

Minutes of consultation meeting with parents regarding Langton's proposed conversion to academy status

INTRODUCTION

The Headteacher welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that this is an important part of the consultation period for all stakeholders to plan for the future of Langton Primary School. Phil Loftus, Headteacher from Norton College, and Stuart Simpson, Chair of Governors at Langton, were introduced. Mrs Ray explained that this evening's meeting provides an opportunity for parents to ask questions, which will be answered during the meeting if possible. Mrs Ray said that she would take minutes of the meeting which would be shared with all parents on the school website under Key Information/Academy Conversion.

CONTRIBUTION FROM CHAIR OF GOVERNORS

Stuart Simpson, Chair of Governors, explained that the consultation period provides an opportunity for all stakeholders to understand the process the school is going through and to contribute to the process.

Background

As a result of repeated changes of leadership for the school during the last few years, the governors had investigated a variety of options for the continuing leadership of the school. Three options which were considered were: to recruit a new headteacher, share an existing headteacher from a good or outstanding school, or to join a larger organisation. At all times, the governors' focus was to provide an outstanding education for the children at Langton. It was felt that the values and ethos of the Evolution Schools Learning Trust (Norton College) were very much in line with those of Langton Primary School and it was agreed by the governing body, following extensive discussions, to put in an application to the Regional Schools Commissioner to join the Trust. On 21st April 2016 an Academy Order was granted, which opened the way for Langton to move towards conversion.

Benefits of conversion

- Easier recruitment and retention of quality leaders and staff and wider opportunities for succession planning
- More opportunities for staff to work across settings, especially specialist teachers
- Enhanced opportunities for staff training and professional development, including the sharing of best practice as part of a larger organisation
- Consistent leadership would lead to improvements in teaching, and improvements in progress and attainment overall
- Access to a wider range of subjects
- Improved transition opportunities for pupils moving into Year 7

- Economies of scale - opportunity to buy the best and get exactly what is wanted
- Access to a shared business manager and other support staff

PARENTS' QUESTIONS

| Questions | Answers |
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| Are there any other primary schools wanting to join the ESLT? | Whilst no other schools are in direct talks at the moment, the changing educational landscape will no doubt lead to other schools looking to join the trust in the future. At the meeting last week with headteachers and chairs of governors, the local authority Assistant Director of Education stated that schools will not be able to continue in isolation. Local collaboration is key. The benefits in the short term are that all resources go to Langton. Early adopting schools to join the ESLT have an opportunity to sit on the board, giving them a voice in the trust and protecting the autonomy of the school. |
| Who is ESLT? | The Evolution Schools Learning Trust (ESLT) is the trust which sits above Norton College. |
| How would the governing body of the ESLT Trust and Langton's governing body interact? | The Scheme of Delegation states that the school is run on a day to day basis by the Langton Headteacher, with strategic direction from its governing body. The board of trustees would have an overview of the school, similar to the way in which the local authority currently operates. |
| Who controls the budget? | The entire school budget goes into the trust. Langton would receive their budget back for them to monitor it just as at present. There is a debate to be had about the benefits of accessing shared services, which could potentially mean that a small percentage of the budget would be retained by the Trust for central resources. |
| Is this money ring fenced? | The only thing which would change for Langton would be the percentage of its budget going into the central resource. This would be no more than 5%. |
| What are the downsides? | All schools are facing a period of uncertainty about the future, whether to become part of an academy or to continue independently in the short term. The governing body at Langton feel strongly |

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| | <p>that a small school such as Langton will be stronger as part of a larger organisation, whilst keeping its own small school identity. Every effort is being made to ensure that transition arrangements are clear and defined, but ultimately it is impossible to see the future.</p> |
| <p>What is the procedure for school closure in a failing school which is part of an academy?</p> | <p>This can be answered in terms of achievement or viability. Achievement: If, for instance, Norton went into special measures, this would become the Trust's responsibility. The Regional Schools Commission would ensure that a robust plan was put in place to bring about rapid change. Viability: The risk is the viability of Langton in terms of numbers on the roll. Plans are already in place to increase pupil numbers at Langton, and this will continue to be a priority, eg the potential to use private transport to bring in pupils from outside the area.</p> |
| <p>How would conflicts be resolved if Evolution grows larger?</p> | <p>Phil Loftus explained that the plan is for ESLT to reach a maximum of 11 schools (3 secondary schools and 8 primary schools). The board of trustees are working towards this as a social enterprise. It is not a profit industry and is motivated by altruism. The direction of travel is to a school-led system across the country and the model of ESLT reflects this.</p> |
| <p>If it is the same pot of money and the budget is divided up, how is this different from a local authority?</p> | <p>There is the professional challenge of working across linked schools. Economies of scale are not just economic – resources and support are just as valid and will become increasingly important as budgets get tighter. Resources are bigger than the sum of their parts. When 4 or 5 schools are working together, capacity will be increased as the organisation grows. There is a difference in being in a formal collaboration: there is a greater commitment and this can then be held to account. There is additional strength in being a secondary/primary partnership.</p> |

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| What about ownership of assets? | Currently the local authority owns the buildings. This ownership will be transferred to the Trust. |
| What safeguards are in place? | <u>The Secretary of State holds the responsibility for deciding if land or building are to be sold. If this does go ahead any sale proceeds must be used to improve education facilities which need to be sustainable for at least 10 years.</u> |
| What happens to staff contracts? | The contracts of all Langton staff will be transferred to the Trust under the TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings - Protection in Employment) process, which is clear and regulated. Staff rights and conditions would remain unchanged. Policies that Langton and Norton College adopt are generally in line with NYCC policies (eg Pay Policy) and this would not change if Langton became part of the Trust. The school would benefit from enhanced recruitment and retention capacity as part of the Trust. |
| Is it a “done deal”? | The Academy Order has been granted which means that Langton can now academise. The consultation process ensures that the process is transparent and, as it stands at the moment, the direction of travel could be stopped. However, the current educational landscape is clearly moving towards MATs (Multi Academy Trusts) or other systems which facilitate formal collaboration. |
| Is there a potential for a break in contract after signing? | No. The only potential would be to join another academy brokered by the DfE. |
| What is the future for small schools like Langton who do not want to become part of a MAT or federation? | They will make themselves vulnerable. If the headteacher leaves, they will struggle to recruit. The direction of travel from the government is that academisation will happen. |
| What will the future hold as the Trust gets bigger? | Currently, Langton is receiving the “spare” capacity from Norton College. This is additional support, which will not necessarily be available to the same degree as the Trust grows. However, the organisation will be able to establish what resources and support are most useful and |

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| | share these accordingly amongst member schools. |
| Will the day to day running of the school be any different? | No. The Trust board will only be interested in progress and attainment, attendance and staff absence. |
| Would Norton College mind if children do not go on to secondary school there? | Categorically, no. |
| What are the feeling regarding moving away from the local authority? | This is motivated by improving the offer for local children. A smaller organisation can be more effective, reacting more rapidly if necessary. Phil Loftus predicted that the local authority will ultimately become diminished. |
| What are examples of existing benefits for Langton? | Langton has benefitted from Maths leadership from Norton and support from subject specialists. Langton has provided some SEN capacity for Norton. |