

Stakeholders Questions and Views Collated at meetings (A & B) and through correspondence (C)

A. Meeting 23/02/2023

Staff Meeting

Present: Richard Cranmer – CEO St Benet’s MAT, Rhiannon Price – Headteacher, Kay Swann – IEB Chair, Paul Seeman – St Benet’s Head of Standards and Quality Assurance, Mark Steggles – St Benet’s HR Officer, Chris Allen – IEB member, Micky Harcourt-Heath – IEB member. Staff attendees from all schools in person or online.

1. What are the timescales for these changes? What about the change of Executive Headteacher and what about the IEB?

KS – The IEB is an interim situation – EHT recruitment is a part of the strategic view. The timescale for conversion, would be up to the DfE accepting the change and capacity of the trust.

RC – Decision on timing is with Regional Director and his Advisory Board that considers the applications. They will consider where the schools and the trust are on their current journey. Would not want schools to join where there isn’t capacity to provide the support needed. Answer really is that we ‘don’t know’. May well be at some point beyond September – no rush from St Benet’s point of view. Once in a MAT there is a lot more stability – get to know the trust board and staff well.

KS – The transition phase will need to be carefully managed but the recruitment of the EHT will include consideration for someone who can take the federation through to academy status if that is the decision made.

2. When does the IEB step away?

RC – The IEB would cease to exist at the point of academisation. A Transition Board takes over straight away to move towards a local governing body.

3. Will schools be at risk of closure? What job security is there?

RC – Schools are no safer in a MAT than anywhere else. We are a Diocesan MAT. Over half of the church schools are small schools and we value all that they bring. We look at the financial viability and standards, Ofsted and governance and if all these are working well then we would consider them to be viable. Job security is the same – can’t guarantee any more than for any school.

MS – Following TUPE we haven’t had anyone who has been moved on without them wanting to.

CA – MATs are involved with Unions and this helps to protect everyone.

4. How are NCC pensions affected? Will wages stay the same? Will terms and contracts remain the same and also continuous service?

MS – Local Govt and teachers’ pensions will be the same. Rates match the LA rates. Continuous service is maintained.

5. Is the PIXL pupil assessment system used for the whole trust?

PS - All schools submit data twice a year. Question Level Analysis and therapies (teaching resources) stem from this. KS – These include some really useful teaching resources. **How soon do schools have to transfer to PIXL when they join?** There is some flexibility.

6. What about staff sickness?

MS – This is similar to what is run by the LA but will depend on length of service etc.

7. What about Dependent leave?

MS – Staff can have a reasonable amount but it comes down to how much you have already taken. 3 paid days and then a reasonable number of unpaid days.

B. Meeting 23/02/2023

Parent /Community Meeting

Present: Richard Cranmer – CEO St Benet’s MAT, Rhiannon Price – Headteacher, Kay Swann – IEB Chair, Paul Seeman – St Benet’s Head of Standards and Quality Assurance, Chris Allen – IEB member, Micky Harcourt-Heath – IEB member. 3 parents present and 6 joined online. 1 Parish representative.

1. Will the Saints Federation still exist?

RC - Yes, the schools would convert individually but there would still be one federation with an Executive Headteacher across all three schools.

KS – The advert is currently out for an Executive Headteacher post.

2. Is there any protection of the school with children currently leaving and the schools getting smaller?

RC – Not in any better way than is now. There is a real concern about the number of children coming into all schools this year across the County. St Benet’s Trust values all schools and that includes small schools. We value having schools in the community. But if a roll got to a point where it made financial challenges for the other schools in the federation then decisions would have to be made. The Trust would want to shore up the schools so that children attend.

3. What if the view of a school causes parents to lose trust in a school?

RC - Actually, being part of a MAT can mean that leadership is more stable and the curriculum is good. Some of the families might then come back. Successful Ofsted also helps to draw children in. The MAT supports schools to be successful.

KS – The federation has 3 small schools so when children leave that makes classes smaller and we have to consider viability. Good financial management is important as the DfE won’t allow schools to join a MAT if the money is not firm. We need to promote the Saints Federation and give some positive messages so people know that children are having a good education.

4. Is there enough promotion of the schools currently?

KS – This is an area for action.

5. Where do these schools fit within what St Benet’s currently have?

RC – As an individual school Scole Primary with 70 is the smallest so these schools individually would be smaller but as a federation they are larger.

6. If the Government gives the same amount of money to LA schools and academies, who have a bigger support structure, how does that add up?

RC – The Trust board decides how much of the money to keep (5% currently and likely to go up shortly) LA is in line with this but not sure of the exact percentage. We have economies of scale in buying things within the MAT and to provide HR etc.

7. Are our new systems going to change with the MAT?

RC – We use things like ParentPay. We don’t have prescribed curriculum so schools can choose from a suite of approved curricula. The Back office is similar – e.g. finance is a specific package. Head of Operations would come to the federation and could talk through the things that the MAT would insist on and then negotiate the transition. We would be really mindful of not changing things too quickly.

