

Forefield Community Infant and Nursery School

Academy Conversion consultation Questions & Answers

Parent / Carers meeting, Thursday 29th June 2023 at 5.00pm

Question: Mentioned visited schools, where have you been and what are the disadvantages?

Answer: Two schools in Sefton belonging to different Trusts Disadvantages – joining an established Trust and potentially having to compromise values, vision linked to this CEO whose values and vision not aligned with those at Forefield.

Why we are excited at being involved from the conception and making a contribution to shaping shared values and vision which are very much aligned and formalised.

Question: Has CEO been appointed and Trustees?

Answer: The appointed CEO will be the current Headteacher at Chesterfield High, which is converting from a single academy trust, to a multi academy trust. Other schools will then join the trust. The CEO will be paid from the top-sliced school budgets.

As CEO of the Trust, the current Headteacher at Chesterfield High School will be the Accounting Officer for the Trust and the strategic support for schools. The Board of Trustees will have responsibility for the effective running of the Trust and the individual academies within it. All schools within proposed MAT will have a Local Governing Body (LGB). On the ground, the LGB includes people who know the school best. The LGB play a very important part to ensure that the school runs smoothly.

Trustees – required expertise established and interest has been invited from participating school's Governing Bodies.

Question: What feedback have we had from staff? If any?

Answer: Positive – they have seen and experienced the benefits and opportunities over a long period of time of collaborative working as part of CAPITAL.

Recognise that being part of MVLT will provide opportunities e.g. CPD, collaborative working.

Question: MAT schools visited – did they have any regrets joining MAT?

Answer: No and they were asked that question directly. Advised to undertake soft due diligence/research (which we have done).

Question: In relation to pots of funding that MATs can access – what would be required in return, it won't be for free?

Answer: It is a bidding process linked to needs assessments.

Benefit of belonging to a MAT is being able to secure services of professional bid writers increasing chance of successful applications.

Question: If all goes ahead and bids are submitted will this be communicated to parents?

Answer: Yes we'd share as we would do now.

Question: You've said staff have worked hard on developing the curriculum will this stay the same? Will the National Curriculum be followed?

Answer: Yes, that's one of our non-negotiables that schools will keep their curriculum that is appropriate for their children.

Question: Do you think there will be a negative impact on the children?

Answer: No, the opposite, I think on a day-to-day basis, the children/parents will notice little difference other than in a positive way and that will be through opportunities that will be available to staff in terms of CPD, collaboration to strengthen what we currently offer which will all impact positively on outcomes for the children.

Question: Concerned that Forefield Infants will lose its identity – we came here so that is important to us especially as there are also changes that are happening alongside this (new Headteacher). Is this the best time?

Answer: Schools keeping their individual identity is a non-negotiable for all of the schools looking to form proposed MAT. Parents have chosen our schools for their children for the school's ethos, culture etc and important to all that that is retained.

Governing Body appointed Mrs Roberts as new Headteacher which provides the school with continuity and Mrs Roberts and the Senior Leadership Team have been involved in the research and decision-making around exploring the opportunity to be part of the MAT.

Question: Regarding Staff – how are you going to guarantee that Terms & Conditions will stay the same forever?

Answer: Terms and Conditions will remain the same for teaching and support staff through TUPE process. There are no plans to change any terms and conditions for the foreseeable future.

If we didn't go forward with the MAT proposal, Governing Body may need to undertake a staffing restructure to ensure that job roles and responsibilities are those roles that the school needs in the current school improvement context.

Question: Regarding efficiencies of scale ... Sefton do a great job through SLAs wouldn't the economies of scale for 99 schools (remaining as a maintained school within the LA) be better than economies of scale for 6 schools (MAT)? Is the quality likely to be better?

Answer: The proposed MAT will be able to take advantage of economies of scale. There are better prices that can be negotiated for 6 schools. In addition, increased spending on back-office activities allows schools to be freed up to concentrate on their professional expertise, delivering the curriculum and supporting children and families. Headteachers are reporting that taking away the headache of detailed financial planning and HR casework for example is a positive for them professionally, and in terms of their mental health and workload.

There may be services that the MAT buys in from Sefton e.g. Admissions taking advantage of the larger economies of scale presented by the LA.

There may be some services that can be acquired that are more cost-effective outside of the LA as we do now.

Question: Do we get CAPITAL funds now and is this guaranteed funding as opposed to a bidding process which is not guaranteed?

Answer: We receive annual CAPITAL fund allocation of approximately £7,000 which needs to be accrued to pay for any substantial capital project. Yes this is guaranteed, however, being able to bid for access to significant streams of funding to develop the school is a great opportunity e.g. one school, part of a MAT secured 4million pounds to build a new EYFS block.

