

## PROPOSED EXPANSION OF CHILDREN’S ENDEAVOUR TRUST

### CONSULTATION QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

#### Introduction

Consultation meetings for parents were held on the proposal for five primary schools to convert to academy status and join and expanded Children’s Endeavour Trust. There were five meetings as follows;

School	Parent Meeting dates & times	Parent/carer Attendees
Freeman Primary School	Wednesday, January 15 <sup>th</sup> 9.30am	12
Chilton Primary School	Wednesday, January 15 <sup>th</sup> 2.00pm	8
Bosmere Primary School	Wednesday, January 15 <sup>th</sup> 6.00pm	20
Abbot’s Hall Primary School	Thursday, January 16 <sup>th</sup> 9.30am	26
Combs Ford Primary School	Thursday, January 16 <sup>th</sup> 6.00pm	18

This document is a summary of the questions asked at the meetings and the answers given. Where helpful, questions have been collated and additional information has been provided in response to the questions raised. The letters in brackets after question indicate at which school parent meeting it was asked.

#### STRATEGY & GROWTH

##### 1. Why does the Government believe that academies are the right way forward? (CF)

That is a difficult question to answer and perhaps should be directed to Ministers and Members of Parliament.

However, it is understood that, at the heart of the policy, is the belief that school improvement is more effectively and sustainably achieved through school-to-school collaboration and partnership whereby school leader and teachers share and develop best practice based on evidence of success.

As at October 2019 35% of all primary and 77% of all secondary schools are academies or Free schools and it is expected the current Government will accelerate the academy programme.

##### 2. Why do governors want the school to become an academy? (AH)

One consequence of the academy policy is that funding for Local Authorities to support maintained schools has decreased significantly at a time when there has been a reported 8% reduction in school funding over the last 9 years. This has resulted in Local Authorities like Suffolk County Council being less able to support schools and having to focus resources on under-performing schools.

This has meant that schools like the five primary schools proposing to join Children’s Endeavour Trust are trying to sustain and improve school performance and pupil outcomes in a landscape of greater scrutiny and challenge by the Department for Education (DfE), Ofsted and Local Authorities with less external support and reduced funding. The model of partnership working between clusters of schools has been adversely affected by schools joining multi academy trusts, where they focus their collaboration.

Each of the Governing Bodies is fiercely protective of their schools and want to retain control of their school’s destiny. However, these five schools have a track record of working well together and the five Governing Bodies have, for nearly 3 years, been actively exploring how their schools could work more closely in partnership.

They have investigated different options including;

1. To **establish** their own multi academy trust.
2. To **join** a large multi academy trust.
3. To help **create** an expanded local multi academy trust.

Having given careful consideration to each of the options, the Governing Bodies felt that working to create an expanded multi academy trust such as Children's Endeavour Trust would secure the benefits of being part of a larger multi academy trust while protecting the individuality of each of their schools.

### **3. What are the risks or disadvantages of the proposal? (AH)**

For the schools proposing to convert to academy status and join CET, the first risk is associated with not proceeding with the plan. As described in answer 2, schools are dealing with an increasingly challenging educational landscape with limited resources to be able to sustain standards effectively. The second risk is that of joining the wrong multi academy trust. Governing Bodies have carried out a very thorough investigation to identify the most appropriate Trust in CET and a robust due diligence process to understand the implications and potential risks of Trust membership.

On balance, each Governing Body believes that the risks of the status quo are too high for not to join a multi academy trust and that the risk that CET is the wrong multi academy trust is very low.

### **4. If approved when will the schools convert and the expanded CET established? (B CF)**

Governing Bodies will consider the outcome of consultation and make a final decision at meetings on February 5<sup>th</sup>. The hope is that schools will convert to academy status on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020 but this is subject to completion of a range of legal, regulatory and operational tasks involving the DfE and Suffolk County Council.

