

## **Thingwall Primary School Academy Conversion Consultation Questions & Answers**

**Parents and Carers Meeting, Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2023 at 5.15pm**

### **Attendees:**

Danielle Evans, Head teacher, Thingwall Primary  
Mike Collins, Chair of Governors, Thingwall Primary  
Tony Lacey, CEO, Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust  
Hardip Hayer, Senior Project Manager, AMF (UK) Ltd  
Emily Comyn, Senior Project Support Officer, AMF (UK) Ltd  
Parents/ Carers X6

Question: The current SEND process is incompetent – can the Trust exert any pressure on the local authority to improve the process?

Answer: The trust has a duty of care to all pupils and can exert pressure on the local authority to a certain extent, but much of the process is out of the trust's control. The trust does have the following SEN support available: ADHD service level agreement, an educational psychologist, a therapist and a SEN Lead who works with the SENCOs within the trust's schools. The Chair of Governors has intensively questioned the trust on SEND matters and has spoken to heads of other schools within the trust and the governors are reassured that the trust is very good with SEND matters.

Question: Will current SEND staff within the school remain after academisation?

Answer: Yes – all school staff will stay.

Question: Could the application to the Regional Director's to join the trust be declined?

Answer: It is highly unlikely. The DfE undertakes a due diligence of the Trust the school is looking to join; looks at things like the financial viability of taking on another school and Oak Trees MAT is in a healthy financial position and is being encouraged by the Regional Director to grow. The Trust has taken onboard three schools in the last 3 years.

Question: What will the impact be on the PTA's grant funding, if any, and can the trust help with this?

Answer: The trust encourages PTAs to work collaboratively and yes, it can absolutely support the PTA in applying for funding.

Question: Is there an expected limit on the number of schools that will join the trust?

Answer: The trust sees 13-15 schools as being optimum. There are currently seven schools in the trust and it's thought that if the trust stays at this number, they could be asked to merge with another smaller trust at some point in the future. The trust has no plans to expand outside Wirral and sees itself as a group with shared vision and values.

Question: What if it becomes apparent that working with the trust isn't for us?

Answer: Schools do not receive funding for becoming an academy more than once. The process so far has involved intense due diligence and consultation and so it is hoped that this won't happen. The headteacher has been researching the possibility of becoming an academy for about three years, because she wanted to be absolutely certain that it was right and the best thing for the pupils; she has looked at a range of trusts and believes that Oak

Trees MAT is the best fit. The chair of governors has been doing the same. The trust is run with integrity, which is key.

Question: Is it a case of 'once you're in, you're in' or can a school be evicted or choose to leave?

Answer: The trust has a duty of care to its schools and the only reason a school would leave is if the trust is failing the school.

Question: How do Ofsted inspections work?

Answer: The MAT's School Improvement Lead is an Ofsted inspector, so has inside knowledge and can support schools with the inspection process.

Question: How does the trust maintain standards during the growth phase; will the MAT team need to expand and what impact will this have on the support available for schools?

Answer: Yes, the trust team would increase to meet increased need. The trust can't take on additional schools without increasing capacity as it would be failing in its duty of care to schools.

Question: What does the governance structure of the trust look like?

Answer: There are 'members' who are figureheads and who meet once a year to do things like agree the accounts and there is a trust board that oversees all schools in the trust. The trustees, who have a wide range of skills, work with head teachers and the CEO.

Question: What is to stop the trustees selling out to a 'supertrust'?

Answer: The vision and values that the trust is founded upon is based on integrity and ethics – selling out would go against this. There would also be considerable backlash from all stakeholders.

Question: How will the school be able to spend money more flexibly?

Answer: Funding will not be ringfenced as it is currently; funding provided by the trust is better than that which is currently provided by the local authority; and the school will benefit from savings on things like health and safety and HR, which will be provided by the trust as opposed to being bought in from the local authority. This means that the school will be able to do things like protect the contracts of TAs and spend more on staffing and the curriculum. The school won't be competing with lots of other schools for local authority funding for things like a new roof. The trust benefits from economies of scale with suppliers and contractors and the trust also provides training and CPD opportunities, which the school currently buys in from the local authority or private providers.

### **Parent/ Carer Feedback Received Through Feedback Form or Email:**

Comment: I am in support of this proposal. My father-in-law is a site manager/caretaker at Church Drive Primary School in Bebington who are already a part of this trust and has experienced first hand the benefits that being a part of this trust can bring to a school. The staffing within the school has remained constant so there has been no disruption to the children and the funding that has been given to the school to improve the condition of the building plus money for resources for the school has been far more than they ever could have had access to previously. Should the same opportunities be offered to Thingwall this can only be a good thing for children, parents and staff alike. I wish you all Good Luck with this process – I know you'll have the very best interests of the school at heart in any decisions that are taken and thank you for taking the time to gather the opinion of parents in these early stages.