As registered charities Trusts are able to access funds that are not available to the maintained sector and some Trusts, particularly those in disadvantaged communities are able to supplement their core funding with additional targeted funding through this route.

Question: Will it have an effect on recruitment of staff and high-quality teaching?

Answer: I anticipate that it will have a positive impact. People are keen to work at Forefield now, however I think that the desire to do so will increase if we are part of the MAT. Through CPD opportunities and collaborative activity, I see quality of teaching improving further which is what we want for the children.

Question: Will the same high standards of checks be undertaken?

Answer: Absolutely, that won't change at all.

Question: Governance – a lot of schools don't have parent/staff governors. Are you going to guarantee that?

Answer: Representation of all stakeholders remains important hence why local governing boards are to be retained in each school with the appropriate proportions of staff/parent/co-opted governors.

Feedback Received through feedback form or consultation email

Parents/ Carers

Comment: Forefield Infants is a wonderful school and both my children have had amazing experiences whilst attending the school. I believe the school has the best interests of its pupils at its heart and would have made this decision with this in mind, benefiting the pupil and whole community. I feel that the experiences my children will have if Forefield form part of this MAT will only improve what is an already fantastic school.

Comment: As an employee at Forefield, and a parent of child attending Forefield, I agree that forming a Multi-Academy Trust is in Forefield's best interest as a whole. I feel it will offer a great deal of opportunities for the staff and for the children. I feel this will give access to a lot more resources to help the children and it's great to see local schools coming together to form this trust.

Comment: Having read the information provided and the values of the MAT in the consultation letter, we feel strongly that Forefield Junior School forming part of this MAT will be of great benefit to the pupils and families. The reasons we chose Forefield for our children to attend, we feel are reflected in the values of the MAT and feel that working with other likeminded schools in the community will enhance the educational provision my children receive at Forefield Juniors. We feel very positive about this proposal and the exciting opportunities it will bring for children attending Forefield Juniors.

Comment: Please can you add these comments to the Mersey View project about academisation of Forefield Infants.

I am trying to give a balance and put concerns forward, please do not think this is a criticism of the hard work that has been done.

Regarding the History,

From the ideas of Charter House Schools in the US and Conservative Education Secretary Kenneth Baker's City Technology colleges (1988)- revisited as the brainchild from Lord Adonis – Labour advisor. (1997)

The idea was for failing inner city Secondary schools initially (1998 Schools Standards and framework act) and later for Secondary faith schools (in the 2002 Education act.)

When Labour left office in 2010- Academy schools in England stood at about 1% of all state schools.

Michael Gove- Conservative Schools Secretary invited all schools to become Academies in 2010.

Under the Conservatives, the policy has accelerated to over 80% Secondary Schools and over 25% primaries.

Primary schools were **not** therefore initially reticent to take up Labour policy as conversion only became available to Primary Schools in 2010.

Regarding legal issues. Mersey View stability?

Joining a MAT is irreversible and offers no protection from a future transfer to another MAT.

A school cannot decide to leave a MAT voluntarily, either to re-join the LA or join another MAT. But if the MAT trust collapses, walks away, or is forced to give up the school by the Government, it will be transferred to a new trust, and parents and staff will have no say on which MAT this is.

Indeed every year hundreds of academies are forced to move trusts, in a process known as "re-brokering" which involves DfE officials deciding on which MATs schools are transferred to.

Joining Mersey View does not mean our school won't end up as part of a national chain or larger MAT. The trend is towards consolidation into bigger MATs and the Government has said that it expects MATs to consist of at least ten schools or 7,500 pupils.

I hope this doesn't ever happen, but we should be honest with people.

Regarding accountability to parents and the community

There is no requirement for MATs to include parent representatives on the 'local' governing bodies of each academy, in fact some MATs have even abolished local bodies altogether. We need guarantees from Mersey View this is set in stone.

More worrying is A House of Commons Public Accounts Committee report, Academy accounts and performance, January 2019, stated: "Parents and local people have to fight to obtain even basic information about their children's schools, and academy trusts do not do enough to communicate and explain decisions that affect the schools they are responsible for and how they are spending public money."

When a school joins a MAT it ceases to exist as a legal entity – instead the MAT board has the authority to decide which powers, if any, to delegate to local governing bodies. Furthermore, ultimate power in an academy trusts rests with its members (usually no more than four) who are the equivalent of shareholders in a commercial company. Members have the power to appoint and remove all serving trustees and change the trust's articles of association.

Again this for me isn't a great advantage. We need an agreement that the structure will never change after conversion.