### **5. What are the plans for future growth of Children's Endeavour Trust? Is a Trust of seven schools sustainable? What is the average size of a MAT? Will CET remain primary only? (B CF F)**

The CET trustees and the governors of the five schools proposing to join, recognise that expanding from two seven schools is a major task that will require hard work over at least a year to settle everything down. There are no immediate plans to expand further in the number of schools, beyond the Suffolk geographical area or into the secondary phase. A lot of work has been done on the trust business plan which shows that CET is very sustainable with seven schools.

However, the larger a MAT the greater the efficiencies and resources it can secure for its member schools. The guidance and advice on optimum size do vary but the schools understand that pupil numbers of 2,500 (which CET will almost be) is considered a critical mass. It is worth noting that MATs of 3,000+ pupils receive significant additional capital funding.

So, if another local school that shared the CET vision and ethos sought membership the trustees and leadership group of Headteachers would consider carefully the benefits of another school joining and whether it has the capacity and resources to support that school through conversion.

### **6. Can any school join CET and can we be made to take a school? (CF)**

Only schools that share the CET vision, ethos and values would be considered for membership and only then if there were clear benefits and CET had the capacity and resources to integrate the school. The trust can't be forced to accept a school but there may be circumstances when CET, as an approved sponsor, would agree to take on an under-performing school because it felt it could improve the school for the benefit of its pupils.

### **7. Why might the plan be turned down by DfE? (B)**

The leadership group of Headteachers has been working hard since May 2019 on the business case for an expanded CET of seven schools including detailed plans covering school improvement, teaching & learning, leadership, governance, finance and business management. Dialogue with the DfE prior to and since the submission of the applications has been encouraging.

However, the final decision rests with the Regional Schools Commissioner based on feedback from the Headteacher Board.

**8. How will the CEO and CFO be able to manage the massive growth from two to seven schools? (B)**

The CEO has been chairing the leadership group that has been working since May 2019 to plan the transition from two to seven schools. These detailed plans were part of the business case for DfE approval, which has received positive feedback thus far.

More recently a working group of school business managers, bursars and the Trust CFO has been established to plan the transition of the finance, business management, payroll and administrative functions. The schools have also retained the support of an experienced academy project manager throughout.

The CEO is being mentored by an experienced multi academy trust CEO and is in the midst of completing the National Professional Qualification for Executive Leadership (NPOEL), which is designed for Executive Headteachers and CEOs in leadership roles across more than one school. The CFO was specifically recruited because of their experience and track record in financial management of larger multi academy trusts.

**9. What is the process for a school to leave the trust? (AH)**

The approval of the Secretary of State for Education is required for a school to leave an multi academy trust. It can only join another MAT, again with the approval of the Secretary of State. It is a lengthy and complex process, which emphasises the importance of identifying the right trust to join.

**TEACHING, LEARNING & CURRICULUM**

**10. How will the curriculum change? Would all CET schools be required to teach the same curriculum? (C)**

Each Headteacher retains control over the curriculum in their school and there is no requirement for schools to teach to same curriculum. While schools no longer have to follow the *National Curriculum*, it is expected that all the schools will stay pretty closely aligned, particularly in numeracy and literacy. The National Curriculum is broad but schools will have the flexibility to vary the balance of the curriculum to meet their needs and interests of their pupils. For example, a school may teach a little less of the history curriculum to make time for music.

**11. How will the curriculum be managed to encourage arts and music? (AH)**

As explained in answer 10 schools will be able to adjust the curriculum to meet the needs of their pupils. One advantage of the trust is that teaching staff with expertise in music and arts will be able to share ideas and resources with other colleagues, which will enrich the arts in other schools. Similarly, brilliant visiting teachers could be commissioned across more than one school.

**SEN & OTHER PROVISION**

**12. How will SEN provision be affected? What guarantee do parents have that SEN provision will improve? (B F)**

Academies have the same statutory responsibilities for children with SEN or an EHCP. The funding follows the child and the Local Authority retains statutory responsibility for the quality of provision.

