

**Minchinhampton Primary School
Academy Consultation - Parent Meeting
Date June 2014 at 7pm in the School Hall**

Present:

Governors:

Mike Allen Liam Eaglestone Nick Moss	Annie Smith Jane Spouse
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Parents:

Lisa Allen Lucy Dowie Mark Catt Adrian Danks Alison Godfrey Alastair Goulty Chris Hower Nic Hitchings Kathryn McGregor	Estelle Manson-Whitton Sharon Marson Tara Patterson Sophie Potter Laura Thomas Mark Thompson Edward Stevens Victoria Stevens
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Diocese:

Helena Arnold	Kerry Brimfield
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The Chair of Governors opened discussions by introducing the Governors, Helena and Kerry from the Diocese and handed out a second copy of the response to questions raised during the consultation process.

The Chair explained the consultation process and that the Governing Board had previously looked at becoming an Academy two years ago, however, at the time the Governing Board (GB) decided the time was not right but would re-look at the possibility should the situation change. The GB believed that with the arrival of the Diocese of Gloucester Academy Trust (DGAT) the time was right to look again. The GB had also consulted teachers in the school who are unanimously supportive of a move to academy status with the Diocese.

The group were also informed that the GB would make their decision at a meeting of the Full Governing Board on 30 June 2014 and that this decision would take into account feedback from the consultation process.

The head teacher (NM) then gave his perspective to the group. NM explained that he believed that becoming an Academy would give the best deal for the children, which in this context was the of bringing the best teaching and learning perspective for the children allowing schools to work together with them in a collegial and supportive approach. He also explained that the Local Authority (LA) now offered little support for schools of our type and DGAT's excellent joint initiatives for staff development has made it an attractive proposition.

Helena Arnold (HA) of the Diocese of Gloucester explained that the Diocese are aiming to grow the DGAT carefully with considered quality to establish processes in order to support schools. They aim to be sustainable with robust systems in place giving small central support.

PQ: How many schools are there at the moment?

There are currently three. Minchinhampton, if it chose to convert would be the forth and there is another in the pipeline all within Gloucestershire.

PQ: Would the DGAT ever decide a school was not appropriate to join the DGAT?

Yes - DGAT is not prepared to see a drop in the quality of the schools in it's group. Also the Department for Education (DfE) have the final say as to whether a school can become an Academy and join a Trust.

PQ: you said you need 10 schools in 3 years is that from now?

It's ten single form entries - the three current schools are 1.5 entry schools giving a total of 4.5 so far.

PQ: What would happen if you didn't have enough?

The Diocese would need to go back to the DfE to ask for further funding. This wouldn't impact on the schools but would affect the central funding and therefore the support DGAT could give. However as more schools interested than are required the Diocese do not envisage this being an issue.

The Chair explained that governors are conducting a risk assessment to look at any risks that might be involved moving to DGAT.

PQ: In terms of schools, within the ten is there a maximum percentage of schools that could be in special measures?

The DfE wouldn't allow a large number of the schools to be in special measures. Of the schools currently in the DGAT on is graded good, the second is graded requiring improvement and the third school is good. The focus is very much on getting schools to outstanding.

PQ: What would be the timescale involved in becoming an Academy?

If the GB make the decision to convert on Monday then conversion would be 1st October.

PQ: The GB looked at this 2 years ago, why is now so much better now?

Previously it was to go as a single stand alone academy which is very different to the level of support DGAT give which covers the legal security and gives us ability to be part of a group of schools sharing best practise.

PQ: How would the DGAT seek funds?

Through the Academies Capital Maintenance fund. There are two windows of opportunity to put in bids for upto two projects. DGAT writes the bids, pulls in experts and submits bids. They have seen much success securing grants for the other schools within DGAT. The schools drive this and DGAT gives support where required.

The Chair explained that finance is an important issue as the school is a classroom short and has been unsuccessful in getting funding. He also assured the group that this has not been a driver for looking at Academy status though it would a make big difference that we would have people who would advocate on our behalf. LM explained that any financial benefit would not be part of the decision.

PQ: Will you be able to meet the resources required from the current staffing?

Ultimately won't make a difference. DGAT would be able to facilitate support (for example technical support) however, it's mainly about how we can pool the resources of all the schools in DGAT to the benefit of all.

