

**SWAINSWICK CofE PRIMARY SCHOOL ACADEMY CONSULTATION 25<sup>th</sup> September 2019 in Hazel Class at Swainswick Primary School.**

2pm Consultation

Present

**BWMAT Central Team: Jason Brown (JB, CFO), Darren Ling (DL, CCO)**

**Governors: Shannon Carr-Shand (SC, Chair), Grant Swarbrooke (GS, Headteacher), Nicola Lewis (NL), Claire Davies (CD)**

GS opened the consultation and confirmed that this was the first of two meetings today.

GS confirmed that Jason Brown and Darren Ling were visitors from the Trust Central Team. They had spent the morning in the school, as had the CEO Philip Bowditch. They all spent time with children and staff today finding out about Swainswick, what the school is like and how parents come from a distance because they buy into the school and the school community. Philip Bowditch was very positive saying 'you have a jewel here which we need to protect'. Therefore GS felt that the Trust were understanding of the school and its unique identity which had been important to the governors when choosing the right trust. GS confirmed that the school has been on a journey, everyone has worked hard including staff, parents, governors and Friends.

GS advised that the school now needs the support and collaboration of colleagues in the local area which BANES can no longer provide. GS has been on collaborative events with the Trust which have been supportive and it is good to be back amongst the cluster group.

SC-S opened her part to explain the GB's (Governing Body's) decision. This started with an explanation of what an Adacemy/ MAT is and how this differs from the maintained school model. A parent raised the question in the parents survey, 'Does Swainswick really need to join a MAT? It seems to be doing very well on its own'. SC-S engaged with this question to explain the GB's decision.

The local landscape has changed. There are only 14 schools still maintained out of 82 in total within BANES. Support from BANES for school improvement have been reduced. Other services became more expensive. Services such as catering were cut.

The local schools cluster joined the MAT in March 2018. Teachers had collaborative relationships with colleagues at these schools. Staff here work well as a team but to build specific professional networks, it is necessary to connect with colleagues with the same specialism outside of the school, eg. EYFS specialists. These kinds of things would not be apparent to parents but would begin to affect the school in the longer term.

SC-S spoke about the options for the school. Not to take action is one option but the GB view is that this is not appropriate because it is not in the best interests of the children in

the school now, and also in the future. We would lose control of our own destiny as academies become full.

Another option is whether to join a primary or a secondary led MAT. The GB view is that Swainswick is a small school so needs somewhere our voices can be heard so a primary focused MAT is best. Also, the school does not feed into a particular secondary school for which the school could join the same Trust.

JB confirmed that the landscapes are changing rapidly and so there is encouragement to join together eg. for economies of scale.

SC-S explained the process for Swainswick. Swainswick could not look to academise when other local schools did because at that time BANES would have withdrawn funding for their new buildings that were planned. BANES position has subsequently changed. Once the GB were able to consider whether to academise they looked at key criteria, selected the BWMAT as the appropriate Trust and made a resolution to take action to join this Trust.

Key criteria were safeguarding the school's own Ethos, collaboration with the local schools in former East Bath Learning Partnership, having capacity to continue to flourish as a good rural school, being primary and not secondary led. The local Schools are all in the Bath Hub of BWMAT.

GS confirmed that Miss Wills is training to be SENCO and support while she trains is coming from Bathford, who are a local school in the Trust, who will provide mentorship. This was given as a clear example of just one of the benefits of working with the local school group.

BWMAT Ethos and vision aligns with our vision and culture. BWMAT believe in the distinctiveness of individual schools whereas some Trusts have made their schools take the same approach. Their School Improvement experience is good. Tom Morrison is working with Trust now who Swainswick have worked with in BANES which was a good experience.

JB confirmed there is pressure from DfE around standardisation. Philip Bowditch is determined to fight this, eg. there are curriculum principles but not set curriculum. Curriculum is agreed locally by those who know the local context.

SC-S confirmed that for children there shouldn't be any obvious changes. Although the support around the school should be an indirect benefit to the children. There will be some differences for staff eg. around appointing the head teacher. Some policies will be created by the Trust. Some systems will be different.

**Q: Do staff see the presentation?** GS confirmed that the staff are quite aware and have been talking about it for some time. There will be a meeting after school regarding TUPE etc. Staff also had a meeting with Philip Bowditch today which was appreciated as he was very positive.

A parent stated that they felt reassured and that the information was clear. Their concerns were addressed by GS and SC-S. Wanted to be reassured that the school would keep it's approach and the meeting did provide this.

A governor confirmed that while there would be changes, that this should be a settling and not an uncertain change. Throughout previous changes the school ethos has always remained.