Being a school SENCO is usually combined with another leadership or teaching role so the opportunity for those SEN leaders to work with colleagues in other schools to share good practice, experience of different needs or even ways to get funding or support from other agencies will be invaluable. That group will be also be able to look at jointly commissioning of specialists such as speech & language therapists or educational psychologists, offering a critical mass of regular work. This will mean that the quality of provision in the trust will be enhanced. If parents are unhappy with the quality of SEN provision, they can still raise concerns with Suffolk County Council SEN teams

**13. What will happen with the Freeman pre-school? How will pre-school and wrap-around provision be affected? (F CF)**

Existing pre-school provision will be unaffected by the proposal and as each school retains control over its wrap-around provision there will also be no change.

#### **14. What are the CET values regarding the health and wellbeing of the children? (AH)**

All the schools share the view that children can only learn and thrive if they feel they are in a safe, happy, supportive and nurturing environment that is committed to developing the whole child: academically, intellectually, artistically, physically, socially and emotionally. Each school will achieve this in different ways but the opportunity to work in partnership will lead to the enrichment of each school and equip all staff to get the very best out of every child.

#### **FINANCE**

#### **15. How is the funding allocated? (CF)**

All academies and maintained schools in Suffolk are funded on exactly the same funding formula, so there will be no change in funding. However, school will be able to retain the element of that funding that is held back by the Local Authority.

An important principle agreed by all the schools is that they will retain all their funding, reserves and other income. So, schools will be allocated the funding in exactly the same way as now.

#### **16. Has the 'top-slice been agreed? How is the CEO salary funded? Who will scrutinise the central cost to stop them spiralling? (B AH)**

None of the Headteachers wants to see funding diverted from their school unnecessarily and so the leadership group has been involved in developing and recommending the Trust central budget. This budget is based on the costs of trust staff and services that is necessary to run the trust and the cost of the services the schools want the trust to commission on their behalf. This cost is then converted to a % of funding (excluding SEN and pupil premium) called the trust central charge. This trust central budget will be reviewed annually by the leadership group giving Headteachers high level of control. The CEO post (or its equivalent) is a required by the DfE and is funded by the Trust central charge

#### **17. Will schools have greater access to funding as academies? (AH)**

Academies are funded using the same formula as maintained schools so there is no additional funding. However, academies can bid to the DfE for capital funding and appear to have greater success in doing so than Local Authorities. The trust has also bid for additional funds worth £100k to support its expansion as a multi academy trust.

#### **18. Would each school get the £25k conversion grant? Will the conversion grant be shared equally between the schools? (CF)**

The five converting schools will each receive £25k conversion grant, totalling £125k. The schools agreed to pool those funds so they could commission support and services such as project management and legal services as a single entity, securing economies of scale. It expected that the cost of converting the schools will be close to £125k.

#### **19. How will CET buy better services than Suffolk County Council provides? (B)**

Suffolk County Council provides much of its services through third parties such as SchoolsChoice or Vertas, which schools commission individually. As a single commercial entity buying for seven schools, it is expected that the trust will be able to secure economies of scale on services such as HR, payroll, building maintenance and IT.

#### **20. What happens if the trust fails and goes bankrupt? (AH)**

The trust is subject to a much greater level of external scrutiny of its financial governance and management than as a Local Authority schools. This is designed to reduce the likelihood of any multi academy trust getting into financial difficulty. However, in the extremely unlikely event the trust became insolvent the schools would be transferred to another multi academy trust.

#### **OFSTED & SCHOOL PERFORMANCE**

#### **21. Will schools still have individual inspections? (AH CF)**

Yes.

## **22. What is the impact of one school under-performing on other schools? (AH)**

Each school is a unique, single entity for the purposes of Ofsted inspections, the reporting of pupil attainment and progress and other inspections and assessments. One school under-performing in any area would not affect another school in the trust. However, were several schools in a trust under-performing the DfE would almost certainly seek to review the trust's effectiveness.

## **23. Will being part of CET help Freeman improve its Ofsted judgement (from RI)? (F)**

Yes. Ofsted reports identify what a school's required areas of improvement but not the ideas, plans and resources to do so. Freeman will be able to draw upon the combined expertise, resources and support of Headteachers and teachers from the other six schools.

