



ACADEMY CONSULTATION BRIEFING DOCUMENT

APRIL 2011

1. Background to the Proposals

As an Outstanding school, we were one of the first schools to be offered the chance to apply for conversion to Academy status under the new Academies legislation. Since June 2010, we have been considering whether this would benefit our school and its students. We registered an interest and have sought information from numerous sources, including the DfE, the Specialist Schools Trust and the Association of School and College Leaders.

As a result of this, we went out to informal consultation on 31st January, 2011; we consulted with staff, parents, students, our feeder primary schools and the trade unions. The consultation included a parents' meeting, 2 staff meetings and Year Council meetings with students. Letters were sent out to all parents; further information, including Frequently Asked Questions was posted on our website. All the relevant trade unions were contacted and have expressed their views. The Headteacher has met with the Heads of current feeder primary schools (as listed in the 2011 LA Admissions Criteria) and with the Director of Education.

In addition, we made available email communication for staff, students and parents to register their questions, comments and concerns. All comments and questions were shared with Governors.

As a result of this consultation and further investigations, Governors have decided to make a formal application for the school to apply to become an Academy from September 2011.

2. What is Academy Status?

In the case of Fred Longworth High School, Academy status means that we would become a state school funded directly by the Department for Education rather than through Wigan LA.

Academy status gives the school increased independence and the freedom to make decisions based on what is best for the students. The main features of Academy status are as follows:

- An Academy Trust, formed from our existing Governing Body, employs the staff directly;
- Funding would be received directly from the Department for Education; we would have control over all of it and how it is spent. We would also have more planning ability, as budgets for the next academic year are known by academies at least 6 months in advance;
- The school would become its own Admissions Authority and would be able to set its own Pupil Admission Number and Admissions Criteria, in full consultation with the relevant bodies and with regard to the law;
- We would have freedoms from the National Curriculum, though clearly the school would still remain accountable for results and its place in the "league tables";
- We would have flexibility over the pay and conditions of our staff, though TUPE regulations mean that existing staff would have their pay and conditions protected. The school does not intend to use this

flexibility – new staff will be employed on the same pay and conditions as existing staff.

3. Reasons for the Proposal

The school wishes to have the independence necessary to be able to make the right decisions in the best interests of the school, its students and its staff. The change of status is not designed to change the school; in fact it is intended to protect it from externally imposed change and a degree of restriction.

3.1 Admissions

Fred Longworth High School was originally formed following the closure of Tyldesley Boys' and Girls' Schools. It was, therefore, built primarily to serve the community of Tyldesley, but is big enough to accommodate Atherton children who live within a sensible distance of the school (we currently have around 26% of our students from M46 postcodes).

With the closure of Hesketh Fletcher, however, there have been suggestions that we can somehow partially replace the Atherton school. This would mean either that we are forced to grow in size, without significant capital money to accommodate the extra numbers comfortably or that our admissions criteria will change. The proposal for 2012 already disadvantages children in Mosley Common for whom we are the nearest school and, as we move back into larger year groups by 2014, children in other parts of our traditional catchment area will struggle to gain a place. We feel that to change our admissions in this way would divorce the school from its community and spoil the palpable sense of belonging that comes from having such a close connection.

We would like also to protect our prospective parents from anxiety over constantly changing oversubscription criteria. Since the announcement of the decision to close Hesketh Fletcher, there have been 3 different sets of oversubscription criteria; this is confusing for parents and is not conducive to good relations between the school and its feeder primary schools.

We want to establish an Admissions Criteria for the school that accommodates all our "traditional" catchment, including children from the relevant M46 postcodes. Once this is established, in consultation with the Admissions Adjudicator, we would be able to stabilise it so that parents know where they stand. In addition, at least one of our current feeder primary schools would have its immediate and very real worries on admissions allayed.

3.2 Finance

We recognise that any extra funding we receive as a new Academy is likely only to be for one year, but feel that having the ability to control ALL our funds is an important advantage of becoming an Academy. We are looking to establish a positive working relationship with the Local Authority and would seek to buy most, if not all, services back from them. However, having access to the "slice" normally held back by the LA would mean that we as a school have more control over how our money is spent.

Another key advantage of the way in which an Academy receives its funding is that the Academy is informed of the budget for the following academic year at least 6 months in advance, giving the SLT the ability to plan strategically and make the most of the money available so that students benefit.