Answer: Thank you for this detailed and considered comment which is very helpful. The information provided above is acknowledged to be true which is why it is so important for schools to investigate thoroughly the values, principles and culture of the MAT they wish to join. Where schools can be part of the setting up of the Trust, appointing of members and trustees and deciding the scheme of delegation, this is an ideal opportunity to shape the future for your own school but also in collaboration with like-minded colleagues. This is the model on which the 'Mersey View Learning Trust' (MVLТ) would be established and we are looking forward to working with all key stakeholders including our trades union colleagues to make sure we shape this new organisation in the best interests of children, families and staff. If this proposal progresses, the Local Governing Body of the school would remain unchanged. There will be Local Governing Bodies (LGB) for each school which converts to an academy and forms part of the new proposed MAT to be known as 'Mersey View Learning Trust'. Parent representatives will be on the academy LGB just as they are now on the Governing Body.

The LGB will have very similar powers delegated to it as the governing body does now – the main difference being that it will be the MAT delegating the powers to the LGB rather than the local authority, as is the case now. The role of the LGB will be clearly defined in the MAT's Scheme of Delegation which will be developed with input from all six schools looking to form the proposed MAT.

You have mentioned changes that may occur over time and this is acknowledged also. As Secretaries of State come and go, central government administrations change from left to right and local political leadership changes, there are no constants in education. There is an argument to say that removing some of the political waves and undercurrents could be an advantage to schools and many schools are currently seeing it this way.

THE IDEA OF MASSIVE SAVINGS THROUGH ECONOMIES OF SCALE.

Academies spend more on back-office functions than maintained schools do, and they don't achieve economies of scale by forming multi-academy trusts, research suggests.

The findings contradict claims by ministers that academies can free up more money for pupils by making savings in back-office costs.

Tom Perry, co-author of the report and lecturer in education at the University of Birmingham, said the "efficiency" of academies was important "within the original rationale for the reform. We had this repeated by researchers and policy-makers... there are a lot of claims within the policy discourse that hadn't really been examined."

Now the presentation last night mirrored what the then education secretary Michael Gove said academies had "more autonomy, more resources, less bureaucracy and an opportunity to thrive".

I found that the main thrust aped the DfE's 2016 white paper Educational Excellence Everywhere where it said MATs offer "significant benefits", including "more efficient back-office arrangements that free up more funding for the classroom". This again is consolidated In 2017, by academies minister Lord Agnew who encouraged small academy trusts to team up, saying the "sweet spot" for a trust was between 12 and 20 schools.

But the study found that, compared to local authority-maintained schools, academies spent proportionately less on teacher salaries (1.5 per cent) and educational support (one per cent), and more on back-office costs (one per cent).

Schools that became academies between 2009-10 and 2015-16 increased the proportion they spent on back-office functions. Mersey View presentation did not ever mention this.

When comparing the spending patterns of single- and multi-academy trusts, the data showed “no evidence of a meaningful difference” in spending on teachers or back-office functions, and “little indication that MAT schools gained a substantial cost advantage over SAT schools through being able to share the administrative burden”.

Again no mention of this was made and only positives could be thought of via conversion. This goes again Leora Cruddas, CEO at the Confederation of School Trusts who warned it was time to stop “making contorted ideological arguments and focus instead on creating a strong and sustainable school system”. She added: “Should we be concerned – that more money is spent on back-office costs and less on teaching and educational support?”

A 2017 report from the Education Policy Institute found MATs spent less on running costs but this was not “translating into increased expenditure on teaching staff”. Costs were not reduced as the trust grew.

So we surely cannot be so sure that these economies of scale can be significantly achieved. I wonder if procuring services from the Local Authority with their experience and economies of scale for 99 schools is cheaper than creating a centralised team for 6.

Top slicing statutory services to private companies or trying to negotiate huge discounts may not achieve the central administration block proposed.

Answer: The proposed MAT will be able to take advantage of economies of scale. There are better prices that can be negotiated for 6 schools. In addition, increased spending on back-office activities allows teachers to be freed up to concentrate on their professional expertise, delivering the curriculum and supporting children and families. Headteachers are reporting that taking away the headache of detailed financial planning and HR casework for example is a positive for them professionally, and in terms of their mental health and workload.

Local authority funding is under extreme pressure and whilst it would be an advantage for back-office services to be procured on a larger scale and greater efficiencies achieved, in reality there is not the capacity to do this and many schools have reported feeling abandoned by the LA and this is also a factor in the increased pace of academisation. In some cases where high quality services still exist, trusts are buying these directly from the LA. There are some examples we can provide, if necessary, where this happening well.

There are elements included above of not really comparing like-with-like, as an academy trust is more than a provider of services. However, we would not expect the schools to find themselves worse off financially by becoming part of the proposed MAT. During the formal conversion process, detailed work is done with the school on the school’s budget to ensure best value is being achieved.

