubscribed and feeder schools within the geographical area expected to increase pupil numbers in years to come. Transfer from member schools and feeder schools will not be automatic. Parents will still need to apply for Key Stage 2-3 transfers and meet the application criteria/priorities.

Q What happens if a school is failing? Will money / staff from other schools be used to shore them up?

- It is not permitted to take money from one school's allocation to be used for another. The MAT will have central funds (top sliced from all member schools) and also funding from successful government 'bids' that can be used to help support schools within the MAT and by keeping an overview – intervention will be earlier.

Q Will there be a bidding war for good staff in the future?

- All schools (Academy or not) have to abide by the national Terms and conditions and can already set their own pay scales so current and future staff are already able to negotiate salaries when changing posts. There will actually be more staff opportunities within the bigger group with better and possibly more convenient and user friendly packages able to be negotiated without the need to move outside the area in order to obtain career improvement.

Q What's actually in it for Welton? How do the staff feel?

- Staff are very excited and positive about the proposal to form an Academy and join the MSNSP MAT, but please be assured Welton will not change its identity. All schools within the MAT strive to be the best they can and Welton will continue to do this in its own unique way.

Q What happens if Welton decides at some stage in the future to leave the MAT?

- Schools contract to join the MAT initially for 7 years. If they wish to leave after that time it would be necessary to be re-brokered to another MAT, they cannot go back to being an LA maintained school. Government cannot micro-manage all schools nationally and it may well be that at some time in the future LAs may re-emerge in a different format. If a school and its governing body should be deeply unhappy with the MAT they would need to approach the Trustees and the Regional Schools Commissioner.

Q What happens about complaints? Clear procedure needs to be published.

- A definitive Complaints Policy with details of who should be contacted at each level if a problem has not been satisfactorily resolved will be made available to parents of all schools in the MAT. Lines of communication must be clearly shown.

Q Is there a cut off point for the size/membership of the MAT?

- It is anticipated that there could eventually be 10-15 schools in the MAT (mostly from the local area but with one or two exceptions – St Dunstan's Secondary School in Glastonbury which is being sponsored by MSNSP for example). If this number looked like being exceeded there would need to be a consultation process to review the whole management structure to see how it could be adjusted to give every stakeholder fair representation.

Q Do parents get to vote?

- There is no parental vote. The decision is made collectively by the governing body on behalf of the school, parents and staff following the statutory consultations to gather information and gauge popular feeling. Parents have to place their trust in the Headteacher and the governing body to do the best thing for the school which has always been the case in the past and will continue to be so.

Q What happens about Bumbles, Breakfast Club and WACI?

Bumbles and WACI will not become part of the MAT as they are tenants that rent property from the school to carry out their businesses. The MAT will become the landlord rather than the school/LA if the decision is taken to join MSNSP. The Breakfast Club is run by the school and will continue as before.

Q What is the timescale involved? What happens next?

- Unlike LA maintained schools the MAT can choose to align the financial and academic years. It would seem sensible for all formalities to be completed in time for the start of the new school year 1st September 2016. To do this a final decision needs to be made by **1st July 2016**. NB: Right up until 30/6 the local governing body can still pull out. Governors need to meet again with staff and Union representatives to make sure their interests are protected. It is the intention for the Governors to meet again within the next few weeks and make a final decision based on all the feedback from consultations to date but it is not a referendum. C of G, Mr Green advised that Governors are duly appointed by the parents to be responsible for the management of the school and it is the governing body (after collecting the views of parents, staff and interested parties) who will have to make the final decision with the best interests of Welton School and its pupils present and future in mind. The governing body have no vested interest in making the wrong decision but cannot be seen to stand still and do nothing. Change is coming regardless and it is better to be proactive than reactive to ensure the best possible outcome.

Q Please can notes be circulated?

- FAQ leaflet already circulated. Notes will be available to read on Website. Hard copies available on request from the school office.