

Multi-academy trust consultation: 8 May–19 June 2015

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# Considering a new future for Millthorpe School

Now the general and local elections are over, the consultation process on the possibility of Millthorpe becoming an academy and forming a multi-academy trust with Knavesmire and Scarcroft primary schools can begin. It is very important we enter a full and robust consultation with an open mind and consult with all relevant parties and take into account the views of parents, staff and pupils. Please take the time to get involved so that school governors – representing a wide variety of people from the local community – will be able to make a fully informed decision.

## **The best provision for our children: the three headteachers explain key reasons for this proposal**

Three schools working closely together can have a direct and positive influence on the quality of education across the whole age range from three to 16 years. Forming a multi-academy trust (MAT) would allow us greater freedom to build the curriculum around the needs of our children. This would enable our schools to retain the creative and innovative approaches that have been our strengths. Closer working across the schools would further improve academic transition, and teachers on each side of the transition could benefit from the expertise of the partner schools.

## **Shaping the future**

Our local authority is increasingly less able to provide guidance and support for schools, so schools must look to themselves to respond. The three headteachers feel that the formation of a MAT would be a proactive step to build the capacity to deal with these changes.

## **Mutual support and challenge**

The three headteachers would be better able to support and challenge each other – as York's school improvement service has been forced to shrink (from 40 professionals to four as from September 2015) its priorities have rightly moved to those schools that are most vulnerable.

## **Staff development**

There would be a number of benefits for staff through the formation of a MAT including a shared induction process for new employees and retaining staff who are ready for a new challenge. The experience and strengths of over 100 teachers working within the MAT

could provide collaborative solutions to the statutory changes facing schools over the next few years.

## **Financial benefits**

Although it is not the main reason behind the proposal, as we face times of austerity, any opportunity for additional funding cannot be ignored. There are four strands to these savings:

- Initial grants to set up the MAT (£25,000 for each of the schools plus an additional grant of £100,000 as there are two primaries involved)
- Additional per-pupil funding of approximately 2%
- Using the power of joint purchasing to reduce costs of services
- The opportunity to bid for grants from a central government pot only open to academies.

We believed the grants offered to schools converting to academy status could be withdrawn after the general election and so in order to secure them, governors of Millthorpe, Knavesmire and Scarcroft schools agreed we take the limited opportunity to apply with no fear of financial loss and then engage in the consultation process. Our application was successful so we can proceed should governors choose to go ahead at the end of a thorough consultation period. If not, funds will be returned less any costs incurred.

**No decision has yet been made.** What governors – the decision-makers, not the headteachers – need to achieve from the whole consultation process is a full understanding of all the issues and hear the full range of consultees' views. Then they will be able to make an informed and considered decision which will ultimately be in the best interests of Millthorpe School. To gain that understanding we need parents and other stakeholders to communicate their thoughts and any concerns to them. For full details, see back page.

# Questions and answers

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## **What is an academy?**

Academies are classed as independent state schools with the freedom to determine their own policies in areas such as the curriculum, school hours, term dates, staff roles and service providers. This is enabled by the Academies Act 2010. Primary, secondary and special schools are all able to apply to convert into an academy and are accountable to the Secretary of State, not the local authority.

Academies are managed by their own academy trust and are no longer the responsibility of the council. Academies are given their funding direct from the government. This means that they get slightly more money per pupil, as money is no longer held back by the council to fund central services. This gives them greater freedoms about how to spend the money.

## **Who runs an academy?**

An academy is run by an academy trust. This is a legal body which has to be set up. It operates as a charitable organisation and a company limited by guarantee. The trust has a formal agreement, or contract with the Department for Education and is a charitable, not-for-profit organisation.

## **What is a multi-academy trust?**

Schools can convert on their own or as part of a group of schools. We refer to these group arrangements as multi-academy trusts (MATs).

Dependent on arrangements, the school can still be governed at a local level. The amount of governance (decision making) kept at a local level varies according to the trust. In our case, the intention would be for each school to retain its own governing body and headteacher, so that there would be a great deal of autonomy allowing for the individual characteristics and ethos of each school to continue. Decisions made at trust board level would focus on services that can be provided more effectively across the MAT.