8. What will the timeframe be?

KS – The Consultation views end 17th March and then the IEB will meet and consider what is the best thing for the federation going forward. We would then liaise with St Benet's if this is the agreed direction of travel.

RC – Regional Director for the DfE oversees all the academy conversions that happen. If the federation decides to submit an application to become an academy (which is a change of status legally) the RD will decide when this can happen. He will want to know that the MAT is in a position to support three schools joining. There has been rapid growth in the trust recently and there needs to be the capacity to support schools. The actual process takes 4-6 months so in reality, from the point of the RD agreeing, it could be 6-12 months. Therefore, likely to be from September 2023 -24.

9. What communication comes from the academy rather than the schools? What will parents see that is different?

RC – Improved teaching and learning would hopefully be seen over time. The relationship for parents is still with the schools as it is now.

CA – There might be some involvement in terms of the Complaints Procedure. The federation schools would still undertake staff recruitment.

KS – Also some guidance for the school e.g., during the pandemic.

10. What are the negatives for staff and parents?

KS – Staff enquired about contracts etc. For parents, no real changes will be apparent, no change of uniform required etc.

PS – Some MATs can be controlling but St Benet's does not impose a single curriculum. If schools are struggling the trust can offer support. Budgets, finance, pupil numbers can change whether you are an academy or not. MATs know the schools well. With 11 schools we can get to know them very well. Sometimes schools are not on the right path and we need to have a different conversation with them.

RC – As a parent you would be grateful that issues in a school are being dealt with if things were not going well. Central Trust colleagues visit schools termly.

11. If other schools are also looking to join, will the trust stop growing?

RC – We are almost at that point at the moment. We have a growth plan and there are a number of schools that want to join sooner than they will be able to. There will be a break over the next 12 months. Don't think this will affect the situation here.

C. PCC Correspondence

1. North Lopham PCC 11/03/23

In response to the Consultation letter received on Thursday 9th March, the members of North Lopham PCC considered the letter by e-mail.

I can report that North Lopham PCC members were unanimous in supporting the proposal for the Saints Federation to join St Benet's Multi Academy Trust.

They feel that membership of this MAT, of mostly Church Schools, would provide valuable support and assist with the sustainability of St Andrew's School in this parish and also of the other two schools in our Federation.

With our prayers and good wishes,

Jennie Vere

Churchwarden of North Lopham Church, and also member of the Norwich DBE

2. Shelfanger PCC 13/03/2023

Thank you for advising us of the consultation concerning 'All Saints' School, Winfarthing, and its Federation partners' proposal to join the Church of England Multi-Academy Trust.

All Saints' Church, Shelfanger PCC is a foundation stakeholder in Winfarthing School whose title 'All Saints' School reflects this. Shelfanger PCC is of the view that being under the supportive umbrella of the Academy Trust gives 'All Saints' School and its partners the best chance of surviving and prospering in the future.

Membership of the Trust also keeps 'All Saints' School and its partners securely within the historic family of Norfolk Church associated schools which has such an excellent record.

Roger Challoner
Churchwarden
On behalf of Shelfanger PCC

3. Winfarthing PCC 16/03/2023

I am writing on behalf of Winfarthing PCC, concerning the proposal for All Saints School, as part of the Saints Federation, to convert to academy status and join the Diocese of Norwich St Benet's Multi Academy Trust. Due to the limited time you have allowed us to respond to the consultation, it has not been possible to convene a full PCC meeting, I have circulated the consultation document by email and contacted as many PCC members as possible to inform this response.

The school - its children, staff and parents - is the keystone of Winfarthing, underpinning the whole village community, and has always celebrated a very close association with St Mary's Church. Over the years the children have been regular and frequent visitors to the church, both for worship and for community and curriculum activities. The strong links with the church have been reinforced, until recently, by PCC representation on the Governing Board of the school, as required by its VA status.

The PCC, as a major stakeholder in the school, has considered two main issues. Firstly we are concerned that with the recent drop in numbers the school has become very vulnerable. Secondly, we feel the preservation of the unique character of the school and its Christian ethos and values is paramount.

We understand that becoming part of the St Benet's MAT will address both these issues in a positive way. It is encouraging to learn that academy status will allow extra support for the staff and the potential for future development to address the needs of the school within the local community.

We are therefore pleased to support this proposal, and look forward to being kept well informed of the progress of the conversion process.

Kind regards

Jane Marchant
Winfarthing PCC

4. St Andrews, Church South Lopham PCC 17/03/2023

St. Andrew's Church, South Lopham, PCC meeting held on 15th March 2023, the members of the PCC voted in favour of St Andrew's School, North Lopham, to convert to an Academy Status and join the Diocese of Norwich St. Benet's Multi-Academy Trust.

Best Wishes,

Jackie Burroughes,
Secretary.