

Marple Hall School 'Academy Conversion' full consultation report 17-5-2016

Context: A public consultation was held between 19-4-2016 and 16-5-2016 regarding a proposal to convert the school to an Academy and form a Multi Academy Trust.

The consultation comprised four informal meetings with staff, one public meeting and email correspondence with any interested parties.

This document contains all correspondence received and answers sent to questions

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1) Responses received to the 'academyconsultation' email account

Correspondence One

Dear Mr Barker, SLT & Governors

Thank you for sharing information about your proposals to convert to an Academy as the next step in MHS's exciting journey. Before commenting may I say how delighted we have been with our experience of Marple Hall to date. Following a tricky start our daughter has thrived over the last two years and it has been great to see her develop into a confident young lady taking an active part in school life and enjoying all the opportunities the school has afforded her. She has received great support from staff to help her achieve this so thank you!

Our initial reaction to the academy proposal is that the arguments for conversion are sound. Whether to convert or not is almost a moot point given the government's direction of travel. However I feel the proposal for a local trust working with feeder primary schools is absolutely the right model and sponsorship by an external agency should be avoided at all costs.

A few questions:

1. Assuming a decision to progress is taken in May, what are the timescales for conversion?

The Department for Education state that conversions usually take around 5 months, but can be longer depending on how complicated matters such as land ownership are. Whilst we are not envisaging any particular issues here, I expect the process to take anywhere between 5 months and perhaps a year.

2. What steps will the school take during the conversion period to ensure that staff remain focussed on teaching and outcomes for existing pupils, and are not distracted by the academisation process?

This is one of my main concerns. Firstly, I am told the academisation process is more simple than it used to be, and so the workload ought to be less than previously. However, I still expect it to be a major piece of work. The bulk of the responsibility will lie with myself, our business manager and the Governors. I have therefore made some changes to the size and shape of the senior leadership team starting in June 2016 to make sure that the school keeps driving forwards whilst the process goes on. Speaking to senior colleagues at the Kingsway School, which has recently converted, I am reassured that the impact on the majority of the staff will be very minor.

3. Are academies still governed by the local authority's rules for allocating places?

Academies can set their own admission arrangements, although I'm not aware of any in Stockport that do. Our intention at this stage is to follow the same procedures as all other secondary schools in Stockport.

4. You talk about working with primary schools, is there any intention / wish to forge relations with Marple 6th Form College (or any other college) through the MAT?

I talk to the Principal at the College fairly regularly and we have a good working relationship, and I'd like to think we can build on this further in the future. However, I am aware that the College itself is currently consulting on forming a MAT with a secondary school in Altrincham, and so it is unlikely there'll be any formal arrangement with them at this time. I believe the details of the College's plans can be found on their website.

Correspondence Two

Re. Academy status - Marple Hall school.

I have always been fiercely opposed to the Government's plans to convert all schools into academies. I am totally opposed to large corporate companies owning and controlling schools with little or no regard for the teachers, pupils, staff or the community involved.

Private providers running large "chains" of schools - taking on more schools than they can run efficiently is not, in my opinion. innovative or ethical.

Therefore, my heart sank when my daughter came home and announced that Marple Hall was to join the academy rat race...

However, after reading the school's proposal I very quickly realised that there was no intention to sell out and allow an outside sponsor or agency to strip the school of its identity and ethos, allowing the curriculum, the terms and conditions of staff and every other decision to be dictated by a corporate organisation.

Marple Hall's proposition to enable *'a small number of schools to come together with a local angle, secondary schools and primary schools working together'*. *'A local trust serving the needs of local families where the schools within the trust will keep their own names, their own decision making powers, their own Governing bodies – essentially their own identity whilst being part of a larger community...'* really is the best possible solution in the current climate.

This type of academy, which I believe would grow from a local secondary/primary federation would hopefully enable the school to ward off a **forced** takeover by a large academy chain in the future. Academy status minus corporate takeover. It is crucial that Marple Hall retains its community, identity and ethos and does everything it can to preserve everything that makes it a great school. (It appears that several LAs/ groups of schools are also thinking of forming this type of alternative 'trust', The topic featured on BBC North West tonight this evening.)

