

**MAT Consultation – Information Evening
Tuesday 20 January 2015
Main School Hall, Carre’s Grammar School**

The Chair of Governors welcomed everybody to the meeting. He said the meeting was to encourage active debate, and to listen to points of views.

He clarified that the timescale for the consultation had taken into account the political purdah that will come into effect prior to the General Election. He admitted the timing had not been ideal. The recommended period for consultation is 4-8 weeks; we had given 6 weeks which included the Christmas period. However, any emails that had come in over that period had been responded to promptly.

The Chair of Governors gave a Powerpoint presentation (available at: <http://www.carres.lincs.sch.uk/site/page.asp?ID=229>). Questions were invited both during and at the end of the presentation.

An Old Boy/Year 9 Parent asked how the current personnel would work, with governors etc as trustees

The Chair of Governors explained that a single body would follow the structure as recommended by EFA. If another school joined, the trustees would be dependent on negotiation, with the Carre’s Trust in the lead. The Board of Directors would be drawn together from individuals to make best use of skill sets, from a ‘wider pool’ than what we currently have. The current governors already have a wide scope of strength and experience and would look similar to a sub-committee. Another school would have input into the Board of Directors, but this would depend upon the school. It is felt that some schools may be relieved that we could do it all – this would be open to negotiation. Local governing bodies may make nominations to get onto our Board of Directors. The recommended number of members is 10 and the challenge would be to get right balance of personnel and skills.

A Year 7 Parent asked how many schools we envisage joining and what is the criteria for selection

The Chair of Governors acknowledged that this was a good question, but we do not yet know the numbers. It is accepted that too many schools would dilute what Carre’s is. He confirmed that governors had not discussed in detail the optimum number as this would depend on the schools involved and what their needs may be. He suggested that a number of local primaries could work with us, and maybe one or two secondaries.

With regards to how we would determine who came in, he said this would depend on what was presented. The school has already had enquiries, and has spoken to schools that are both different and similar to Carre’s, and to schools that need a sponsor to help with Ofsted. All needed different responses. If one school needed a lot of support and help we would have to question whether we could deliver this and still maintain our own standards. He stressed that we are performing at a certain level and are not prepared to drop our level to bring another school up to a better level. It is felt that a few schools could create a strong Trust, but too many and we could lose sight and touch of what is important.

A Year 11 Parent asked if we went ahead and took another school into our MAT, how would this affect us financially?

The Chair of Governors briefly explained the way that school funding works, that we receive funding for the number of students in each Key Stage, and this is lagged funding. This would come in regardless of a Trust structure. The money could go directly to each school

within the Trust and a number of the costs incurred across all the schools, such as Finance, HR etc, would be allocated proportionally across the schools. Skill would be required to decide how the money left is best spent and shared. The process would be fully audited and transparent and no school could be advantaged or disadvantaged over another as a result. The Finance Director would have a balance sheet for each school. Savings made could create better opportunities with a greater focus on expenditure on teaching and learning. All of this would be audited by the EFA.

The Year 11 Parent asked if we had an Executive Headteacher and took on extra schools, would he be paid more and would it be taken out of that money?

The Chair of Governors said it was recognised that once a MAT gets to 5 schools it would need an Executive Headteacher. This role would be overseeing business, and would not be an 'old fashioned' Headteacher role. How this would be done between 1 and 5 schools would be 'best fit', depending on whether secondary or primary schools were involved, but there would be a need for a Head figure over the top of all the schools. The Chair of Governors explained how Headteacher salaries are determined using a point score based on the number of students, although in theory academies can do as they like. Carre's has not strayed from the structure used before becoming an academy. He confirmed that there would be no need to do anything straight away and stressed that it would not be double pay if there were two schools.

A Year 8 Parent said that she is out of area and had chosen Carre's for specific reasons. She queried that if Carre's sat within a Trust, whether the admissions arrangements would stay the same as they are currently. She also queried that if we merged with another secondary school on a new site with better facilities whether we would lose the boys only school and become co-educational.

The Headteacher said that he had contacted the Department for Education and there is no way that they would let one school be co-educational and one single sex in the same town. In Spalding there were two single-sex non-selective schools on one site, but they are now as one. He confirmed that we would not change our admission arrangements. This would be a fundamental change which would require another county-wide consultation. No major changes happen quickly.

A Year 8 Parent asked if we would actively seek to recruit schools, or wait and see what happens. She asked if we had any schools in mind?

The Chair of Governors replied that we are not actively seeking another school(s). We do not need somebody else to join to become a MAT. There have been lots of discussions in the education environment about how to work together and some of these discussions have gone further than others. We are keen to be ready for whatever opportunity comes along. The Chair of Governors is aware that several schools are keen to talk. Some of these are obvious and others less so, but which may still prove to be a 'good fit'.

Another Year 8 Parent said that she is a Parent Governor at a primary school. Her concern is that if there were several schools in the MAT and there was a change of Head, ill health etc, what the impact would be if, for example, 3 schools needed help, and would it be detrimental to Carre's?

