

AYLSHAM CLUSTER TRUST – AYLSHAM HIGH SCHOOL

Changing to Foundation School Status and Acquiring a Charitable Trust

Formal Public Consultation Summary

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1. Preamble

To set this in a national context, the first group of schools became Trusts in September 2007. Aylsham High School (AHS) is currently one of 867 schools with 1500+ potential partners working with SSAT on the Trust Schools programme.

As of end of July 2010, there are 322 open Trust schools (list of open trust schools/partners available at http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/schoolorg/dsp_tsp-proposals.cfm).

The Eastern Region has 198 'live and acquiring' trust schools in 57 separate projects (97 Secondary, 88 Primary and 13 Special schools). In Norfolk, there are 2 live single school trusts and 8 schools exploring trust status in 3 separate projects. Norfolk already has 13 Foundation and 2 VA High Schools with 4 Foundation and 70+ VA & VC Primary Schools.

The Aylsham Cluster of schools has been developing a very strong collaboration, with all schools benefitting from an increasing number of networks and projects. The collaboration has been cited by the Local Authority, by the Training Development Agency, the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust and the National College for School Leadership as a model of excellent practice. There is potential to grow this collaboration even further, working with external partners for the benefit of all children and families in the cluster area. The Trust model was identified as a way of providing a mechanism for formalising the partnership between the schools in a way that would not compromise their individuality or autonomy.

This paper has been produced to give detailed information of our consultation process, to summarise the results and to draw conclusions.

2. Summary

Our formal consultation process began on 14th June 2010 and was completed on 16th July 2010 (5 working weeks during term time). During this period, a series of events were planned including 2 meetings and 2 open forum meetings. Prior to the formal consultation, an introductory presentation and a Question and Answer session had been held with the school staff on 19th April 2010.

1010 Public Consultation packs were widely distributed.

The School Council were asked to consider the proposals.

A detailed analysis of the response forms is attached.

46 questionnaire forms were returned (4.6%).

3 letters were received.

0 parents arranged a meeting with the nominated Parent Governor

0 staff had meetings with one of the nominated Staff Governors.

3. Calendar of Events

14.06.10 Public Consultation packs distributed / details 'live' on the website

- 19.07.10 School Council meeting
- 06.07.10 Open Staff meeting
- 06.07.10 Open Parents & Stakeholders meeting

4. Summary of Consultation Returns

Distribution List

- a) Young people currently on roll at the school;
- b) Parents/carers of pupils currently on roll at the school;
- c) Staff currently employed at the school, both teaching and non teaching;
- d) The governing body, teachers and other staff of any other school that may be affected by the proposals;
- e) Families of pupils at any other school that may be affected by the proposals;
- f) Any trade unions who represent staff at the school and representatives of any trade union of any other staff at schools that may be affected by the proposals;
- g) the Norwich Diocesan Board of Education for the Church of England;
- h) The Young People’s Learning Agency;
- i) Local Members of Parliament whose constituencies include the school (including MEPs)
- j) Local Borough, District or Parish councils where the school is situated;
- k) The Early Years Development and Child Care Partnership, or those who benefit from a contractual arrangement giving them the use of the premises;

Response Details - 46 Questionnaires were returned

Stakeholder Group	Number of Responses
Parents, guardians, carers	25
Staff	17
Other / Anonymous	4

5. Comments from Questionnaire Responses

Question 1: How do you feel about AHS changing its status to become a Foundation School?

Yes – 30 (65%); No - 11 (24%); I don’t know – 4 (9%); No response – 1 (2%)

Comments (15 received)

Having attended the consultation meeting and heard in more detail the opportunities and potential available through Foundation status both for the school and the wider community, I am happy to support AHS changing its status (P)

I believe that there are tremendous advantages to us as a school. We will be well placed to take opportunities as they arise in the rapidly changing educational environment. (S)

I trust the choices of the school itself. (P)

More autonomy from the Local Authority. (P)

I have more questions before I can give a response. (S)

I am a bit concerned about support staff pay and pensions. Is it true that this agreement can be taken away after one year and our pay will go down? (S)