PQ: Would you use inset days for this development?

Yes. There would be some joint inset days to bring staff together to look at the needs of the school.

PQ: Isn't it a big change to facilitate development?

It can be very hard to pin people down and DGAT would give an official network where staff can meet and offer day to day support.

The school has an agenda to move towards an outstanding Ofsted grading and the governors believe DGAT will help us move towards this and that our experiences may help to develop other schools.

PQ: Are there any issues for teachers regarding terms & conditions?

No, the trust is committed to keeping in line and not to deviate. Staff were also unanimous in their support for the school becoming an Academy.

PQ: Will it affect the school's ability to attract new staff?

We have no problem attracting people and this is not expected to change.

PQ: What part would DGAT play in the admissions policy and procedures?

The DGAT is legally compliant with the admissions code, therefore it would be the same. The DGAT is an inclusive trust who don't apply faith based criteria, it is up to the GB to decide on the admissions policy.

PQ: We've not been told the risks or given a copy of the risk assessment, will it be available for parents to see before a decision is made?

No.

PQ: Do we have greater purchasing power as part of the trust?

This is a possibility but is entirely up to the school. Ideas are presented to the schools and they decide.

PQ: How can parents back the proposal without knowing risks?

There is a draft assessment on risk and mitigations however which needs finalising. HA explained that the Trust has had to go through the risk assessment exercise and that the biggest risk for them is if schools don't perform, therefore every school has an external development partner who looks at the progress of the school and this is shared with the Trust, school and GB for monitoring purposes.

PQ: What if you do have that terrible case scenario?

There are set procedures but also the LA are not completely out of the picture and the LA are ultimately responsible for ensuring children get an education and continuity. The DGAT also produces a continuity plan for the school which is very similar.

PQ What about the risk associated with the political climate?

The Shadow Minister for Education has stated that the academy programme would continue under their government. The government are discouraging schools to move to academy status in isolation but instead in trusts which allow the centralisation of auditing & reporting.

PQ: Is there a potential risk of the Diocese taking on many schools?

The Diocese would not have the capacity to support a large number of schools.

PQ: How would the governance structure work?

The Diocese reports into the Secretary of State. There is representation of staff & governors on the Diocese Learning Board to ensure the needs of the school are being met. This is a genuine two way dialog.

PQ If, as parents, we see the Diocese as growing to many schools what voice do we have?

DGAT is accountable to the Board of Education regarding the quality of support the trust gives to the school. If the DGAT grew too much it would be monitored by the Board of Education.

PQ: The current GB seems to be a good representation of parents - would this continue under DGAT?

Current legislation is that every school has to reconstitute this academic year and it is looking for smaller, leaner governing boards. The trust is mindful of this so it is a conversation around how we make up the governing body. Legally the current governing body would cease and be reappointed.

PQ: What's DGAT's biggest worry?

Kerry - ensuring we never compromise on quality and managing growth to ensure the support of back office. HA - the unknown of government policy and what is the next 18 months going to bring.

PQ who owns the school and who's responsible for the physical upkeep and compete for funding?

Ownership doesn't change but upkeep is then the responsibility of the Trust and part of the delegated budget would go to upkeep.

PQ: With regard to class sizes, does DGAT set a levels for admissions?

What is already in place cannot be changed however if changes are required in the future, these need to be viable financially and in terms of support for children. This is a dialog with the school.

PQ: If Minchinhampton School becomes an academy would there be any change in curriculum?

It gives us more flexibility but wouldn't change it drastically.

PQ: Would there be any change in religious education?

This is down to us as an individually as a school. There is no agenda to change the religiosity of the school.

PQ: Is their a target for outstanding or would it be realistic to set?

The GB held a self evaluation recently to see where we can improve. One outcome of this was that the GB needs to be more strategic in the longer term and we are looking to extend the strategy to 3 years which could contain clearer descriptions of how we move to outstanding.

PQ: The letter implied that there were some aspects of the new curriculum coming that the school weren't happy with, is there anything specific that you would change?

It will give us the opportunity to be flexible where we need to be and the senior management team would engage with any changes they felt were necessary.

The Chair thanked the group for their engagement with the consultation process and closed the meeting at 9pm.