The Chair of Governors confirmed that we would take on other schools' risks and liabilities so would have to make sure that problems were picked up early. This situation, or a key member of staff having a serious illness, could put a strain on Carre's and its reputation, and this would be a concern. The Chair of Governors stated that he and the governors were confident that this would be dealt with appropriately and accordingly.

A staff member said that she understood an Executive Headteacher with multiple schools in a Trust would provide more targeted support and leadership, which is why the Trust would

have this position. Having the right structures in place would be very important protection against individual problems such as those suggested by the Year 8 Parent.

The Headteacher also stated that the Local Authority would still have responsibility for the education of the students, so if the MAT was failing the school they could step in and take the school out of the MAT. They would look at standards and if the MAT was failing it would be his job on the line. Other organisations, such as the David Ross Foundation, are 'hovering around' and taking over schools that have been taken out of a MAT that has failed a school.

A Year 7/10 Parent, said that he could understand the educational benefits of becoming a MAT, but he was not sure how the cost challenges of a MAT could be met without massive economies of scale and any savings would be offset by larger salaries. He also asked that if the MAT linked to the school's long term vision and if that included a local school, the relationship with KSHSSA needs to be addressed. Have there been discussions with KSHSSA?

The Chair of Governors confirmed that there have been a number of discussions with KSHSSA over the last three years. KSHSSA has a similar long term vision; discussions are ongoing and could go either way. He continued that a number of parties are interested in joining with us. Last July the view of governors, after considering all options, was that we should create MAT, and at some point on a timeline become co-educational which will require some form of working together. There are lots of options. The Chair of Governors said a lot of effort had been made to build bridges, not just with the Joint Sixth Form, but in the long term we have got to make it work and draw the schools together. This could be in 5, 10 or 20 years' time. For now, we have to keep on our path, not knowing when things will materialise, but being ready to get to the 'end point' which is our long term vision. Currently both schools are landlocked. Carre's has applied for planning permission to build an extra storey on the tech block, and we have received confirmation today that we have been granted planning permission. This does not mean that we will necessarily proceed but, subject to funding, it gives us another opportunity. The Chair of Governors said that it was right to have been asked the question. The long term aim is to have both schools come together to achieve the vision. KSHSSA has a similar view in the long term; the problem is how to get there.

Regarding the financial challenge and a viable business case, the Chair of Governors said that the principles have to be driven by education, the core business of Carre's. Any changes have to be of educational benefit to the students. He suggested that by doing work for primary schools, the money paid to other agencies for services such as Finance etc could be shared. Work already carried out by the Finance Director does show it would work. Governors would consider each school that came. As the number of schools went up and, depending on the schools, work would be 'divided up' and the work of the Executive Headteacher would change.

The Year 7/10 Parent asked if we had targets in mind, such as projects to fund or building a surplus to fund training, a change to infrastructure etc? The Chair of Governors said this was not comparable, we could not raise anything like that what would be needed for substantial infrastructure change, for example. For this we would need to secure funding from the government and other avenues. The benefits would be having better buying power and savings on operating costs.

Another Year 7/10 Parent said the slides indicated that the Sleaford Joint Sixth Form (SJSF) would not change, but if we became a MAT and another school had a sixth form, surely this would have an impact?

The Chair of Governors said that if we go into a MAT there would be no change for us at all. St George's Academy (SGA) is already part of the SJSF. If we worked with schools further

afield, this would be likely to be staff sharing best practice. He stated that, clearly, if schools were in different towns, students would not be using another school's facilities.

The Year 7/10 Parent asked if we had good relations with SGA and if they had taken part in the consultation?

The Headteacher confirmed that they had taken part in the consultation. He and the Principal of SGA have a good relationship. They meet regularly and discuss various issues. SGA is supportive of the proposal. The Chairs of Governors of the two schools have also discussed the matter.

A Year 7 Parent asked who owns the buildings? If there were high maintenance costs, would this prejudice the decision about working with a school?

The Chair of Governors confirmed that it would. All Carre's land is owned by the Foundation with a small sliver owned by LCC. Other schools' property would transfer to the MAT. If it was owned by the Local Authority it would go back to them if the school later left the MAT and ceased to be an academy. There is an understanding with Church Schools that they will stay together because of their property ownership. It is very important to consider all these matters and the Chair of Governors said he is confident that the governors have the background to deal with it. Schools previously had an education way of thinking, but over the years the level of business consideration has been greatly increased. He believes we have done very well at Carre's, getting a good balance, which is one reason why meetings and discussions take so long. Whatever decision is made, it has to be of benefit to our school as well as other schools joining

Everyone was thanked for attending and for giving up their time. Further questions or comments were invited, to be directed to the consultation email address.

The Chair of Governors said that any further information would be circulated by email when/if decisions are made by governors.

Julie Body
21 January 2015