I believe that links with other agencies, especially those in the community, will provide greater opportunities for children. I also hope that as governors will employ staff that they will take responsibility for standards, ensuring good quality teaching across the board. (P)

What actual benefits are there for the pupils? What benefits will my Year 7 child see? (P)

We support the aims of foundation status, as set out, which are very laudable. However, we do not believe that you make the case that these aims can only be achieved with foundation status. Indeed, we believe that AHS's existing organisation should, and can, achieve these same aims. We note that the trust would appoint only a minority of representatives to the AHS governing body. We do not believe, however, that unelected/ private parties should have any influence in the governance of a state school – including the management of publicly owned buildings and land. (P)

Not yet enough information re support staff ie what happens to LG pensions / continuous service / redundancy service years? (S)

Why will responsibility for 'managing assets' bring about freedom to meet learning needs of the community? What are the learning needs? Are the new governors trained to cater for meeting any learning needs? (P)

I do not like the idea of being employed by the governors. (S)

Not enough evidence of the long term benefits of this change. (S)

I believe this is the way forward. If you don't move with the flow, you will be on your own island, going nowhere! (P)

Most school governors work as well as volunteer to help the school and I feel that asking them to take on extra responsibilities, which many of them will not be experienced in, is unfair. (P)

Question 2: How do you feel about AHS acquiring a Trust?

Yes – 31 (67%); No – 11 (24%); I don't know – 3 (7%); No response – 1 (2%)

Comments (11)

Now I have a clear understanding of Trust status and the implications for all interested parties, I am happy to support the proposal. (P)

A sustainable platform for the work of the Aylsham cluster will reap benefits for all of the families in the Aylsham cluster area. (S)

I like the school to be as involved as possible with its local community. (P)

I do not feel that I have enough information to comment. (S)

Will my child's next four years at school be spent in a 'changeover' period? Will this affect her education with teachers too busy on paperwork? (P)

We are impressed by, and supportive of, the links that AHS has already forged with outside partners, including those involved in its status as a Business and Enterprise Specialist School. We do not understand why these existing partnerships could not be sustained and developed without the need for the introduction of new bureaucratic structures. (P)

The positives of this initiative sound good, but I still have concerns for the roles of support staff. Where is all the funding coming from? (S)

Is there not a long standing community partnership with the school already? This all appears very 'woolly' to me. How can you guarantee a long term partnership? (P)

It is a wholly specious and fallacious claim that 'the totality of the contributions from members bringing benefits to the community that exceed the sum of the individual parts' is only achievable through this altered status. There is no genuine reason why any school's aim cannot be achieved under current status. To be reliant upon / dependent on 'partners' is a very dangerous route to go down. (P)

I believe we need additional funding always to help upgrade our children’s learning facilities. (P)

Given the current economic climate, recent change of government and massive cutbacks, I cannot see that there is a lot of extra funding to seek. (P)

Question 3: Do you think that AHS should develop long-term partnerships and work with the following organisations to achieve its educational aims?

Organisation	Yes	No	I Don't know	Blank
Aylsham Cluster Schools	40	2	0	4
City College Norwich	35	6	1	4
The Sainsbury Centre	32	8	3	3
The National Trust	32	8	3	3
A Higher Education Institute	35	7	1	3
A Health Service Provider	31	7	4	4
A Voluntary Sector Organisation supporting young people and families	31	8	4	3
A co-operative business	30	9	3	4

Comments (13)

The combined ‘thinking capacity’ of the organisation selected as partners will have much to offer schools. There are thousands of examples of how this is working in other trusts. (S)

Not really sure what a Health Service Provider is? (P)

Any opportunity for high school students to develop their learning beyond the classroom by grasping connections between the ‘real, outside world’ and their own personal development would be most welcome. (P)

I feel the school can currently forge good working relationships with many organisations. I am currently not sure of the benefits of ‘formalising’ such relationships by creating a trust. (S)

The nature of collaboration with the Sainsbury Centre and the National Trust needs careful monitoring; commercial interests must not exceed educational needs. If well managed, the link with the Health Service could be a wonderful partnership – drop in centres? Health education? (P)