It was noted that change can bring challenges to parents and eg discussions outside the school gate.

There has always been a link with the Diocese and this would remain regardless of the academy which we joined. The Trust is a separate legal entity but based close together.

Some parents wondered whether it was a good or bad thing when other schools joined a Trust and wondered whether Swainswick would have done that at this time.

**Q: Are there any barriers to the school joining the Trust now?** This is a genuine consultation and any issues that came up would be considered. The Trust are ready to take the school and don't perceive any barriers.

Another parent confirmed that they felt reassured.

A parent expressed the view that keeping the individual schools approaches would be really important and that they are reassured that this would happen in the Trust.

SC-S confirmed that other schools within the Trust eg. heads, Chairs have confirmed that they have kept their own identity.

JB confirmed his role in the Trust central team.

**Q: What is the ration of men and women in the Senior team?** JB confirmed that there were 2 women and 3 men.

**Q: How would policies work?** It was confirmed that some Trust policies are obligatory, some are templates to contextualise eg, add in your own school, some are your own, for some schools within the group they would work together on a policy.

**Q: What about the Behaviour Policy?** The school can set this policy but it must comply with the exclusions policy.

It was confirmed that curriculum policies were at school level.

**Q: If the government were to change could the MAT environment change?** JB stated that different political parties have different views but would be almost impossible to undo what has been done. Going forward the speed to academization might change or another tier would be created.

**Q: How does the funding work?** JB confirmed that the Funding Formula has been made more similar nationally with a view to it becoming the same formula in the future. The amount of per pupil funding remain the same.

**Q: Do any other countries have this model and how has this worked?** The answer to this question was not known and the meeting was due to close.

*The meeting closed at 3pm.*

## 6pm Consultation

### Present

**BWMAT Central Team: Jason Brown (CFO), Darren Ling (COO)**

**Governors: Shannon Carr-Shand (SC-S), Grant Swarbrooke (GS), David Parr (DP), Imogen Windsor (IW), Nicola Lewis (NL from 6.15pm), Robert Shackell (RS from 6.20pm)**

GS opened the meeting and confirmed that Philip Bowditch the CEO had been spending time in school today and that this was a positive experience. GS had been keen that Trust team understood the Ethos and how families bought into this and were very driven and supportive. Parents come from different areas. There are some challenges here such as not having a school hall but we have a strong, flexible staff team. The school and governors recognise that if we are to continue offering the best for the children that we need support and collaboration with our peers. BANES are unable to offer that support anymore. Therefore GS and governors have been looking into joining an academy and have identified the BWMAT as being the Trust for Swainswick. After his visit this morning Philip Bowditch confirmed wanted to protect and support this special school.

GS had already taken part in eg academy leaders day run by the BWMAT and found this positive and supportive.

SC-S then explained about why the academy had been chosen and how this stage had been reached. SC-S explaining that funding comes through the local authority for maintained schools but will come through the Trust for academies.

SC-S confirmed that parents were asked to put forward questions about joining a MAT in the parents survey. Many of these had then been answered in the FAQs information previously distributed. One parent asked 'Does Swainswick really need to join a MAT? It seems to be doing very well on it's own.'

SC-S began answering this question by explaining that BANES' stated political position is that they are neutral regarding academisation. However many less maintained schools remain (14) and this impacts on the schools. BANES withdrew a lot of services and the school had to procure these directly. All local schools used to form a cluster but all the others went

into the Bath Hub in March 2018. Loss of eg. early years teacher having a peer to discuss their role with. It can lead to the school becoming insular when it intends to be an outward looking school.

Having looked at what is in the best interests of the children now and in the future the GB concluded that the school cannot do nothing. It was noted that other remaining maintained schools are also looking to convert to academies.

We have choice at the moment and we don't want to be the last ones as those choices may be lost. Wanted to be in a primary led MAT so that our voice could be heard as a small school and there would be focus on primary school provision.

The GB started looking at academisation once the new buildings were agreed and BANES confirmed that the process would not put the building project at risk. GB agreed to pursue converting to an academy in October 2018.

The GB considered their key criteria which were to guard the school's distinctive Ethos, avoid an academy which is prescriptive about what would be taught when but would allow staff to continue teaching in a rich cross curricular way. Working with schools in local area was important. The GB wanted MAT big enough to continue to challenge us and allow us to grow as a good rural school. The GB wanted a primary rather than a secondary led MAT.

Looked at different MATs, chose this one because it fitted the key criteria and allowed our local ongoing working relationships to continue.

GS confirmed that cross collaboration can be very successful eg Bathford Primary are mentoring our SENCO who is training. Cross collaboration allows for discussing best practice but also supporting each other to learn in ways like these.

