

Further Questions from parents around proposed MAT

Questions about finances:

1. How much school money has already been spent investigating the feasibility of forming a MAT?

No money has been spent from the school budget. The governor and headteacher time taken in the preparation work has all been voluntary and those meetings which required headteachers have been in the evening not in school time.

2. I have seen several questions asking about the financial benefits of forming a MAT but all the answers so far have talked vaguely about potential savings. Please show us the figures, somebody must have made some actual calculations, what are they?

The Regional Schools Commissioner's office has already done due diligence on each school's financial status and judged that a MAT will be financially viable, however we are looking carefully at ongoing costs to ensure that our individual schools will not be compromised.

3. What are the new costs to Mayfield of being in the MAT, e.g. CEO salary, money to innovation trust, added costs. There must be figures, what are they?

We are currently in the process of improving the detail and accuracy of our preliminary figures eg benchmarking of CEO/CFO salaries and identification of all costs to the Trust eg insurance, accountancy systems. We also have to identify which costs we would no longer need to pay at all (eg apprenticeship levy) or which we will no longer need to pay out of our individual budgets because the Trust will be paying eg subscriptions, governor services. We will also receive some additional money which is currently kept by county.

In addition we will be talking to other small MATs to see what they do to sustain strong finances and to hear any concerns they have. The figures we obtain will be for a worse case scenario as over time more contracts can be consolidated and savings made, but we will not be relying on that when a decision is made. We will also look at projections for the financial situation for a 4 school or 5 school MAT.

Financial projections will need to be acceptable to all the founder schools and to the shadow trust board as they take on the responsibility for finances. We will not proceed if financial forecasts are poor.

4. Given the possibility of joining a MAT has been looked into since 2016 why do the governors not have figures yet of costs and savings? This is the vital and most important area.

During the process we have had preliminary financial figures based on past experience, current costs and funding, and information about other MATs which suggested that it would be feasible to fund a MAT of this size. However, detailed financial planning requires us to release staff time to get quotations from suppliers etc and therefore costs money. As we did not think it was morally acceptable to take this out of the school budget we waited until we had been approved to proceed and allocated a conversion grant by the DfE in December before pursuing in depth analysis. In any case, we needed up to date information and the LA is only just releasing the new budget figures and telling us what is being delegated to schools. This is essential for getting an analysis that is accurate and useful for our decision making.

5. Would the MAT be financially viable in the medium to long term with just the three founding schools? If not, the whole case for the project collapses: insistence on careful growth with like-minded schools, focus on teaching, etc. become just lip-service in the face of financial imperatives.

Financial sustainability is part of the due diligence process but it is true that under financial pressure it would be tempting to jump at the first school wanting to join. In terms of any schools who may be immediately interested there have been some ongoing discussions around shared values but the same due diligence process that we are having around values, finances, premises, data etc would be undertaken and the whole package carefully considered by the Board of Directors. They too would bear the weight of responsibility for getting these decisions right. But yes, we need to be in a financially secure enough position that we have the time to be cautious

To reiterate - this is all part of the due diligence and we are fully aware that it is vital and important that the finances are secure - it is not a done deal that the finances will be acceptable to the governors.

Questions around staff:

6. How long will teachers salaries and conditions be protected after the initial TUPE? Usually after TUPE there is a legally specified period that conditions can't be altered but after that renegotiation can occur.

We have no desire to make unfavourable changes to staff Terms and Conditions and even if we did they could be successfully challenged at an employment tribunal. Alignments may need to be made for some policies and staff and unions will be consulted where appropriate. Any differences in policies are likely to be

small (all the schools have been working with the same model policies) and we are looking to align towards the most favourable option for staff. Staff have met with our HR advisors and with their union reps to discuss these issues further. The unions have considerable experience in this area and can support staff effectively.

7. Will salaries offered in the MAT match those outside the MAT?

Cambridge is a very expensive place to live and we are very keen to be attractive employers in order to recruit and retain good staff. As a result we would not be looking to offer salaries that are lower than other schools. Like all schools we have very tight budgets so we will not be in a position to offer higher salaries either.

8. How will you attract good teachers from outside to join the MAT if they will no longer be part of the pension scheme they have already been paying in to?

The pensions continue to be paid into the Teachers' Pension Scheme or the Local Government Pension Scheme and the unions at the TUPE meeting did not have any concerns for staff about that. Pension benefits will be exactly the same.