Question: Could you confirm what percentage of our school funding is used by the MAT to fund its operational costs and how this compares to current resource charges with the council / outsources providers?

Answer: The percentage varies according to the needs of the school, but with savings from services provided by the MAT coupled with savings from the school budget not being top-sliced by the LA the MAT funding for Thingwall should be in line with the current funding in place. We negotiate this with the school to ensure that they maintain a positive budget.

Question: How does other schools in the MATS spending impact that of our own. For example if Thingwall spends carefully and acquires a reserve of money at the end of the year but another school wishes to spend more than their budget, would this be taken to fund others?

Answer: The schools' budget is their own, so reserves are for the schools to spend as they see fit. It is up to each school to control their own finances.

Question: What due diligence takes place by the MAT when outsourcing services to third parties to ensure a fair and transparent process?

Answer: We always have at least 3 providers pitch for services with a full tender process, and for some larger contracts we engage an independent company to lead the process. We always have a Headteacher involved in the process to ensure that any provider meets the requirements of the schools. We do full checks on each company's finance, accounts, reputation and gain recommendations.

Question: We were told in the meeting repeatedly that we as parents would see no change during the transition period, but can you confirm what changes we will see in terms of benefits to our child's education within a short period. What will be visible? Are there any priorities that the MAT has identified as key improvements.

Answer: The benefits for the children are numerous, including:

1. Better teachers due to improved training and support
2. Better curriculum through subject leader support
3. Better leadership through added capacity and support from the MAT
4. Pupil events every year for MAT pupils
5. Better resources through group purchasing power.

In terms of priorities, the priority will be to support the school in their next OFSTED inspection and to work with leaders on their school improvement priorities to ensure that outcomes across the school continue to improve in future years.

Question: What are the short and long term objectives identified for the improvements to the school?

Answer: Short term would be address any issues from the OFSTED inspection and School Improvement Plan, longer term would be around pupil numbers, continuing to secure good outcomes for the school, improving the school building and ensuring that Thingwall are an integral part of the Trust.

Question: It would be helpful to provide examples / case study from a school that has recently joined the academy and what improvements or changes have been made and the difference this has made to pupils education experience.

Answer: Brackenwood Junior School joined the Trust in 2019, and whilst pupil outcomes were not published in 2023, outcomes at Brackenwood were significantly improved in 2023 with reading, a key issue in the last OFSTED report, having significantly improved results.

Question: I understand that research has found that MATS employ more unqualified teachers than maintained schools. Is it envisaged that the selection criteria for the recruitment of any current or future positions at the school would change or an unqualified teacher status would be preferential?

Answer: We do not employ unqualified teachers at the Trust and there is no plan for this to change.

Question: Are there any currently outsourced / Council provisions that would continue, for example catering and cleaners?

Answer: We outsource a number of services, which many LA schools including Thingwall do already, and we will look at this with the school. Cleaners are employed by the school as before.

Question: Will the admissions policy change for Thingwall Primary?

Answer: No, admissions continue to be managed by Wirral LA and there are no proposed changes to admissions currently

## **Staff Meeting, Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2023 at 3.45pm**

### **Attendees:**

Danielle Evans, Head teacher, Thingwall Primary  
Mike Collins, Chair of Governors, Thingwall Primary  
Tony Lacey, CEO, Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust  
Hardip Hayer, Senior Project Manager, AMF (UK) Ltd  
Emily Comyn, Senior Project Support Officer, AMF (UK) Ltd  
Staff members X13

Question: Will the same suppliers be used if the school becomes an academy? For example: grounds maintenance

Answer: Yes, but schools can use the trust's contractors if preferred. As long as the current contracts/ SLAs provide the school with best value for money. There are some contracts and systems that the school may need to change so that they are using the same ones as the Trust i.e. HR and finance systems.

Question: Why is the trust called Oak Trees?

Answer: It is based on the quote 'from little acorns grow mighty oaks' – one of the first schools that joined the trust had oak trees in the grounds. It is nothing to do with the Government's Oak National Academy.

Question: How will systems in the office change?

Answer: Academisation will have an impact on how things work in the office, but all new systems will be set up well in advance and in the background. Training will be provided, for example on SIMS and the finance system, so staff will be ready to go from day one. The trust's financial year runs from September to August.

Question: Does the trust use CPOMS?

Answer: Yes – all schools in the trust use it.

Question: Will the preschool become part of the MAT?

Answer: No – it will continue to run as a private entity.

### **Staff Feedback Received Through Feedback Form or Email:**

Question: Could you tell us what will happen to Thingwall Catering if we go over to an academy?

Answer: The Trust will work with the Headteacher to discuss her plans for catering, and any decisions taken by the school will be fully communicated to staff during the conversion process. No decision has been made yet by the school on catering plans as we are at an early stage of the process.