I think you are a school, not a business and not a college. (P)

The wider the community cohesion and range of contacts the better. (S)

Surely, all this should be happening already. I have read the information you have sent home with my daughter very carefully and I appreciate the opportunity to comment, although it appears to be a clearly made case already. I have many questions concerning Booklet 1 which appears to omit many key details. I will be coming along to the meeting – I am not opposed to the change as you have made it sound like a golden opportunity and I want to know more. I look forward to speaking to parent governors and Mr Spalding who I hope will clarify things for me. (P)

The institutions may have beneficial links but not for educational aims. The more partners, the less cohesive and the worse for core subjects in my experience. (S)

School should naturally be working with other institutions in the education sector. However, to have formal partnerships with the other listed entities is both dangerous and superfluous. Schools should not be formally beholden to any other external organisations. (P)

I support the list of partners. However, I feel that this could be done without a trust. (S)

The long term partnerships you have with these organisations would, hopefully, help to keep much needed funds which the schools need sometimes desperately. Also it may provide job opportunities for children. (P)

Again, as businesses have to look at ways of reducing expenditure and staff are being asked to produce more during their time at work. I cannot see that there will be many organisations wanting to take on extra voluntary work for their workers. (P)

Other Possible Partners

There may be merit in considering working with both Broadland and N Norfolk District Council given their responsibilities as community leaders and developers, subject to establishing their alignment with the strategic objectives of the Foundation Trust. (P)

Museum Service eg Gressenhall, Dragon Hall or Norwich Museum. (P)

Police – safety awareness of drugs and alcohol abuse (A)

A large, local employer who could offer information, support and guidance in a variety of job opportunity fields eg Aviva, Carters, or a leisure organisation. They could give an overview of changing skills and attitudes needed when entering employment. (P)

Possibly a link with the local churches. (S)

Local artists, sports organisations (2012), International schools links, Scouts. (P)

Community support and emergency services. (S)

Easton College, NUCA, Aviva, John Lewis, Tesco (Aylsham), Norfolk Wildlife Trust, Barnwells. (P)

Question 4: Do you think this new Governing Body model is right for the school?

Yes – 27 (59%); Yes/Concerns - 5 (11%); Yes/More Trust Govs - 3 (6.5%); No – 9 (19.5%); I don't know – 2 (4%)

Comments (11)

I think that any partners/ governors that are willing and able to support the realisation of the school and community aspirations should be encouraged to do so. (P)

If the governing body is to take on the extra responsibilities of a trust, I feel that the current system is flawed as members do not have enough specific knowledge. (S)

Would the appointed governors be parents or teacher governors from other schools? I would prefer a balance so that expertise and knowledge is maintained and the majority of elected parents does not become too excessive. (P)

What is so wrong with the existing status quo? (P)

We do not agree with this proposal. (P)

I feel that a governor should have financial and managerial expertise now that the LA will no longer employ staff. (S)

If this is going to happen, it has to be fair and it has to be regulated. My concern is that the trust has responsibility of the allocation of pupils – you say in Booklet 1 that this will be fair – but how will this be regulated? These new partners will hold the purse strings and the power – this is my concern. There has to be an even distribution of representatives on a governing body, but their input has to be communicated and regulated in some way. (P)

If the trust goes ahead, it should have some representation. (S)

Such a trust should have no influence upon the make-up of a school governing body. The governing body should be comprised solely of people with a direct stake in the school, not ersatz 'business', 'charity' or any external bodies. (P)

If there is to be a trust, it is correct that they should be in the minority on governing bodies. (S)

I feel that being asked to attend 2 lots of meetings is too much to ask trust members. (P)

Question 5. Do you agree with the proposal to establish a Stakeholder Council?

Yes – 31 (67.5%); No – 9 (19.5%); I don't know – 5 (11%); No response – 1 (2%)

Comments (5)

I think this will be critical in ensuring transparency and accountability of the new 'body'. (P)

We do not agree with this proposal. (P)

The more staff that are involved in the process the better. I believe there should be no secrecy over what the trusts plans to do. (S)

Perhaps, as long as this council is a fair representation of stakeholders and it is a separate body from the trust. It will need a strong impartial liaison officer! (P)

Hoping it doesn't happen, so I haven't really thought about the mechanics of it. (S)

Question 6. Do you have any other comments, concerns or suggestions that we should consider?