9. What about longer term issues such as pension deficits? I understand that under the current set-up, pensions do not come under the responsibility of the school, but some of them do under the academy scheme; some of the biggest schemes in the country have been running deficits that have occasionally had to be plugged (by employers), and it seems that academies wouldn't be exempt: <http://www.uhy-uk.com/news-events/news/academy-schools-pension-fund-deficits-double-in-a-year/>

Trustees of Academies are raising concerns about the Local Government Pension Scheme deficit. We will ask the lawyers for their views on this.

10. Rather than time for teaching instead of business administration, won't the new role of a headteacher be more of a managing director and so incredibly sidelined and frustrated by changes imposed and lack of agency to control these changes? One of the most important aspects of the head teacher is to maintain the reputation of the school, that is going to be outsourced effectively and the head teacher will lose control over it.

All of the founder schools are motivated to retain their unique characters and ability to serve their own communities. The CEO will not be micromanaging the schools who will be free to maintain their own reputations. One of the main drivers for exploring this project is to alleviate the considerable business and administration burdens that our headteachers already undertake. For example,

currently we are gearing up for the introduction of another major change as we will require a Data Protection Officer from May – a significant administrative burden that could be better shared across schools.

Questions about sustainability:

11. Risk of “endowment effect” bias: much exploratory work was undertaken when there was an obligation for the school to convert to an academy, when the issue was “What type of academy?”. Now the issue is “Convert to an academy or remain with LA?”, would the individuals involved be so certain that the project is the best way forward if so much work hadn’t already been ploughed in the process?

There will not be an automatic decision to convert just because we have put in a lot of time and effort. We always knew that the due diligence phase would be critical and we definitely do not want to leave a legacy that will be detrimental to the school community going forward. This has the potential to be a really good collaboration but all aspects have to be correct. Minds have not been made up and will not be until all the information is available.

12. Could the situation of LA schools be quickly improved under a different political will? Considering the irreversible nature of conversion, would biding our time in the short term be a viable alternative?

It is really difficult to make decisions based on potential political changes especially when we have a situation when another election is not due until May 2022, we have no way of predicting who would win that election and if there is a change of government there is no indication that reversing academisation would be a priority (it would be hugely expensive for starters). It may be that finances or other reasons dictate that we cannot form our own MAT at this time and we will have to wait (or we will chose to wait) and see what happens.

13. Now the issue is “Convert to an academy or remain with LA?”: Whilst some of the elements have been covered (deteriorating LA support) we haven’t really seen a clear discussion of the relative merits of each option, or of any in-between models (shared services/purchasing syndicate?).

Other models such as Hard Federations are rare and were formed during a brief phase prior to the formation of MATs, however if the MAT does not go ahead at this time we will continue to look at ways to collaborate and share services where possible.

14. If these structural changes are implemented will the boundaries between governors be settled in advance and is it clear what they will and will not have

authority on in the future? Similarly, will parents have understanding of these boundaries/roles before acceptance goes ahead?

The roles and responsibilities of the Members, Trustees and Local Governing Bodies will be set out in the Scheme of Delegation for the Trust and will be available before a decision is made.

15. The devil is in the detail. I trust the current MAT team's belief in and dedication to their current vision, but this vision can only be maintained past the current post-holders if clearly supported by the articles (e.g. CEO to be a headteacher, quality of teaching paramount, etc).

We are trying very hard to future proof the ethos and vision of the Trust and we are using parent feedback directly to inform our Terms of Reference etc so please keep giving us feedback.

Other questions:

16. Will entry criteria for children to Mayfield change, i.e. will it still be catchment first, siblings, etc?

Admissions will continue to be administered by the LA and entry criteria will not change.

17. How many parents need to say no to the proposal for Mayfield not to join the MAT? 10%, 20% of parents 90%? Or are the parents views only one consideration?

We don't have a percentage in mind for parents saying 'no' or 'yes' and parental view is one (very important) factor amongst others. We are listening to the questions and views of parents and are responding with answers where we have them and making further enquiries where we don't. We are also responding to issues raised eg by making changes to the Articles of Association or Terms of Reference as a direct result of parent feedback. We have extended the consultation period and are planning another meeting for parents to ask questions and give feedback. This is a complicated issue and we appreciate that it takes time for parents to understand what is proposed and formulate questions and opinions. The governing body fully understands the importance of the decision to be made and will be taking account of parent opinion, staff opinion, finances, land and buildings, contracts, governance and legal issues. We will also need to consider the future of the school if we do not form this MAT. We are hearing that the 'push' remains for all schools to become academies by 2022 and we are also aware that the LA is further re-evaluating and restructuring the services it offers. We are responsible for future pupils as well as the children already in school but we WILL NOT convert unless we are satisfied that a MAT can be sustained financially and with the ethos that we have planned for.

