



Millthorpe  
school

MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST PROPOSAL

# Prospective Parent Consultation

These are the questions posed by prospective Parents/Carers of the three schools at the formal information evening on Tuesday 9 June 2015.

We have attempted to answer them to the best of our ability.

There were two consultation questions:

1. What questions would you like answering?
2. What issues would you like governors to consider?

Responses to the second question were mainly in the form of questions, so we have answered them too.

# 1. What questions would you like answering?

**Q How will Ofsted rate the school if not on curriculum?**

A Ofsted currently rate schools on “Achievement”, “Teaching”, “Behaviour and Safety” and “Leadership” with a fourth grade for Overall Effectiveness.

**Q How will you rate or level other children from other primaries now there are no levels?**

A We will have to develop new systems to be in place from September 2016 when we will be joined by new Year 7 students who come with a simple numerical score from their primary schools.

**Q Are you convinced without an extra lead body you can manage all the structural change and partnership management without appointing someone. It’s a lot of work!**

A We would have the £100,000 Primary Chain grant to help us establish the MAT and we could appoint someone for an extended period with some of this money to ease the workload.

**Q How will the school access specialist educational services e.g. access to Lime Trees, access to the school psychologist. Will the school have to pay the LA.**

A Lime Trees is part of the Health Service so there would be no fee. The Educational Psychology service currently provides a block of sessions free but if the school needs more it must pay. For academies, statutory work would be free (e.g. for assessment leading to an Education Healthcare Plan) but non-statutory work is chargeable. There is currently no difference between what is charged to local authorities and academies on an hourly basis, but the Educational Psychology Service may alter its charging structure in the future. Specialist teaching, e.g. for autism, would remain free for students with a statement or an Education Healthcare Plan. For students without a statement or Education Health Care Plan, specialist teaching would be chargeable. Provision is made in our financial plans for these potential costs.

**Q Will my children be at a disadvantage as they are coming from a primary school that isn’t Knavesmire or Scarcroft? Will there effectively be a two speed transition - very good for those in the MAT but what about the other feeder schools? Is there a strategy for ensuring these children/transitions are as good?**

A Managing the social and emotional part of the transition will be identical for all primary schools and will continue unchanged. The proposal to improve the academic transition involves preparing teachers better both in Years 5 & 6 and in Years 7 & 8. This would benefit the teaching of Years 7 & 8 and hence be beneficial to students from all primaries. The collaboration between Millthorpe and the primaries would be of interest to the other schools in our cluster and they may wish to become involved.

**Q What have staff said at the staff consultations?**

A Staff had questions about funding, buildings, changes in staff pay and conditions, union membership, how the primary schools may influence Millthorpe decisions, and whether our ethos might be homogenised. Staff expressed interest in the cross-phase work and the formal collaboration, possibilities for career progression, training opportunities, better sports facilities, working on projects with the primaries, and improving transition for vulnerable students. Staff

were concerned about possible changes to pay and conditions, a change of leadership which could lead to further change, financial management, unqualified teachers, training opportunities being lost, losing links with York, pension changes, redundancies, increase in workload, and the design of contracts. We have set out our responses to teachers' questions and concerns in a document like this one.

**Q With the constitution of governing bodies do all of the term end dates now coincide? We hope not.**

A At the moment, term dates are a matter for the employer which in the case of Millthorpe is City of York Council. However, the law is changing: the Deregulation Act 2015, which is not yet in force, would transfer the power to set term dates to the governing body. City of York Council currently sets term dates for all York community and voluntary controlled schools; in the case of voluntary aided schools the Governing Body sets them. Schools then select five of those days for teacher training, so term dates for all York schools are very similar. If there were a MAT, the employer would be the Trust which would then set term dates (until the Deregulation Act transferred this power to the governing bodies). It is unclear how likely individual governing bodies are to use their powers to set term dates once it is delegated to them in future but clearly they would be expected to consider the benefits of being consistent with their local schools.

**Q How long does/can the process of converting take?**

A If there is a vote in favour of conversion, the earliest date of conversion is likely to be 1 November 2015, but 1 January 2016 is more likely.

**Q Are you considering/looking at the option of having an academy sponsor?**

A No. A sponsor generally takes control of a Trust, and is for schools which need to improve. A sponsor provides no money. We would not need or want a sponsor.

**Q Who makes decision on curriculum?**

A Governing bodies.

**Q If the MAT is so unique and tailored to the York Heads views how does this stack up legally?**

A Trusts have a lot of freedom to design their own governance. We believe the structure we have proposed is different from many others and better. Our reading of the legal documents suggests there will be no problem with the proposal legally, but we will take legal advice on it.

