

## **Parent Consultation Report in respect of Raleigh Federation primary schools: Drakes, East Budleigh and Otterton joining the Link Academy Trust**

A six week period of consultation was set up for Parents starting on 3<sup>rd</sup> June and finishing on July 15<sup>th</sup>. A letter was sent to parents from the Chair of Governors, Christine Channon updating parents on the Leadership position and opening the period of parent consultation. The letter read as follows:

As a Governing body we are delighted to confirm that from September 2019 Mr Halford will remain as our Acting Executive Headteacher.

Following the retirement of Mrs Saunders the Governing Board began the lengthy process of securing the leadership of the two schools within the Raleigh Federation. During this time we explored many options including recruiting a new Executive Headteacher and widening the Federation. Through the Diocesan Education Board we also sent out Expression of Interest forms to all suitable schools in the local area, the purpose being to secure an interim leader to cover the period from January to September 2019. From the replies received the Governors decided to pursue a Management Partnership with The Link Academy Trust and in doing so Mr Halford came to us from Yeoford Primary.

Working in the Management Partnership has been a hugely positive experience, we have been impressed by both Mr Halford and the support that the Federation has received from The Link Academy Trust both at a pupil level with the introduction of Times Table Rockstars and the two new Toddler Groups alongside administrative guidance to improve the systems and protocols we use to improve standards.

As a result the Governors have decided to enter into a period of consultation to formally join The Link Academy Trust in October 2019 and retain Peter Halford as our Executive Head.

**The six week consultation period will open on Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> June and close on Monday 15<sup>th</sup> July 2019.**

As part of this consultation period there will be two parents meeting. Parents from both Drakes and Otterton can attend whichever meeting suits them best, the dates are:

Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> June 3:30 – 4:30pm at Drakes Primary School

Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> June 5:00 – 6:00pm at Otterton primary school.

The purpose of these meetings is for you to have the opportunity to learn more about the Link Academy Trust and ask any questions that you may have. The following email address will also be open for questions:

Please only use this email address, it will be fully monitored and replies will be given within 48 hours (except at weekends)

If for any reason it is not possible to email please leave questions in sealed envelopes in the care of the office marked Academy Parent Consultation

At the end of the six week period the Governing body will make the decision as whether to proceed with the process.

The Link Academy Trust is currently made up of nine small primary schools (the majority being under 100 pupils on roll):

- 5 Community Schools (Cheriton Bishop, Hennock, Stoke Gabriel, Tedburn St Mary and Yeoford)
- 2 Voluntary Aided Schools (Harbertonford and Landscope)
- 1 Voluntary Controlled School (Diptford)
- 1 Voluntary Trust School (Bearnese)

The Link shares our vision for strong, sustainable schools that are known and respected in their local communities- please see the websites for more information

You will have the opportunity to hear about the Link Academy Trust and ask any questions at the meetings or through the email.

Should the planned conversion go ahead it is important to point out that a Local Governing Board will be retained with Parent Governormembers along with Staff and Foundation Governors.

More information can be found using the following: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/convert-to-an-academy-information-for-schools>

### **Report: Raleigh Federation Parent Meetings 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> June 2019**

The context of the meeting was explained with the following points made:-

Resignation of Executive Head Carron Saunders at the beginning of the academic year meant that decisions needed to be made about the way forward for the Federation.

Several options were considered in conjunction with discussions with the Diocese and the Local Authority.

- Seek to employ a new EH and continue the Federation as 2 freestanding schools – this was deemed difficult as current pressure on budgets would not allow for an attractive offer to be made to a good and experienced head.
- A Management Partnership was considered with other local schools but no offers were forthcoming.
- Further federation was also considered but no expressions of interest were received.
- Through the Diocese expressions of interest were sought for a temporary headship for developmental purposes from an existing Academy/MATs/Federation.

Whilst initially the Governors stated that they did not want to become part of a MAT after learning about the philosophy of the Link Academy Trust, an agreement to extend the contract of employment for PH was signed for 4 terms with a review scheduled after 2.

The ethos of the Link was explained as that which has at its heart supporting small schools, enabling schools to retain their unique features, their dedication to Christian distinctiveness and place in their local community and how they could support the staff of the Raleigh Federation.

The Governors were quickly very impressed with PH and the way he assessed the situation within the schools and prioritised the work necessary to bring the best outcomes for the children.

As part of the ongoing process of review the Governors also talked to the teaching staff within the Federation who in the main were very positive about the changes and support offered.

An additional benefit has been the support that has also been offered free of charge by the experts within the Link Academy Trust giving a taste of what would be available to the Federation should a formal agreement be reached between the MAT and the Raleigh Federation.