Comments (20)

I think this model of governance is very relevant under the prevailing economic and social circumstances and should place the school and its community in a strong position to cope with and adjust to emergent challenges. I believe the flexibility of the proposals will be the key to successful implementation and development over time. (P)

The collaboration between the schools has already proven to have had a significant impact on families, children and schools. I feel that we have only just begun to tap into the potential of what this partnership can do and we should become a Foundation school/ Trust and create a lasting legacy that will shape the future of our community. (S)

If the support staff will be transferred from the employ of the LA to the trust, what happens to the year of continuous service / Pensions / Redundancy rights / Job security / Training and development? (S)

All this time and money being spent – who is paying? Your time is being diverted away from the children and more on processing this application. In Year 7 we haven't had a Parents Evening yet – one due in July – a whole year after Year 7 have started – why? The Year 7 report also seems very standardised – this is what you should be doing better – not all this political point scoring paperwork. (P)

We are concerned at the point made in Booklet 2, at the end of point 4 that 'a trust officer and support staff will be appointed to work on behalf of the trust and take day to day control in outworking trust business'. We feel that this will create an unnecessary layer of bureaucracy with inevitable extra costs. Any extra monies available should be spent on frontline teaching staff. We would prefer that you appointed someone to teach Spanish during schools hours rather than more administrators. (P)

We note that the proposals make no mention of either Buxton or Colby Primary Schools which we understand have, until now, been part of the Aylsham Cluster. Please explain why they are absent from the proposals. (P)

If the proposals go ahead, what is the likely timetable for AHS changing to Foundation status and acquiring a charitable trust? (P)

We have concerns about the wider impact of some Norfolk schools changing to foundation status. We fear that those schools which do not choose to follow this path could be disadvantaged through the fragmentation of the county education service and the diminution of LA power. (P)

I'm a bit concerned that no longer being employed by the LA will affect me in ways that haven't been outlined. (S)

Clarification is definitely needed for support staff regarding the issues of who pays the wages, LG pension rights, continuous service rights. Plus CPD, what happens regarding further INSET? Do we still belong to the PDC? (S)

What you lay out in Booklet 1 reads like a holiday brochure, and to be honest, I've read words like these hundreds of times before. It has left me confused, slightly muddled and concerned that AHS will be run as a business, creaming off top students to produce best results, thus boosting social segregation. I realise that this government has said this sort of procedure has to happen, but my concern lies with the total lack of the word 'differentiation' in the whole document. I will come along to the meeting where I do hope that you can help clarify things for me and lay my fears to rest. (P)

My 9 year experience of the Aylsham cluster is very positive. The cluster works well together and the standard of behaviour and academic achievement are good. I believe that joining or changing to this new status will not benefit or change the school's profile enough to justify the money, resources and time spent implementing it. Already the amount of time educational leaders have sent and the amount of resources used seem disproportionate to the overall outcome. I believe it would be better to use the time, resources and money on supporting teaching staff and students in the classroom. (P)

It feels very much like this is already a done deal – I hope not. If it does happen, it must be because it is the right thing not the current trendy thing. (S)

No, simply because the lower paid people will be hit and suffer. I do not see any need for change as I don't think it will make changes for the better for most people. (S)

It is disappointing and extremely myopic to even consider such a proposal and present it as so wonderful when it clearly isn't. Schools should concentrate on the basics; pupil behaviour, staff training, delivering the curriculum and ensuring parents support school policies. All the above can be achieved without any such drastic and unnecessary changes. Schools do not require the intrusion of any of the aforementioned organisations. (P)

Not enough evidence to support the proposal. (S)

I was against this at first, but after learning more from the information given and from the parish clerk, I feel it is appropriate to educational needs. (P)

Personally I feel that the document sent out outlining these proposals is too long and unclear. All I can see it explaining is the extra roles governors would be asked to add to their workload. There are no actual benefits outlined and the cluster, at present, works very well. As some schools in the cluster have already decided not to explore the trust option, I think this would cause friction and a 'them and us' situation, should the trust go ahead. (P)

I think it is good that the schools can work together more if we do this. It will be good for the children and we will all be better off for it. (S)

What if the government don't like the idea of trusts? They seem to like academies! (P)

6. Comments from Public Consultation meetings

School Council

1. Working as a Cluster

This will help us be more connected (as a group of schools).