I wish you every success in this bid.

Dear,

Thank you for your feedback and I couldn't agree more about the sponsored academy model – we believe that our proposal is a much better way to keep the focus where it should be, which is on the students and the job of educating them for their futures.

Your support is very much appreciated,

Best wishes,

Joe Barker

Correspondence Three

Thank you for the information about the school's proposal to become an academy.

While I understand the logic of the school wanting greater financial control of a slightly larger budget and in turn to determine whether to procure certain services from the council or not, I have significant concerns about the proposed change of status - and about the wider social implications of academisation more generally.

My main concerns are:

- There is no evidence that changing the school to academy status will have a positive impact on pupil outcomes. In fact national research carried out by the LGA recently indicates that pupil outcomes in academies were marginally worse than those in state schools. At a national level, academisation seems to be reorganisation for reorganisation's sake as part of the wider rolling back of the state ('privatisation - lite') and could ultimately distract leadership from the most important aspect of the role - improving the quality of teaching and outcomes for pupils.

You are correct, there is no evidence that schools will do better for their learners just because they are academies. The factors that make schools more or less successful are just as likely to be present in state schools as academies. It is possible to point to many success stories of effective schools converting to academy status and continuing to develop, and probably just as many examples of struggling schools that have not improved by becoming academies. Whatever the arguments for and against the Government's plans, the MHS governing body took the decision to launch this consultation before the announcements were made as we believe that there is the possibility to improve the education we can offer students by being an academy, especially through the opportunity to work much more closely with local primary schools. If there is one key weakness in the educational system it is the transition from Year 6 to Year 7 – not necessarily the pastoral aspect, but certainly the academic transition from the end of KS2 to the start of KS3. We plan to use the MAT to greatly develop links between the primary and secondary phase and to accelerate the progress that students make as a result. On your final point, you are right that one of my key roles should this plan progress is to make sure that the school does not take our eye off what is important, namely the quality of teaching and the outcomes for learners. I have made some changes to the senior team to build our capacity going forwards, and whilst I would have done that anyway I believe that these changes will mitigate for the additional work that the academy process may involve.

- Removing the school from LA control removes democratic accountability. While councils might not always offer the best value service/s (although some do), the fact that there is currently democratic oversight of the school provides a necessary check and balance. I would like to know more about the proposed governance arrangements for the school (will they change?) and level of parental involvement / consultation that will be sought on changes to admissions or curriculum under the academy model.

A fair point. Ultimately the school will be accountable to the Department for Education, and I imagine they would argue that they are a democratically accountable organization, but I fully appreciate the point you make. In terms of Governance the model would change, as all academies have a different governance structure which encompasses 'members' who appoint a board of trustees, who in turn hold a smaller governing body to account. In most conversions existing Governors (including parents) have adopted one or more of these roles, and in other examples independent people have become 'members' to ensure impartial oversight of the governance of the school. All the roles are unpaid as is the case now. In terms of future changes to the school, such as admissions or curriculum, the school would follow the same guidelines as now for consultation with parents. Certainly for the foreseeable

future no major changes are planned, especially to admissions. We would buy-back the same service from the LA for this aspect of school life.

- Once academy status has been granted, there is nothing to stop the school changing certain aspects of its policies and ways of working - changing its admission policy, for example, to only admit the most able. Making all schools 'independent' under the academy model could increase existing inequalities between communities in Stockport and beyond - and may ultimately have wider social consequences over time.

As above, there are no plans to change admissions policies or any other significant aspect of school life. Indeed, part of our motivation is to preserve our ethos and policies. I have read of some academies that have sought to change admissions codes, but the overwhelming majority of academies that I know of have not attempted such a thing. I am not entirely sure that it is even possible to do so anymore, but I confess I am not fully aware of the procedures as it is not something I am contemplating doing. I agree with you that there can be no guarantees over time, and it is a valid point to say what will happen if I leave, or there is a change of governance leading to a different direction in the future.