## **SCHOOL MANAGEMENT & ADMISSIONS**

### **24. How will transition into secondary be affected? (F)**

The proposal will have no effect on relationship the schools have with their secondaries or the arrangements for transition.

### **25. How will admissions be affected? (C B AH)**

Admissions will be largely unaffected. Schools will retain their admissions policies and parents will still apply for place through the Local Authority admissions arrangements. The only change is the trust will be the admissions authority rather Suffolk County Council (SCC). In simple terms this means SCC will be offering places on behalf of the schools, having used their admissions policy to allocate places fairly.

### **26. Could school term dates and hours change? (F C CF AH B)**

Schools will retain control over their term dates and school days. As now it is expected that schools will align their term dates to the local arrangements, which are often led by the secondary school. However, the trust will seek to ensure there are joint Inset days to enable staff from all schools to come together for professional development and training.

## **GOVERNANCE & LEADERSHIP**

### **27. Will the Board of Trustees grow in number to govern a larger MAT? (B)**

CET was deliberately established with a small Board of Trustees to enable recruitment of further trustees as the trust grew in size. Governors of the five joining schools have been invited to nominate themselves as trustees and several have expressed interest.

Trustees are responsible for

- Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction;
- Holding executive leaders to account for the educational and wider performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the effective and efficient performance management of staff; and
- Overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent.

Trustees are chosen for their individual and combined skills and expertise across education, school standards, pupil support and safeguarding, finance, HR, strategy, compliance and asset management. A list of current trustees can be found on the CET website at <https://www.childrensendeavourtrust.org.uk>.

## **PARENTS**

### **28. Can Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) work together? (F)**

Yes, absolutely. It would be great to see the PTAs working together and sharing ideas and resources for fundraising. Each PTA would be separate from the trust and will retain control over the funds they raise.

### **29. How will CET work in partnership with parents? (AH)**

A school's Headteacher, teachers and staff will continue to be the main port of call with and point of contact for parents. It is not anticipated that CET will be dealing with parents direct although parents thought it was helpful it could look at CET updates and information.

## **STAFF MANAGEMENT**

### **30. How do staff feel about the proposal? (B)**

Staff are being consulted at the same time as parents, so their views are not yet known. However, staff have been updated about the proposal and given the chance to ask questions. Their informal feedback has been broadly supportive.

### **31. How does the Springfield Teaching School Alliance fit in? (CF)**

The TSA provides CPD for teachers from a range of schools and is separate from the trust. It will continue to do so. Springfield has also successfully bid to be an *Initial Teacher Training* provider, which means the trust will be able to recruit and train its own teachers.

### **32. What has been the impact on staff turnover at the founding schools since they converted? (AH)**

Neither Broke Hall or Springfield have seen a change in staff turnover since they converted in January 2019.

### **33. Will you be able to sack experienced teachers and bring in inexperienced teachers? Who will oversee trainee teachers? (AH B)**

No. Experienced teachers are a vital resource in developing less experienced teachers. The schools will continue to recruit and deploy trainee and New Qualified Teachers (NQTs) as now. Each Headteacher will make sure that the school have the capacity and expertise to support trainee and new teachers.

## **CONSULTATION**

### **34. How is the consultation with children going to be managed? (F)**

That will be a decision for each Headteacher. Most pupils tend to ask if the uniform is going to change or if their teacher is going to change. Given neither is going to happen as a result of this proposal

### **35. Is this a done deal? (C)**

No final decision has been made and the consultation is genuine. The Governors of the five schools are proposing the schools convert to academy status and join the Children's Endeavour Trust because they believe it is the best interests of the schools, pupils and staff. The purpose of consultation is to establish if there is any significant objection that would make Governors reconsider the proposal. Parents, carers and staff are encouraged to complete the survey so that Governors have the fullest picture of what stakeholders think.

### **36. What would happen if the majority of parents in a school objected to the proposal? (B)**

If a majority of a school's parents objected, as measured by the survey, the consultation report would advise governors that of this fact and provide information on the reasons given. It would then be for governors to consider the reasons for the objections and whether they outweighed the reasons for and benefits of proceeding with the proposal.