We can swap ideas.

Primary Schools can learn from each other.

Younger children will feel more confident and comfortable.

It will be good because younger children will already know a lot about our school before they come here.

2. Trust

The Trust sounds like a good idea because: -

Parents can have their say.

Students can have an opinion. – we can be involved in the decision making.

This is a bit like the Student Council but better, instead of just for our school it could be for everyone.

Could we develop a Cluster Student Council? with representatives from each school meeting together?

3. Partners

What about Social Services – so we can influence things?

They bring intelligent support from experienced leaders.

They bring innovative support from experienced leaders.

How much could partners bring to help us get closer?

Would love to see this happen – everyone connected together

Downsides - There might be disagreements within the co-operative model?

4. Foundation Status

Will we have more say about what happens?

Would we continue to get transport to school?

Will the school get as much money? Would the Governors be against this in any way and for what reason? (If the Governors do not agree we would want to know why but we would not want to risk losing them.)

What do Colleges think about people who come from Foundation Schools compared to Community Schools?

The word Foundation makes it sound lower in status – like in exams where Foundation Tier is not as good as Higher Tier.

Staff

The meeting was addressed by D Spalding (Headteacher), V Scargill (Director of Community Strategy), Eileen Springer (Governor) and Pat Kenny (Consultant for the Foundation and Trust Schools Partnership)

22 members of staff attended.

Questions raised by staff;

1. What are the potential downsides, particularly financial?
2. Who are our employers if we move to Trust status?
3. What are the implications for support staff's terms and conditions?
4. Will new jobs become available due to the forming of the Trust?
5. How will it affect our cluster schools if they opt out?
6. Would there be plans to extend to schools out with the current cluster?
7. What data is available to show the impact on student progress?
8. How easy is it for schools to pull out of the Trust?
9. Is the Governing Body unanimous in their thoughts?
10. Who will have responsibility/accountability for school finances?

There being no further questions the meeting concluded at 5.50 pm.

Parents / Stakeholders

6 parents attended.

Welcome:

Mrs. Platt welcomed parents to the meeting and thanked them for their interest in what the school was hoping to do.

Mr. Spalding welcomed parents and gave an explanation of Foundation School Status and Trust Status. He then asked for questions.

Questions:

What are the changes to the maintenance and liability on land and assets?

How will any funds made be invested?

Looking at the national picture – will funding be harder to acquire?

One of the Cluster schools is not party to moving forward on these proposals – have they been fully consulted?

Would there be any change to the admissions criteria?

What about pupils who are 'Managed Moved'?

Would the Local Authority oversee any admissions appeals?

What are the powers and responsibilities of the Governing Body?

Will Governing Bodies of each school collaborate with each other?

What is the proposed number of external partners?

Which partners have expressed any interest or have already 'signed up'?

How will external partners be represented on the Governing Body?

Can external partners be involved with more than one Trust?

How will the Trust Officer and Support Staff be funded?

Have there been any concerns or issues raised by members of teaching and support staff?

What does the Cooperative Model entail?

What percentage of schools takes the Cooperative Model?

What happens next?

Is it ultimately now a Governors decision to take this forward or decide not to go any further?

7. Comments from Meetings with Governors / Letters

Parent Governor

0 parents made contact

Staff Governors

0 staff made contact.

3 letters were received, thus: -

No formal reply was received from the Town Council, but the Chair of the Town Council reported that the matter had been discussed at a recent TC meeting and that the TC were in support of the proposal.