I realise that ultimately the individual consultation at Marple Hall is redundant - government policy is to force the issue of academisation despite many LAs, parents, schools and teachers being opposed to it. While the short term benefits of direct budget management may look attractive, the longer term implications provide serious cause for concern and are the reason why I am opposed to the change.

Kind regards,

Dear

Thank you for contributing to the consultation, I appreciate the time that you have taken to do so. I have responded to your comments below, but please do be in touch if you would like more information as you raise important points to which my responses may be lacking.

[see above for answers]

Kind regards

Joe Barker

Correspondence Four

Hi

I would like to be reassured that if Marple Hall becomes an Academy, that the school would continue to see the needs of young people with additional and sensory needs as a priority. Also would the school continue to work in partnership with external agencies to ensure young people receive professional specialist support to achieve their optimum potential.

I would also like to enquire how the rights and terms and conditions for staff would be ensured, and whether membership of unions would be encouraged ?

Kind Regards

Hi

Thanks for the message. I can answer the questions below:

- 1) I would like to think that we will do more for our young people who have additional and sensory needs, which will include working with external agencies. The best way to try to reassure you on this is that I have recently signed off on a significant increase in spending on the whole 'SEN' provision for next year in terms of staffing, equipment, support packages and physical rooming. I hope that this in some ways shows my intent, and I cannot see any reason to change the approach were we to academies.*
- 2) We will keep all terms and conditions of employment the same as they are now for all staff. We will adopt the School Teachers Pay and Conditions document and have no intention of changing anything for any staff – I do not see the benefit and the risk of losing good staff by doing anything else is too great. As for the unions, I have always had a very good relationship with internal reps and local secretaries – I hope that this continues and will always encourage staff to be in a union.*

Please let me know if you would like further clarification,

Thanks

Joe

Hi Joe

Thanks for your prompt reply. I appreciate converting to an academy would not affect me personally, but... I am obviously concerned for students in the future. Thank you for your reassurance, I am aware that you have always endeavoured to support xx in addressing her needs (and ours) and believe that you will continue to do this for other students and their families.

Correspondence Five (received on 16-5-16)

Please find my comments on the proposal to convert MHS to Academy Status and to form a Multi Academy Trust below.

I am a parent of a student at MHS and attended the consultation meeting at the school on Monday 9th May 2016.

Name of person responding:

Comments:

Whilst I can understand the proposal to convert to Academy Status in the current political and economic climate I do have concerns about the uncertainties this will lead to both in the short and longer term.

At the meeting I attended on the 9th May, Mr Barker and the representative from the Board of Governors did provide reassuring responses to many of the questions raised about the impact of this proposal, for example around financial and budgetary concerns, employment of qualified staff, staff terms and conditions and the curriculum. However, these reassurances were based on the personal ethos and outlook of Mr Barker and the current Board of Governors. It does not appear that there is any mechanism to enshrine the principles and ethos which Mr Barker described in any formal way into the principles of the Academy as an organisation. Thus the future direction of the school is entirely reliant on the individuals managing any future Academy trust. This creates a more precarious future for the management of the school in many ways, as a change in personnel could have such a major impact on fundamental values and principles.

Linked to this is the issue of local accountability and governance. Without oversight from the Local Education Authority I feel that accountability to the local community is weakened considerably. Oversight will be provided by a Regional Schools Commissioner overseeing a much larger area and number of schools as well as the DfE itself. I have yet to be convinced of the effectiveness of these new mechanisms for oversight which are much larger and unwieldy organisations. How responsive can they be to individual concerns from the community?

I also have concerns about the loss of a local overarching approach to Stockport education which allows issues around equity and resourcing to be managed beyond the individual school level for the benefit of the wider community in the whole of Stockport. This approach is more likely to prevent a two-tier system of good and bad schools developing.

I feel that the professionalism and efficiency of services provided currently by the LEA is in danger of being lost. Many services provided by the LEA are of value to all schools in the area and will have a detrimental impact if lost.