## **Are all multi-academy trusts the same?**

No. Some are asked to take over failing schools. They are both then deemed to be academies joined together in a MAT or a chain. Sometimes this is done with one executive headteacher across the chain. This is not the approach we are proposing. In our model, each of the schools would play an equal part and there would be no lead school.

## **Are there any other academies in York?**

There are two secondary academies, Archbishop Holgate's School and Manor Church of England Academy. There are also four primary academies: Robert Wilkinson Primary and Haxby Road Primary in a MAT, Poppleton Ousebank Primary School in a MAT with Manor CE Academy and Huntington Primary School as a standalone converter academy.

## **Are there any rules about pupil admissions for academies?**

Yes. Academies have to follow the law for school admissions, special educational needs and exclusions as if they were a maintained school. Academies cannot select pupils on the basis of ability.

## **Who deals with complaints for schools that have become academies?**

Parents who have a complaint about their child's academy would contact them directly, as they would normally do in accordance with City of York Council's complaints policy. However, there is no next stage through the council. The route for academy complaints would be to speak to the appropriate headteacher. If you are not happy with the response, contact the trust. If you are not happy with their response, contact the Education Funding Agency. This represents the interests of the Department for Education.

## **How do I find out more about academies?**

You can find out more from the Department for Education, [www.education.gov.uk](http://www.education.gov.uk). The page on academies gives a starting point.

## **What is the proposal?**

The proposal is that Scarcroft Primary School, Knavesmire Primary School and Millthorpe School become academies and part of the same multi-academy trust which would be called the Southbank Academy Trust. Each school would retain its own headteacher, governing body and current unique character, and operate with a high degree of autonomy. The trust would be managed by a trust board, the planned composition of which is set out below, and would manage any services which may be delivered at trust level rather than at school level, for example payroll and human resources.

## **When might this happen?**

The schools have applied to the Department for Education for an Academy Order. This releases money to explore the change of status, particularly in legal terms. Before any conversion takes place, each governing body would have to pass a resolution to that effect after a widespread consultation. This consultation begins 8 May. The consultation is planned to last for six weeks. Only if a school's current governing body resolves to convert would any school convert and this would be a decision for each governing body. If a governing body does pass such a resolution, it is possible the school could convert on 1 November 2015.

## **What is the composition of the trust board?**

The proposals for membership of the trust board may change but at the moment, the members would be:

- Three members of the founding local governing bodies
- The founding headteachers (Trevor Burton – Millthorpe School; Anna Cornhill – Scarcroft Primary School; Adam Cooper – Knavesmire Primary School)
- One representative of the local authority
- Three appointed trustees drawn from the schools' catchment area served by the trust, with skills in HR, finance and legal work.

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### **Why are you proposing this change and why is now the right time?**

The current educational climate is very stormy. There is constant change: in accountabilities such as Ofsted frameworks and the ways in which school performance will be measured, significant decreases in local authority school support teams, and looking ahead, for the first time in living memory, significant cuts to schools funding. In a challenging climate like this, simply staying the same is not an option. The headteachers consider these to be the main benefits and have shared them with governors:

- Greater freedom to design the curriculum around the interests and strengths of each school
- Opportunities to be proactive rather than reactive within an ever-changing educational landscape
- Formal partnership would make it simpler to share subject specialisms, staff expertise, staff training, curriculum development, and workload on common areas of interest
- Peer support and challenge across the three senior leadership teams
- Cost savings achieved by acquiring services across the three schools, thus achieving economies of scale
- Being able to create new posts across the MAT that would not have been possible in any one individual school eg. Speech Therapy; support for English as an Additional Language
- Mutual protection as the support from the local authority is withdrawn through the cuts to LA funding from central government.

### **Couldn't you do this without becoming an academy?**

Some of it could be done without academisation. However, joining together in a MAT makes this approach the default one, rather than one which is desirable, but not essential. The three schools have worked together in the Southbank Cluster for over a decade, but have not gone very far with this up to now. Also, the efficiency savings could not be made without some formal arrangement.