16th July 2010

Dear Governor

Re: Foundation Status / Charitable Trust

I would like to put on record a number of concerns that colleagues in the NASUWT have with regard to the school's move towards becoming a Foundation School and establishing a Charitable Trust.

The concept of the trust school is a controversial one because it represents the growing involvement of external sponsors in the governance of state schools and the removal of direct accountability of the school to the democratically elected local authority. This development has the potential to undermine the ethos of public service provision.

In recent years the involvement of the private sector has broadened into the employment of staff, management of services and ownership of previously public assets. Trust schools represent another example of this.

The NASUWT is opposed to trust schools because:

- they provide another route for private companies to become involved inappropriately in the governance of state schools;
- they sever the democratic and employment link with the local authority, **leading to further fragmentation of the education service;**
- the trust acquires ownership of public buildings and land;
- assertions that the trust will raise standards are **nothing more than speculative.**

Reasons given for acquiring a Shared Trust have centred around raising achievement and cementing the Aylsham Cluster of Schools. However, no positive examples of how or why achievement will be raised have been put forward, and not all schools in the Aylsham Cluster seem ready to participate in the Trust. Indeed, we have been led to believe that any Trust Partner can remove itself from the Trust by giving a term's notice; hardly the best way to ensure that the legacy is made permanent.

Yours sincerely,

Bill Boyce
NASUWT School Representative

Copies to the Governing Body



ATL wishes to express the following points which it is hoped that the Governing Bodies of the schools will take on board.

1. The consultation process has not worked as described. Thanks are due to John of Gaunt School who took the trouble to mail the local Branch Secretary directly and in good time. Thanks also to Aylsham High and Bure Valley who did attempt to consult, but whose mail was delayed. Although an email request for contact was sent to the head of another school [on 9 July] to date a response is still awaited. ATL has members at the Cluster schools and in Appendix A (f) there is an undertaking to consult.
2. Whilst it is important for Governing Bodies to seek for the best for all its stakeholders, there is not a lot of firm detail which identifies greater benefits. A list of partners who are clearly committed to the Trust, rather than "potential" and "a health services provider...and a cooperative business" would reduce fears about possible non-educational motives. The current status may have areas where schools may seek improvements, but maintained schools are accountable to the community through the Local Authority, and diminution by admitting any partner intent on pursuing an agenda to favour their own interests is of concern.
3. It is unclear what the anticipated benefits of partnership with organisations and businesses beyond the County Council are. What guarantees are there for sustained delivery of those benefits?
4. Which advantages of the change of status is not already available to Aylsham Cluster Schools?
5. It is important that employees' Conditions of Service are at least as good as, if not bettered by any change of status. There is no mention of *The Burgundy Book** in Booklet One. This is potentially detrimental to teaching staff. Has this been explained to staff? ATL does have support staff members, and although currently ATL has no negotiating rights it does have representational rights. Whilst the present intent is to uphold parallel terms and conditions with LA employees for all staff, this is not irrevocable.
6. It is noted that two VC schools have expressed interest. They do not appear to be fully included in this consultation.
7. Individual members of ATL may have expressed views that are their own. ATL membership encourages that right.

*provisions of *The Burgundy Book* have relevance to sickness, maternity, and trade union facilities amongst other important issues.

Overall, ATL's position is of commitment to LA provision. Please pursue this by looking at <http://www.atl.org.uk/Images/Trust%20schools%20PS%202008.pdf> ATL represents members in the whole range of schools and colleges, and should Governing Bodies decide to further pursue a change of status, ATL would wish to be fully involved.

Andrew McCandlish
ATL Norfolk Branch Secretary.

Andy Mash

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Thursday 15th July 2010

Dear (Chair of Governors)

The Aylsham Cluster: Proposed Trust

Thank you for the various correspondence which I have received from several sources, directed to the Norwich Diocesan Board of Education (DBE), relating to the Aylsham cluster's current proposal to create a formal Trust of local schools. I am sending an identical copy of this letter to each of the cluster schools from which I have received literature about the proposal.

