

Dales Academies Trust (DAT): Stakeholder consultation

Parents, Carers and Community Members

The comments, questions and answers below are a summary of the feedback received from all parent/carer and community members 19.6.17 and 8.9.17. They include response to emailed queries, questions raised at meetings and submitted in suggestions boxes. Questions raised by parents, carers and community members via our online survey are recorded within appendix 9.

Bolton on Swale and East Cowton – Parents Questions, 12.7.17

Question: What happens to the grants received to support conversion and set up?

Answer: These have been pooled together initially to support conversion costs and year 1 set up costs. Once the MAT is formed it would go in to a MAT bank account where all funds would be audited and accounted for in line with the grant guidance.

Question: What was the process for appointing the proposed Trustees/Members?

Answer: Members are appointed by the respective Diocese following the agreed Church Model Articles of Association which are negotiated and agreed nationally on behalf of all Church MATs. For Trustees we sought volunteers from across the schools governing bodies and the Diocese nominated some positions.

Question: How long does TUPE last?

Answer: TUPE has no prescribed time period that it lasts. Until such a point contracts are renegotiated or a staff members role changes TUPE will remain with the staff member.

Question: How are / will governors be selected?

Answer: Governors at a local level have what's called an Instrument of Government and this outlines the structure of a local governing body and its membership. Moving forward academies have something similar whilst also looking at a complimentary skill set across the body. For elected posts such as parents and staff they will continue to be elected. Other positions are advertised on school's websites, through networking meetings, public forums, the LA and word of mouth.

Question: What is the process for whistle blowing?

Answer: The Trust will create a Whistle Blowing policy in due course.

Question: Will all staff have qualified teacher status?

Answer: Yes.

Question: What does it cost for a school to become an academy?

i. Are you being asked to make savings?

Answer: There are costs a school incurs as part of becoming an academy for example legal fees, licenses for new finance systems, project management costs etc. The figures vary by school dependent on the level of complexity for example a school that may have a shared site with other providers can sometimes incur addition expense on legal fees. The DfE grant of £25k should cover the costs for conversion with the average cost been approximately £21k.

As part of this process we are not been asked to make savings but we all recognise that funding is tight so when savings and efficiencies can be made we will look at this in detail as it means longer term there would be more money to invest in teaching and learning in the classroom.

Question: Can you close a school as a result of it becoming an academy?

Answer: Unfortunately, schools in some parts of the country including here in North Yorkshire have closed for many reasons eg; financial viability, small or falling numbers, poor leadership and governance. There are no plans to close any school proposed to join the Trust in fact one of the reasons this is being explored is to strengthen and secure the long-term future of all our schools – we believe we are stronger together.

Question: What's in it for the schools?

Answer: We believe there are many advantages to considering academy status at this stage in the MATs development and these include:

- Increased opportunities for pupils through greater collaboration. Joint learning and sporting activities as well as development of best practice in the classroom.

- Opportunity to influence policy and procedure and the way the organisation is set up
- Increased emphasis and focus on professional development of all staff

Question: How many posts will there be above the schools/in the Trust centre?

Answer: At the moment we have identified a need for 3 posts.

Question: What are the salaries of proposed central staff i.e. CEO, FD and Finance Manager?

Answer: The CEO has been appointed on a 0.6 contract with a salary of approximately £45k to DAT. The Finance Director and Manager have yet to be appointed and their salaries will be set at rates which align with national benchmarks.

Question: What is the proposed top slice contribution from the schools?

Answer: The contribution for Bolton on Swale and East Cowton will be 4.5%.

Question: Is there a cooling off period if a school is not happy in the MAT?

Answer: No. At the point the funding agreements are signed a school is in the MAT and it is only via mutual consent that a school can leave a Trust.

Question: Are any of the schools proposed to join the Trust in a deficit position?

Answer: All schools proposing to join DAT have produced a 3 year balanced budget.

Question: Are there regulations on how you can spend capital funds which may go to the Trust or an academy?

Answer: Yes. Guidance is provided on how capital funds can/should be spent and you cannot move capital grants in to revenue budgets. Capital is accounted for separate to revenue budgets in all schools whether an academy or not.

Question: What is different about the Swaledale Alliance to the MAT?

Answer: Swaledale Alliance has grown significantly within the last few years and is there to support the development of teaching and learning. These are formal

partnerships but nothing legally binding between the schools. There is so much more a school needs including additional moderation and benchmarking as well as external challenge. Swaledale does not offer back office support to the headteachers within the MAT meaning that Heads can focus on teaching and learning much more.

Question: Will staff be prioritised within a MAT or within a school?

Answer: Staff will be prioritised within the schools. Staff will not be expected to work in different schools unless they have contracts to do so i.e. a contract to work across a federation of schools like some do already.

Question: What are the opportunities for children?

Answer: The opportunities are/could be:

- Access to a richer learning experience due to the opportunities for staff to work together and share best practice as well as children having new experiences working with other children in the MAT.
- More finance to invest into the classroom due to savings made.
- Improved outcomes for all schools/children

Question: We are happy with what the school does, will it change when part of a MAT?

Answer: At the front end of the schools i.e. in the classroom nobody will see any change. The same staff, the same curriculum offer and same school day/year. There will be some operational changes within the administration to account for changes needed to manage finance and the organisational elements that a MAT requires.

Question: If Richmond CE Primary are in an Ofsted category will our school resources be moved to support this school?

Answer: No. We would like to stress that although Richmond CE Primary is in a category it is a vastly improved school from that early in 2015 when it received its Ofsted inspection. Its results have had two years of improvements and this summers were better than many of the other schools proposing to join DAT. Under new leadership the school has moved forward significantly.

Comment: There is a worry this is politically driven and as a parent I worry about the long term. It is evident to see the positives now but what about in years to come?

Response: It is hard to second guess what may or may not happen in 2, 5 or even 10 years' time however, after much research we believe that this proposal is in the best interests of securing success for our children's future. Both main political parties have had academies central to their agenda and it would take significant physical and financial resource to unravel what has been set up. Together we believe we can be better prepared to respond to the political landscape/policy.

Comment: We don't want to lose this good school

Response: We don't and you won't. We want to ensure all schools become and remain outstanding and achieve the very best for pupils now and for decades to come.

Comment: I am reassured that Headteachers and staff are so positive. I was unsure when I arrived.

Comment: I would like clear evidence on the positives of joining a MAT and would like governors to make a fact based decision not hypothetical.