For these reasons the Governors have taken the decision to work towards joining the Link Academy Trust during the next academic year. To date nothing has been confirmed as there are many applications/legal contracts to be completed and the agreement of the Diocese has to be confirmed.

It is therefore at this point that we feel that this news should be shared with parents and other stakeholders giving the opportunity for questions to be asked, answers given and hopefully to respond to concerns.

Presentation by Nicky Dunford, CEO of the Link Academy Trust:

- The Link currently consists of 9 small schools (biggest school 105 pupils)
- Many of the schools have joined in similar circumstances to the RF i.e. when low pupil numbers threatens the sustainability of the schools and impacts on the outcomes for children.

- By providing excellent operational functions within a bespoke Central Business department the Academy Heads and teaching staff can concentrate on quality first teaching and learning.
- Development and Training of teachers is paramount in ensuring best outcomes for children and a CPD Model ensures all staff are trained every year.
- A specific unit (Improvement and Inclusion Hub) has been developed to support children with SEN including training for teachers and TAs, experiences for children and bringing in external expertise, this is available to all children with SEN within the Link Academy Trust.
- As well as prioritising excellent teaching and outcomes for children the Link believes in extracurricular activities for an holistic approach to learning. This includes wrap around care and Early Year Foundation Units or Pre Schools within schools.
- The Link Academy Trust is a charitable trust which enables them to top up the money received from the DfE by making grant applications to fund providers which in turn allows each school to receive more funding per pupil.
- Purchasing of supplies in volume allows for further budgetary savings which in turn are reinvested into the teaching and learning for the children.

### **Questions (Q)**

#### **(Q) What will be the impact on teacher & support staff numbers?**

(A) Support from the Link Academy Trust provides support for staff in terms of CPD & expertise. It is not planned to reduce staff numbers.

#### **(Q) Is there an opportunity for wrap around care?**

(A) Definite plan to introduce this when numbers indicate that it would be sustainable also hope to introduce an EY unit to provide succession planning and provide support for families.

#### **(Q) How is the funding for EPs managed?**

(A) Funds for children with EP, PP & PPplus, still come to school in the same way. With the support of the IHH unit, additional expertise is available to help teachers and families to provide opportunities for children and improve outcomes.

#### **(Q) Will current funding for school remain the same?**

(A) Funding formula remains unchanged but in the Link Academy Trust this is enhanced by the ability to make funding applications for specific projects, to use volume to attract better purchase pricing, using local expertise to provide in-house training and support rather than costly external providers. A reserve policy states that certain monies must be kept to ensure the ongoing sustainability of the Trust and also to cover any unforeseen expenses. Over the last few years the Link Academy Trust has ensured that this money is available – all other money is reinvested in schools and improving outcomes for children.

#### **(Q) What differences will we see at school level**

(A) The Link Academy Trust ethos is to ensure that each school maintains its individuality and place in the heart of its community. Very little change will be seen at school level but operational processes & systems will be addressed to ensure compliance and best value.

#### **(Q) How will children benefit and results improve?**

(A) The outcomes for children is paramount in everything we do. Improvements include:-

- Sharing of expertise
- Improving equipment and environments.
- CPD for teachers to ensure up to date methods and best quality
- Enhanced provision through holistic experiences such as Forrest Schools, EY, SEN unit.
- Developing a culture with a love of learning

- Proactive school councils
- Local Governing Board and Ethos Group ensures the day to day running of the school maintains the Christian Distinctiveness and existing ethos.

**(Q) Does the Raleigh Federation of Otterton & Drakes continue?**

(A) Within a MAT there are no federations but schools can join together informally, in this way are referred to as a Hub and as such continue much as before, sharing and working together for the benefit of the children.

**(Q) How does the autonomy of the HT change?**

(A) It doesn't – however as many of the operational burdens are lifted from the Academy Head a much greater focus can be given to improving teaching and learning and the needs of the children within each school.

**(Q) How is underperformance of teachers/staff managed**

(A) Outcomes for children are of paramount importance and this includes the expectation of excellent teaching. Support through expertise at the Link Academy Trust will be offered and opportunities for CPD available. Standards will be closely scrutinised to ensure expectations are met.

**(Q) Are teachers happy?**

(A) Conversations with staff indicate that they are happy as they feel they will be better supported and receive opportunities for CPD and training.

**(Q) In regard to reserve policy – where does this money come from?**

(A) The funding formula remains unchanged within a MAT but in the Link Academy Trust as it is a Charitable Trust this is enhanced by the ability to make funding applications for specific projects, to use volume to attract better purchase pricing, use local expertise to provide in-house training and support rather than costly external providers a prudent attitude to expenditure ensures money is spent where it is needed and best value is obtained at all times. A reserve policy states that certain monies must be kept to ensure ongoing sustainability of the MAT and also to cover any unforeseen expenses and over the last few years the Link Academy Trust has ensured that this money is available. Stringent auditing processes, transparent accounting and external inspections ensure money is wisely spent and invested.