Individual private companies can clearly provide good services but require rigorous monitoring and evaluation of their contracts and terms and conditions. It seems to represent an unnecessary and inefficient administrative burden for individual schools or trusts to be undertaking this type of activity which would previously have been done by the LEA. There are many potential inefficiencies and a loss of 'economy of scale' benefits with the establishment of autonomous academies. I realise that this process is already underway in that many schools already run many of these financial and administrative processes but feel that the point about the inefficiency of this still needs to be made.

Lastly I also worry that the process of Academy conversion will take much attention and investment of time from certain MHS staff and that this could have a negative impact on the school over the next couple of years.

I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the consultation and look forward to hearing about the results of this and any next steps moving forward.

Regards,

Correspondence Six

Dear Sir/Madam,

We are writing to participate in the consultation process regarding the proposed change of Marple Hall School to an academy.

Overall we are distressed at the prospect of the link to local authorities being severed and the government plans to dismantle state provision in a number of different areas. In particular we object to our children being part of an ill-informed and dogma driven experiment which, in our opinion, should be resisted at every opportunity. Having said that, we are also realists and can see that schools are offered very little choice. The one optimistic element we take from the plans as set out is that this will not be a commercially sponsored academy and that the local feel will be retained by working with other schools in the area.

To date we have been convinced that the team at the school are dedicated and put the learning and welfare of pupils first and we can only hope that if the school converts to an academy this continues to be the case.

Yours faithfully,

Correspondence Seven - CAMSFC response

Dear Joe

Thank you for sending me details of the consultation for academy conversion. As we are nearing the end of the area review process please could you clarify:

1. Whether Marple Hall will apply to the DfE to extend the age range of the school?
2. Whether Marple Hall would consider opening discussions regarding the possibility of Marple Hall working in partnership with Cheadle and Marple Sixth Form College and Altrincham College of Arts as part of their recently approved Multi Academy Trust?

2) Questions raised by staff members in person

Staff meeting re Proposal for Marple Hall School to convert to Academy Status and to form a Multi Academy Trust – 27/4/16

1. A member of staff asked about admissions arrangements?

Joe Barker replied that we would buy back this service from the local authority, which is common to the other converter academies in Stockport.

2. A member of staff asked if the school would go for opening a 6th form again?

Joe Barker replied that it would be something to think about for the future, but not immediately.

3. A member of staff asked about legal costs and funding?

Joe Barker replied that the Dfe states that on average it costs a school about £28k to convert to Academy Status and we should get £25k of this from government.

4. A member of staff asked about changes to pay and conditions and would they stay the same?

Joe Barker replied that there would be no changes to pay and conditions for members of staff. In terms of pay scales for teaching staff, all schools have had the right since 2012 to adopt different pay scales. MHS (and most schools) retained the existing M1-6, UPS1-3 points, and plan to do so for the future whether as an academy or not.

Staff meeting re Proposal for Marple Hall School to convert to Academy Status and to form a Multi Academy Trust – 6/5/16

- 1) A colleague asked how can we be sure that terms and conditions for staff will not be eroded over time?

Joe Barker replied 'It is my understanding that the STPCD (School Teachers Pay and Conditions Document) which is updated annually on a national level will remain in place in future years. If so, MHS will adopt it as the basis of our terms and conditions of employment for teaching staff. Similarly, we will adopt the same conditions as present for support staff. There is no desire at all to set out our own terms and conditions which would be costly and unpopular with no clear benefit for the school. In the long run I cannot guarantee what would happen were there to be a change of leadership/Governance.'

- 2) A colleague asked what will the benefits be for students?

Joe Barker replied 'A big part of the conversion proposal is to maintain our ethos and values, and not to make any changes for the sake of academisation. Therefore in that regard students would not see noticeable benefits. However, our plan of working with primary schools is based on the belief that we need to learn from the KS2 experience and improve our provision at KS3. It is in this area that we will see a benefit for students – they might not notice it as it will be the norm for them, but the potential is there to improve what we do with the lower years'

- 3) A colleague asked why not wait until we are forced to convert?