Individual school distinctiveness is important within the Trust and each of the Hub schools are passionate about their own Ethos.

BWMAT had an established track record in School Improvement.

It was explain that there will be a small difference in the school name/logo. The school day should be the same for your child. However, extra support for staff should ultimately have a positive impact on the children.

Staff will be impacted by moving to the Trust as their employer as this is a change. There would be other changes to face if the school was not looking to join this Trust.

Tom Morrision School Improvement is moving from BANES to the Trust and this relationship will continue. He is an Ofsted inspector.

**Q. If we convert does that mean can't be Ofsted inspected?** GS confirmed that the school could not be Ofsted inspected for the first three years following conversion. GS confirmed that the school have come a long way in the last 3 years and would like some validation for

this because the school is in a strong position. JB confirmed that Ofsted shouldn't come now because the school is close to the conversion date. GS confirmed that the school will still be held to account even without an Ofsted visit.

SC-S confirmed that the Ofsted criteria are used in school as they are a useful form of challenge.

It was confirmed that there are some differences in how maintained schools and academies function. Head Teacher recruitment was given as one example of this as the Trust would now have the final say on this rather than governors. However, Local Authorities used to have a strong oversight of this so the change might not be so different in practice.

GB becomes a local GB but will still be responsible for oversight of the school.

The Trust would provide some policies. This is a beneficial thing as there is a lot of work around policies.

There will be some changes in the systems which Miss Didcott will have to deal with.

Any questions?

**Q: Will the caterers still supply to us when we are in the Hub?** Yes it is a commercial arrangements.

JB gave some background, that the Trust initially took 5 schools in special measures, providing good school improvement so that they came out of special measures. Then a stream of schools wanted to join. Then 10 schools in Bath joined at the same time. The BWMAT is now one of the largest primary focused multi academy trusts.

GS confirmed that staff are very positive about working with other local teachers again.

GS thanked SC-S for her work on this and also thanked JB and DL for their time.

**Q: What about the distinctiveness of the school? There is a religious focus with the MAT. Swainswick is open at the moment to other religions and to no religion. Would it become more church focused?**

JB confirmed that governance comes through the Diocese but conversion does not change the foundation of the schools. The Trust has a non-church community school in the Bath Hub who have been encouraged to celebrate their own Ethos. Church schools still have a SIAMS inspection. Religious education and worship policy is still school specific. The Trust encourages schools to develop their own approach as they know their local community.

**Q: Are you moving from the old Deanery?** Yes we are moving with the Diocese and will continue to have our offices with them in the Aster building. The new building will be more practical including for Wifi.

**Q: Thinking of terms and conditions, understand about TUPE, but what will it mean for new staff? Would non-teachers be employed as this an option for MATs? Is the BWMAT's preference to recruit only qualified teachers a firm commitment?** JB confirmed 'Yes, we want the best results for the pupils across our Trust'.

**Q: Is there additional administrative support?** JB stated that there is additional support and a training plan in place. There will be changes in how the processes are done but should balance in the longer term. SC-S confirmed that there is an experienced team at the trust who support. Donna SBM has been part of a team that have been through a conversion.

DL confirmed that there is a capital fund where risk factors are prioritised and there is also an allowance for contingency. DL confirmed conditions and suitability would be considered.

**Q: Is School fundraising something that the MAT get involved in?** This continues as usual. This belongs to the school as their funding. Trust might still support a project that is funded with Friends money.

**Q: Is the MAT definitely happy to take Swainswick?** JB confirmed yes it can go ahead and wouldn't have otherwise got to this stage.

**Q: Will the Trust continue to grow?** JB confirmed that this is the longest that we haven't recruited for, due to taking on 10 schools. There are always schools looking to join. Just don't know how many we could or would be permitted to take on yet. Some academy trusts are merging. We are not in a rush to grow at a pace.

**Q: There is no mechanism for a school to leave once they become part of a MAT. What would happen if in 10 years things didn't look as nice, what would it mean for a school if they wanted to leave and can't?** JB advised that the DfE can direct it. At the moment there is not a form to leave, JB thinks that in the future this will be possible, eg. transfers to a different Trust because Trusts have been created in a haphazard way.

**Q: Could schools revert back under a different government?** JB stated that this would be a legal nightmare including costs of conversion for the legal fees which have already been paid to convert to academy and would need to be paid again to convert back. SC-S confirmed that while we are in an existing structure this has been dismantled around us and would be the case even if government policy changed.

**Q: Do any other countries have this model?** This was not known.

*The meeting closed at 7pm.*