### **What are the risks of this change?**

This change is likely to carry some risks – for example:

- A conversion into a MAT does not by itself guarantee improvement – it is dependent on the governance and leadership of the schools, and this would inevitably change over time. However, this is also true of local authority schools. This risk is minimised by having a strong governing body, sensitive to its own succession planning and to planning the succession of its headteacher, supported by an equally strong trust board.
- The current commitment shown by Labour and Conservative parties to using MATs for school improvement may change. It is difficult to mitigate against this risk. However, with over 4,500 schools already in academies, we would not be alone.
- If one of the three schools were to see a sharp drop in educational standards, the trust as a whole would have to offer help which could distract them from their core purpose. The three schools involved are currently graded Outstanding, Outstanding and Good. All have been involved in assisting colleagues in other schools. While the risk of a significant drop in standards is very low, the capacity to correct that in each school is currently high.
- The capital funding currently enjoyed by academies may dry up leaving Millthorpe no better off, but with the trust fully responsible for the buildings maintenance and repair. The risk here is of opportunities failing to materialise rather than outcomes being worse than before. Significant building problems would be covered by insurance based schemes.

### **What guarantees can you give?**

It is very difficult to make guarantees when the outlook for education funding is so challenging, but governors have committed to the following. As a result of any conversion to an academy:

- There would be no name changes for the schools.
- There would be no changes to the

current school uniforms.

- There would be no changes to the distinct ethos of each school.
- All three schools would maintain exactly the same admissions procedures. City of York would be offered the contract to carry out the admissions service for the academies. It is particularly important to governors that the inclusive nature of all three schools is maintained. There will be no requirement, nor no preferment for children in Scarcroft and Knavesmire to continue to Millthorpe at age 11.
- There would be no changes to staff employment rights on transfer of employer from CYC to the multi-academy trust.
- There would be no changes to pay or conditions of service.
- There would be no job losses as a result of academisation.
- Both teaching and support staff would enjoy the same pension rights as now.
- Continuity of service in local government would be recognised for employees.
- Union representation would continue to be encouraged.
- All schools would receive at least the same funding they received when part of the local authority.
- There would be no executive headteacher of the Trust.
- All headteachers are equal partners and all schools are equal partners.
- There would be no pay rises for senior staff other than the normal ones that would have taken place if the school were a local authority school.
- The nursery at Knavesmire would become part of the Knavesmire academy and provision would continue exactly as now.
- Scarcroft would make every attempt to maintain the private nursery on its site, but as this is a private commercial venture it is beyond the school's control.
- There would be no changes to the availability of free school meals for children.
- There would be no detriment to the provision of excellent support for children with SEN/disabilities.

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# Consultation meeting dates

Consultation events for Millthorpe School parents will take place as detailed below. In addition, we will be consulting staff, pupils, prospective parents, local councillors and trades unions. Please check our website, [www.millthorpeschool.co.uk](http://www.millthorpeschool.co.uk) for latest updates

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**MAY 2015**

**19**  
Tuesday

Formal information evening with Q & A at 7pm in the school hall. We will issue an electronic survey after this meeting, so that parents can tell governors what they want them to take into account when making their decision. Paper copies will be provided on request.

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**MAY 2015**

**21**  
Thursday

Informal breakfast drop-in session with headteacher Mr Burton and governors, 8.45am and a tea and coffee session 2.45pm. Please sign in at reception.

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**JUNE 2015**

**2**  
Tuesday

Informal breakfast drop-in session with headteacher Mr Burton and governors, 8.45am and a tea and coffee session 2.45pm. Please sign in at reception.

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**JUNE 2015**

**9**  
Tuesday

A further formal information evening with Q & A for prospective parents of any of the three schools at 7pm in the school hall at Millthorpe School.

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**JUNE 2015**

**10**  
Wednesday

Informal breakfast drop-in session with headteacher Mr Burton and governors, 8.45am and a tea and coffee session 2.45pm. Please sign in at reception.



Your views are welcome and can be sent direct to governors via post or handed in to: Consultation, Millthorpe School, Nunthorpe Avenue, York YO23 1WF or email: [consultation@millthorpeschool.co.uk](mailto:consultation@millthorpeschool.co.uk)

All submissions will be sent to all governors.

Consultation closes on 19 June.