Joe Barker replied 'The proposal is about being in control of our own future, and was agreed at Governors before the announcement that all schools will be forced to convert. At this moment I do not know if the Govt will follow through on the plan to convert all schools, but if they do then waiting for too long will see us forced into a different MAT which will mean the loss of some independence. If we plan to convert then we should do it under our own terms'. The meeting also involved a wider discussion about different types of academy, different terms and conditions, the Cheadle Hulme High School situation (including their primary school and possible second secondary school).

3) Questions raised by staff members via email

Correspondence One

Will we still become an academy now?

Naturally this change of heart will have a bearing on what we choose to do, and in a way now we know we can discuss the options properly rather than wondering when/if they were going to change their mind.

The Governors decided to start the process before the announcement came about enforced academisation, for all the right reasons in terms of giving us greater control over our future. Therefore in some ways this news does not change anything, but of course it does mean we need to go back and review our plans and see if they are still appropriate.

Interesting times!

Joe

Correspondence Two

Hi Joe,

Considering the news today, will Marple still be going ahead with changing to an academy or will it consider remaining under LA control?!

Thanks

Hi

A very interesting question! I need to review exactly what Ms Morgan has actually said, as it seems more complicated than a straight u-turn. In the short term we will complete the consultation and then discuss as a governing body, but I can see that some arguments for being an academy have now gone, whereas others still remain. Whether any primary schools would be interested in joining us is now probably more in doubt.

Cheers

Joe

Correspondence Three

Hi

If converting would we be an academy by September 2016?

Would we still be civil servants employed by the government as we would be listed as a private company etc?

Do we have to pay VAT on goods as a private company even on educational supplies as this will affect the budget?

Thanks

Hi

To answer your questions:

If converting would we be an academy by September 2016? – no, the process takes between 5 and 18 months once we start it, and we may delay the start if the DfE can't make their mind up what is happening (Nicky Morgan spoke yesterday in Parliament saying all schools WILL be academies by 2022!!)

Would we still be civil servants employed by the government as we would be listed as a private company etc? I am not sure on the exact legal status, but the school effectively becomes a charity-run school funded directly by the government. It is not a private business as such, as the funding is given to us to provide an education. Either way, we have committed to keeping all the same pay and conditions, same contracts, same everything for staff.

Do we have to pay VAT on goods as a private company even on educational supplies as this will affect the budget? No.

Let me know if you need more detail to the above.

Cheers

Joe

Correspondence Four

Hi Joe,

Hope you are OK. Sorry that I've not had chance to attend one of your Q&A sessions. I'd be grateful however if you would answer the following for me:

- Is the intention to proceed with conversion to an academy, even if school is not able to form a Multi Academy Trust with local primary schools? *It is an option, yes. We would prefer to build the MAT we have described, but it is a possibility that some local schools will not join. As well as going it alone (but ironically in a MAT), there is a third option which is to work with other secondaries too. The Gov Body will weigh up all options at the end of the consultation*
- Which Primary schools are you in talks with? *Three local schools have met with me and discussed the options in detail, but they have asked that I do not name them as yet.*
- What will the management structure of the MAT look like? *This depends who wants to join. I prefer the 'umbrella trust' model where the heads of each school have an equal voice, and there are some good examples of successful trusts like this. The more schools who join the planning phase, the more collaborative the leadership model will be*
- Will the admissions process change in terms of us having a greater say about which students are offered a place, and which aren't? *No, we will keep the same process and buy back the same team from the LA.*
- I know you have already answered that you don't expect staff terms and conditions to change, however could we be asked to work from another location within the MAT? E.g. could the Exams Officer be asked to manage SATs in the primary schools if this was of benefit? *Technically yes, but technically the LA could ask you to do that now (although it is very rare). I don't imagine our exams office would be asked to manage SATS, but we may look to share expertise across schools in some way – ie best practice in one primary shared with the others.*