I haven't had an opportunity to consult formally with the full DBE. It last met just prior to my receipt of your formal consultation documents and won't now do so again before the closing date of that consultation period. I therefore reply on the DBE's behalf, subject to its approval.

'School trusts' is not a matter about which the DBE has formulated a policy or position as this is the first such instance involving schools in the Diocese of Norwich. I outline below a series of questions and issues which I'm sure the DBE would expect me to raise; and which I hope (and believe) the church schools in your cluster would be supportive of being asked.

Legal Position

Church schools cannot formally or fully join a Trust – because they are themselves trust schools already by virtue of their church foundation. It is neither feasible nor, indeed, legal for a school to belong to two charitable trusts at the same time. I realise this appears to contradict the advice or opinion received by some in the cluster or amongst those proposing the Trust. But I have checked – and it is still *my* understanding of the position. Church schools would not be granted permission to switch from one form of charitable trust to another (even if they wanted to) so that isn't an option available to them.

Continuity?

The DBE has a strategic responsibility for all of its 110 church schools. In representing the interests of those schools, I hope one may be forgiven for asking, in consideration of this proposal, if the same levels and extent of collaboration, free and unhindered, will continue to be available to schools which are not part of the Trust or which choose not to join (I note there are also two other, non-church primary schools in the cluster which have not expressed a desire at present to become part of the Trust)? Or will future, *genuine* collaboration be restricted to just those schools in the Trust?

Associate Membership?

Could the church schools be Associate Members of the Trust? If 'associate members' only, does the new Trust envisage that would mean the church schools wouldn't then be allowed to access the opportunities and events organised under the Trust's remit?

Or that they could then be charged for doing so? In a way which I don't believe has been the case hitherto and which, if I might say so, wouldn't be consistent with the strong collaborative arrangements and professional harmony which I am aware exist today.

A form of 'associate membership' would enable them to continue the collaboration which I know the cluster enjoys now and which its schools are used to already (as are, in turn, the other schools in the cluster, with their neighbouring church schools).

Governance

I note the proposal for two members of the Trust to become members of each governing body of each school in the new Trust; and, in turn, for two members from each governing body of schools in the Trust to be recruited to form the Trust's governing Board.

Again, I pose the question about associate membership. Governing bodies are sovereign, in church schools as in others. It would not be possible for prospective governors from the Trust's Board to become fully-fledged members of a church school's governing body as that would distort the balance of the constitutional foundation. By the same token, therefore, would governor representatives be welcome to attend Trust Board meetings? Contribute to debate and/or decisions? What would be the extent of their constitutional position and any voting rights within the Trust (and vice versa)?

Professional Links

The supporting literature refers to the organisations and companies with which the Trust (if approved) would propose collaborating on a formal basis: NHS, Sainsbury Centre, National Trust, Norwich City College, etc. It's difficult to see why any school or parent would *not* vote in favour of such collaborations as they could bring only benefit. Is this a condition or consequence of Trust status? Or will such partnerships and benefits be pursued and developed anyway?

Diocesan Position in principle

The proposal document says the two church schools have expressed an interest in becoming members of the proposed Trust, given the support of the Diocese. Have both schools' governing bodies confirmed that as being their respective, preferred position via formal resolution?

I have no doubt the DBE would welcome and support, in principle, any move which seeks to secure better educational opportunities, learning environments and professional practice for all schools – and chiefly, of course, for the young people they serve and their communities.

Status Quo vs Added Value

The Aylsham cluster deservedly enjoys a wide-spread positive reputation for the best illustration and professional practice of local schools collaborating with one another. Does the current status quo need changing? What will this new arrangement add which doesn't exist already? In clichéd parlance: 'if it ain't broke, why fix it'?! If these changes are introduced, what will be their purpose and benefit? What is the value which will be added to schools' existing worth and efficacy?

I've met with the headteacher and key governors at one of the church schools (I've not had chance to do so at the other). So I believe I write on their behalf as well as that of the DBE. If further discussion would be helpful for the benefit of us all, I'd be very happy to help facilitate such discussion between those leading the proposal and members of the Diocesan Board.

Yours sincerely

Andy Mash

Andy Mash – Diocesan Director of Education