3.3 Curriculum

It is unclear what the future holds in terms of curriculum and we feel that we currently have an outstanding curriculum. We would seek to use any freedom that we have to tailor our curriculum for small groups and individuals so that the needs of all are met – we would not be forced down the “one size fits all” path. The school would, however, remain mindful of key national targets, league tables and Ofsted requirements.

3.4 Summary

In short, the key to this proposal is that we want to protect our currently outstanding school from outwardly imposed change. We believe that our staff and Governors know what is best for the school, informed by the needs of our students, their parents and the wider community of the school. This local understanding means that the school will be able to be as receptive as possible of local needs as well as national requirements.

4. What would stay the same?

The following would remain the same:

- The school’s name, aims, vision and ethos;
- The school uniform and the badge – the Tyldesley town badge;
- Our policies on staffing, pay and conditions; we do not intend to use the freedoms to deviate from nationally agreed pay and conditions and current staff are in any case protected by TUPE legislation;
- The length of school terms and the school day. We do not believe that it is conducive to outstanding learning to extend either;
- The high standard of the teaching and learning at the school;
- The quality of our curriculum;
- The current Governing Body, together with principles for the constitution of the Governing Body; parent and staff governors will continue to be elected and will make up the same proportion of the Governing Body as is currently the case;
- Our commitment to working in partnership with other schools. Our commitment to the Kingsbridge Educational Improvement Partnership would remain, as would our commitment to the new school improvement clusters currently being developed by the LA;
- Our commitment to a fully comprehensive education – as an Academy, we would not be allowed to select on ability but would not, in any case, wish to do so;
- Initially, we would adopt the Admissions Criteria currently in existence, but if necessary would look to reinstating Mosley Common to our catchment area in consultation with the relevant bodies;
- Our Pupil Admission Number. We have no intention of expanding our numbers as we feel that the school is an optimum size at present. We are not looking to encroach on the catchment areas of other schools;

- Our commitment to working in support of other schools where needed; as a Leading Edge school, we have a tradition of providing support for other schools; as an Academy, this would be expected of us as part of the Funding Agreement;
- Our commitment to transparent and open decision making at all levels.

5. What would change?

- In many ways, hardly anything at all. In fact, we would hope that students noticed little or no difference when the conversion first takes place. We recognise that the financial gains are likely to be modest, but feel that these can be used to maintain and develop our existing outstanding learning resources;
- We are looking to strengthen our links with our traditional feeder primary schools through working as a cluster with them. As we would be able to stabilise our Admissions Criteria, there is much to be gained through collaborative work that can only encourage smooth transition from primary to secondary;
- The way in which we would be funded would mean that we would be able to plan ahead more effectively – our internal structures would adapt to accommodate this opportunity;
- Our relationship with the LA. We want to continue to work closely with the LA and intend, at least initially, to buy services back from them. However, we hope that the relationship will develop as we are seen as “customers”.

6. Safeguards

As part of our conversion process, we would ensure that we have appropriate levels of indemnity insurance and other insurance to protect the school, its buildings and its land. We will observe the principles of “Best Value” in all financial relationships formed as the result of becoming an Academy. At the moment, we believe that Best Value would best be served by buying back services from Wigan LA. However, we will continue to monitor the service received and would look initially to other local authorities locally if we felt there was a need to do so.

7. Working with other schools

As noted above, we are looking to continue with existing partnerships and would like also to work more closely with our feeder primary schools. We are currently exploring the formation of a cluster with a number of our feeder schools so that we can, for instance, share resources more effectively.

8. Next Steps

We intend to make an application to the DfE for conversion. However, we are not committed to conversion until we are sure that the move will be of financial benefit or at the very least will not financially disadvantage the school. We will not know this until we see the Funding Agreement, but current information suggests that the financial situation will be favourable. In the meantime, we intend to conduct a further formal consultation, details of which are provided below.

9. List of Consultees

- Current staff, students and parents at the school;
- Headteachers and Chairs of Governors of our feeder and other local primary schools;
- Parents of children at our feeder primary schools;
- Headteachers and Chairs of Governors of other Wigan schools;
- Local FE Colleges and HE providers;
- Local MPs and councillors;
- The Local Authority;
- The relevant trade unions, to include ATL, NAS, NUT, Unison and GMB;
- Other community organisations as deemed appropriate;
- The local press.

Your views can be expressed by writing to Mrs T Ball, Clerk to Governors at the school. Alternatively, you can respond by email to consultation@flhs.wigan.sch.uk. Governors will consider all responses to the consultation on 16th June, 2011.

Janet Garretts
Headteacher

Brian Wilson
Chair of Governors