- Will we retain the support of the Stockport SIMS team, and that of School ICTs for our training and SIMS support? This is crucial to my role, and I understand that you can choose to continue to buy in to the services that Stockport/Schools ICTs provide if you wanted to. I would strongly recommend this. *Yes, absolutely.*
- What are the benefits for staff? *More development opportunities through working with colleagues in other schools, potentially more career progression opportunities, not being faced with being forced into a big national 'chain' with different terms and conditions...*
- I have a concern that our first point of call for HR is a member of SLT, and who is the direct line manager of many staff in school. I don't therefore feel that we have an avenue to discuss anything privately that may be concerning us with an independent person/body. I'm aware that school have already bought the services of an external HR provider, and I would like to know if this would remain the case, and whether staff would be at liberty to contact them directly should they feel the need to do so? *Yes, we would buy the same HR support as now as we think they are very efficient. I think your concerns above are about line management, not HR, but every colleague always has a right to ask for a different line manager if they have cause to do so.*
- How long do you anticipate that the conversion would take? i.e. what are the stages in the process, and 'sign-off' points. *The Gov Body and I are keen not to rush this, and so it may take a while to make a decision thanks to the lack of clarity from the Government. However, if we do go ahead then the process takes between 5 and 18 months depending on how complex the conversion is. One advisor I have spoken to suggests that our conversion would take 8-10 months as we are a fairly large school but we do not have complex land ownership issues (which is the biggest cause of delay)*
- We have been told on more than 1 occasion now that we are deemed to be overstaffed in terms of Support Staff. Can you provide any assurances that school will not be looking to make staff redundant if the school changes to an academy? *Being an academy would have no bearing on this – we do not intend to make any redundancies full stop, but whether academy or state school we are facing a budget squeeze in the next 3 years (which is a lot better than some schools who are already feeling the pinch). I hope that we do not have to make redundancies either way and are already taking action to save money in a bid to avoid this. However, it would be wrong of me to 'rule out' future redundancies over the medium term, but that has nothing to do with us being an academy.*

I have to be honest and say I don't know enough about how academies work, so please don't take the above as a negative view at all. I am open to this as a positive option in terms of being a prospective school parent, and would proceed 'with caution' as a member of staff!
J

Thanks

If I could please ask another question, what are your and the governing bodies goals for the school, and how does converting to an academy help to realise these goals, versus remaining as a state school? I was supportive of your wish to take the lead in this when the government were forcing schools to convert, but I'd like to understand if we do go ahead now, why that would be the best option? As a member of staff I'm not fearful of change, as most change is good and brings benefits, but I feel that I need to be able to buy in to the vision and the strategy in order to understand what is required of me to help make this a positive change for everyone concerned.

Many thanks,

...I'm just in the process of re-shaping our goals for the school but they will be centered on establishing the best possible education for our students. This will of course involve exam results, but I want to put more emphasis on building the whole person through a determined push on student health, community awareness and the instilling of a set of values which I think we are going to call the 'Marple Hall Spirit' (MHS...making use of the logo that's already everywhere). Our view is that this would marry easily with the respective aims of our local primary schools – we wouldn't want to force them to change anything, but few people could argue that the goals above are inappropriate and I could see the MAT doing some great work in our local area.

To achieve all this we need to autonomy over our decision making process, and although the Govt has climbed down from an enforced academy solution, I think it is incredibly likely that all/almost all secondary schools will still convert. The percentage of conversions for our sector is around 70% already and still going up, and in a speech on Monday Nicky Morgan stated that she still expects all schools to be academies by 2022, but that she will find 'other ways' to make this happen – which is rather ominous!! Being an academy of our own means that we will have the security to plan for the next 5 years without the worry of if/when we are forced to convert, and whose MAT we end up being put into. Doing nothing in my view will lead ultimately to a loss of autonomy. We may end up in a local, community MAT and all is well, or we may end up in a large national chain and all will not be. Personally I don't see the logic of taking that risk when we have the option here to build the future we want to build.

Aside from this, we think that being an academy will bring some relatively small benefits in terms of budget flexibility, the ability to save some money currently top-sliced for services we have never bought, a sizeable increase in money by not losing all our interest payments to the LA etc.