As registered charities Trusts are able to access funds that are not available to the maintained sector and some Trusts, particularly those in disadvantaged communities are able to supplement their core funding with additional targeted funding through this route.

Certainly this will not bring a raft (or what ever the collective noun it is!) of advisors back! There is a counter argument that can be backed up by a report/evidence – this counter argument should be on the consultation.

Becoming an academy can lose support

Academies lose automatic support from the LA. Special educational needs, school improvement, and speech and language therapy services could all be lost, with no guarantee a MAT could offer the same support.

The argument about the Schools Capital and a guaranteed £7k a year from a central pot versus a £4 million pound award through bidding is valid – although my kitchen probably less than £7k!

Answer: See answer above. The support that Local Authorities can provide has diminished over the years and this will continue as government funding is withdrawn further. SEND funding from the LA will remain the same as it is now. Where value for money is offered, the schools may continue to buy in various services from the LA.

All MATs also have access through a bidding process to funding direct from the Department for Education (for building works and maintenance), which is not accessible to local authority maintained schools.

Currently the school receives £7,000 from the LA which does not go very far – MATs can bid for higher levels of funding through CIF.

Many Trusts are taking the decision to employ their own educational psychologists, SALTs, counsellors, social workers, family liaison workers etc. Shared resources between trusts are also being modelled. The opportunity to employ quality multi-professional practitioners is only limited by the scarcity of these individuals, however this is a national issue.

Pupils in academies are more likely to be taught by an unqualified teacher.

A 2019 study published in the British Journal of Sociology Education confirmed that academies are more likely than other schools to employ teachers who are unqualified and that the percentage of teachers without qualified teacher status (QTS) in academies is rising compared with LA schools.

Answer: We will never employ non-qualified teachers and will always try to ensure, wherever possible, that all teachers are specialists. All teachers will be appropriately qualified.

Teacher pay can be worse in academies-

DfE data for 2021/22 shows that, on average, classroom teachers in both primary and secondary academies earned more than £1,300 less than their maintained school counterparts.

There is a growing layer of MAT leaders and chief executives being paid six figure salaries. In 2021-22, as teachers and heads faced a pay freeze, the average MAT CEO or headteacher was paid 10 per cent more than the previous year and more than half of the country's largest MATs increased the salaries of their top earners.

A comparison of MAT and local authority finances for 2021-22 found that the largest MATs are spending eight times more per pupil on salaries of £130,000 and above than are England's largest local authorities.

Answer: The proposed MAT will adhere to the national School Teachers Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD) and the NJC for support staff.

This will be an express part of the agreement to form a MAT. We will be able to better support primary schools with more investment. We will work hard with trade unions with relationships based on respect. At a time when recruitment and retention of all staff in schools is a real challenge it would not be sustainable to pay school staff less than the going rate indeed there could be an argument to say that the pressure to increase pay and improve staff conditions is in an upward trajectory and some trusts are looking at creative ways to attract and keep their staff.

Academies can undermine staff terms and conditions-

A MAT may promise that pay and conditions will not change, but there is no legal barrier to that happening following academy conversion. New staff joining an academy may not get the same terms and conditions as those who transferred when the school converted.

While those staff who transferred have a legal right to maintain their pay and conditions on transfer, the pay and conditions for new joiners can be whatever the MAT determines.

Staff who move to academies can lose their built-up entitlement to maternity pay. Staff who later return to LA employment will have lost many rights, such as continuity of service, which is important for calculating sick pay.

[Answer: To attract best staff, it is intended for new joiners to be brought in on same terms as conditions that are currently in place, following conversion.](#)

If Mersey View's non negotiable is keeping staff's pay and pension- why can there not be a written agreement that the new MAT will not change pay, pensions and policies after conversion? For ever?

Then any changes would have to be agreed, negotiated with trade unions and fairly considered. I do not think that is a hard thing to guarantee and I want happy staff that will stay.

After listening to the presentation last night- I am asking can there be an agreement in writing for the Academy and its staff? That would truly be non negotiable.

[Answer: On conversions employees retain existing terms and conditions – they come across into the MAT through TUPE arrangements which protect their T&Cs.](#)

[The schools will provide pension fund membership the Teachers' Pension Scheme and Local Government Pension Scheme.](#)

[Chesterfield High School converted to an academy in 2011. There have been no changes to staff T&Cs or pensions.](#)

If conversion is to happen, I do not see why that cannot be achieved if we are all dealing in transparency.

[Answer: If the schools remain as maintained there would not be a guarantee that terms and conditions would never change. As set out above there are no plans to change any terms and conditions for the foreseeable future.](#)

Feedback Received through feedback form or consultation email

Members of Staff

Comment: I think this sounds like a really exciting opportunity for the whole community, staff, pupils and families. I am looking forward to the new opportunities this will bring for all.