**Q 1. Does an individual school's decision depend on the other schools also joining? (Many of the arguments for relate to the joining of 3 schools).**

**Q 2. If the governors from one or all schools vote no to the MAT - what happens next? Will the schools re-propose this in say a year's time until it is voted through?**

A It is highly likely that governors (who will make the decision) would think differently about their own school's conversion depending on the conversion of the other schools. We expect Governing Bodies to vote on the issue of conversion should their school convert alone, should one of the other two convert, and should both convert, which covers all the possibilities. If a governing body votes against academisation, it is up to the governing body whether it wishes to reconsider this in the future.

**Q 1. Are there any scenarios where one of the 3 schools could get into a position either financial or on standards where a situation could arise where the EFA/other body could force involvement of an external sponsor and if so would that sponsor be a sponsor for the failing single academy or the combined MAT?**

**Q 2. What if the MAT gets into great financial difficulty?**

A The Regional Schools Commissioner can force a sponsor on any failing school, whether that school is a local authority school or an academy. Failure could be financial, or could be academic. Currently, where an academy is failing, it is removed from its existing Trust and placed in another one as a sponsored academy. If a local authority school is failing academically, it will be forced to academise and allocated a sponsor by the Regional Schools Commissioner. If a local authority school is failing financially, it could be subject to a formal intervention by the York such as a removal of its governing body and a management committee put in on a temporary basis until financial regularity was restored.

**Q Is there a fully worked out business plan?**

A All schools currently have 3 year financial projections and have had for many years. They also have school development plans approved and monitored by governing bodies. Schools manage their own finances with monthly management accounts and they are monitored by a governors' committee termly. The only difference between the current situation and that of an academy is a consideration of the variance in income and costs, which amounts to 2% of the annual budget. This has been done.

**Q If there are so many examples of bad MATs isn't this an even more important reason to look at other alternatives?**

A The evidence on MATs is that they are no better or worse academically than local authorities. However, they are more subject to media scrutiny being a relatively recent part of the education landscape and therefore bad examples are more prominent. Governors will look at the alternatives to academisation including staying as a local authority school, considering a federation and considering an umbrella trust.

**Q Why does the parent survey not include a tick box for 'in favour', 'against' or 'don't know' so governors could ascertain if parents were generally in favour or not? Isn't it likely that without such a box parents who are generally in favour just won't return a form and governors will not get a proper flavour of what the parents/community think?**

A Governors have a difficult decision to make on this proposal. Many people will have some reasons for and against the proposal, and a simple yes/no cannot capture this complexity. Governors wish to base their decision on reasons and not opinions, and so have sought out parents' thoughts to guide Governors' decision-making rather than tallying a simple yes/no opinion.

**Q Will the school day change?**

A There are no plans to change the day.

**Q Is the 7 year contract with the Department for Education important? Does the deal get worse after this date? (Or is there more of a risk of this under academy status?)**

A There are no schools capable of predicting what “deal” they will get after 7 years. It is likely that financially, all schools will find the current parliament challenging. The main purpose of the 7 year (rolling) funding agreement is probably to ensure that academies could not be brought to an end within one parliament, but would require two to do so; however, this is political speculation.

## 2. What would you like Governors to consider?

Admire the pro-active response to a political situation that may not be personal choice.

By developing a MAT that allows the heads influences to be reflected is also admirable.

What are the risks of not converting to an academy?

What happens if the trust comes into financial difficulty? Is that risk increased by not having an academy sponsor?

Define the benefit/risks/nature of the relationship between the schools in the trust.

The amount of time and commitment involved in being a trust member - unpaid - what can you expect?

How do you recruit governors/trustees with the right skills and experience and remain representative of the school community.

The current EFA rules dictate that there must be a chief executive or principal - the three heads idea will not be approved.

The members have the power to appoint or remove trustees and make amendments to articles - a lot of power in few hands.

If there is no fully worked business plan, all the other aspects of the plan are in danger of falling apart.

Given that there are many bad examples of MATs out there, it is definitely worthwhile to explore other options.

Ensuring that all three governing bodies make their decision on the same date.

What information are governors receiving to ensure that they receive both arguments in support and against? Also, factual neutral data?

Are governors aware of independent academic research on the topic?

Have governors visited the Scarcroft matters web page?

Did you see the Yorkshire Post academics letter?

Where do governors stand on parents wanting a ballot/vote?

The debate could be distorted by political views. I would support governors in looking beyond polarised political views to the underlying facts (which are probably relatively marginal for/against) to determine what is best for the schools.

Regarding the new primary school in the area I would much prefer a locally run academy trust to run the new primary than a distant chain or even worse a free school. I cannot say what the relative likelihood of these outcomes is.

It seems quite positive that you are taking control of your future.

It's good that the ethos is shared and good intentions.

Would the academy be responsible for support staff pensions and how much of a financial burden would this represent?

How much deviation is there expected to be from the national curriculum?

Opportunities to work across the MAT to address disappearance of levels of attainment.