**(Q) Does ownership of schools change (Can they be shut down)?**

(A) Both schools continue to be owned by the Diocese with a formal agreement with the Link Academy Trust that they are used for the purpose of education within the community and that Christian Distinctiveness is maintained within schools and learning.

**(Q) What happens to the staff?**

(A) Staff will be TUPE'd over to the Link Academy Trust maintaining all existing contractual and pensions arrangements. Staff usually remain in their present location unless they choose to seek promotion or developmental transfer.

**(Q) How will Governance of Schools change.**

(A) The Link Academy Trust is run by a Board of Trustees which oversee the work of the MAT. At local schools level the Governing Body becomes a Local Board with Governors being appointed by the Link with the Diocese. Each Local Board has 5 board members, each bringing different skills, and 2 parent Governors which are elected by the parents. This means that there will be opportunities for new personnel within the board and a parent governor election will enable all parents to stand for election if they so wish. To ensure the Christian Distinctiveness of the school is maintained the Local Board is augmented by an Ethos group which we anticipate will be led by the local Vicar the Reverend Martin Jacques.

**(Q) Is there an aim to increase pupil number within the schools?**

(A) It is hoped that by improved provision, the creation of an EY unit and better wrap around care numbers will increase but only to the PAN (planned admission number) in each class. This enhances the sustainability of the school.

**(Q) When will an EY unit be open?**

(A) Aiming for September but need to ensure there are sufficient numbers to make it sustainable, premises need to be considered as well as the qualifications of the staff.

**(Q) It feels like the decision to join the Link Academy Trust has been made - why were the parents not told in advance, It feels like there should be more openness and transparency in communication.**

(A) The function of a Governing Board is to ensure the ongoing sustainability, safety and wellbeing of pupils and staff. The Governing Board of the Raleigh Federation, which includes a number of parents has been working very hard to ensure that this decision is the best way forward for the schools. Communicating the options before a comprehensive audit had been completed may have caused unnecessary anxiety and some aspects of the process needed to remain confidential to ensure the wellbeing of staff. Even now the process is still ongoing and has not yet been confirmed by SOGG. Having been involved with the school for some years the governing board is aware of the many factors which have contributed to this decision. It is therefore after much thought that they consider this option will ensure the ongoing sustainability of the schools and the best outcomes for children. This evening gives the opportunity for you to ask questions about the decision.

**(Q) Has independent advice been taken?**

(A) This is the next part of the process and a presentation to the Diocese and SOGG will be made next week. It is only then that the decision can be confirmed.

**(Q) Is the LINK business plan on their website?**

(A) Yes together with audited accounts.

**(Q) Is there a plan to extend the Link Academy Trust?**

(A) Not a proactive plan but if the Link Academy Trust are approached by schools such as ours their application to join will be considered as long as it does not detrimentally affect the schools already within the trust.

No schools joining the Link have closed and most have grown substantially.

**(Q) Do schools retain their individuality?**

(A) Each school within the LINK is individual and retains a special place in it's community – there is no intention to change this. The hope is to tidy up the schools through investment and to support the provision but not make wholesale changes.

**(Q) Do all teachers of the schools in the Trust come together at any time ?**

(A) Once a year for planning, sharing best practice, supporting areas of concern - a very positive event. Cohort leaders also meet throughout the year to share best practice and look at updating skills etc.

**(Q) Concern that joining the Link Academy Trust adds a layer of bureaucracy and focus on children as individuals may be lost.**

(A) The creation of an operational department within the business actually lifts much bureaucracy away from the schools enabling them to concentrate on teaching and learning and the individual needs of the children. Parental concerns about their own children should be brought to PH.

Some of the procedures we have to work with are as a result of DfE legislation such as absentee monitoring, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/739764/Guidance\\_on\\_school\\_attendance\\_Sept\\_2018.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/739764/Guidance_on_school_attendance_Sept_2018.pdf) attainment monitoring and therefore, with these elements, we have no choice but many management decisions are made at a local level for the benefit of the local children.

**(Q) Need for future communication to be child centred, timely, open and transparent.**

**(A)** We have taken this on board and will do our best to do this.

**Emails:**

We received two emails to the parent consultation email;

One was from the Chair of a Local Parish Council wishing to retain links and continue to work with the schools.

The second was a parent expressing concerns about Teaching Assistant support reduction.

Both were answered satisfactorily by the CEO in collaboration with the Vice Chair of Governors. There was no further correspondence.

**Consultation closed on Monday 15<sup>th</sup> July**