

Burford Primary School

Parent Consultation Evening – 3 February 2015

The Chair of Governors welcomed parents and governors. She said that governors had been considering and reviewing options since July 2012 when OCC had encouraged schools to look more closely at partnerships and at academy status. Governors had looked at both local and national alternatives – with a focus on sustaining the character and ethos of the school. Governors had concluded that a MAT (Multi Academy Trust) with a strong understanding of and focus on support for primary education was important for the school's future development. Hence the proposal to seek academy status within the Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust (ODST).

ODST is established as a MAT for schools of all types and Burford Primary School's ethos as a community school is protected through specific elements of the funding agreement with the Secretary of State. All multi academy trusts in Oxfordshire have a mixture of different categories of school (mixed MATs) and have no difficulty with sustaining the individual ethos of each school. Whilst this is the first example of a community school wishing to join ODST, it won't be the last and there are already several examples of voluntary aided and controlled schools within MATs with community schools. ODST therefore knows and understands what it means to preserve the ethos of a school which is in a minority within a MAT – and is totally committed to sustaining the community character and ethos of Burford Primary School. ODST makes no central curriculum decisions though it does help schools to respond to new developments and enables a collaborative approach to finding suitable solutions.

ODBE (Oxford Diocesan Board of Education) has a strong focus on small village primary schools and both it and the Church of England more broadly have a vision and mission to provide schools for communities. ODST is keen to support the development of a local group of schools, within ODST, who wish to continue to work together and to support each other. ODST will support and enable that, and recognises that for some aspects of the school's life – including transition to secondary school - other local partnerships will be important. ODST is not setting up in competition to that. It does not insist that schools relate only to ODST and parents and other members of the local community will continue to have a core role in local governance of the school.

Q&A

Why ODST and not other MATs, including more local ones?

Governors want to secure the future of Burford Primary School as a good primary school, moving to outstanding – and a school continuing in its own right. So looking for support from an organisation which has expertise in and a focus on primary education. ODST has that. Secondary school led MATs can lack that focus and primary schools in other similar MATs in Oxfordshire have raised concern that their needs are not well understood. Governors don't want Burford Primary School to be swallowed up by a secondary school.

What impact will ODST as a church organisation have? Is it not inevitable that its ethos will drive decisions for the school which result in greater church involvement?

ODST as a Church of England organisation is motivated by faith to provide schools for local communities. Burford Primary School's ethos will be protected and leadership of the school will remain in local hands. Both the DfE and the local authority will want to be satisfied that the ethos is protected.

ODST will want to keep checking back with the school – and with parents – that the ethos is not being changed, so there are checks and balances.

What is the background of the Board of Directors and how are they paid for?

The Board of directors has 12 places; there are currently some vacancies. Directors are non-executive and unpaid. The key decisions in appointing directors are to secure a broad and complementary range of skills. The Diocesan Director of Education is also the CEO of ODST and is paid for 2 days of her time each week for that role. ODST also has a director of schools – an experienced lead inspector, adviser and headteacher, who is paid on a headteacher salary. Other staff lead on HR, finance and administration of ODST.

It is for the directors to determine staffing and salary levels and the extent of the central services charge on each ODST academy to cover the staffing and other central costs. That is currently set at 5% of each academy's budget. As a company, ODST files annual accounts – a set of which can be found on the website: <http://www.oxford.anglican.org/schools/odst/>

Any impact on admissions arrangements?

The local governing body will become responsible for admissions and could in principle set new criteria – but any change would require consultation and all admissions arrangements must comply with the School Admissions Code. ODST would advise against any change to admissions criteria. If there is more demand than places available and parents appeal the decision not to offer their child a place, ODST will provide an independent appeal panel (just as the LA does now).

How long would it take for the school to extricate itself from ODST, if the arrangement didn't work?

The funding agreement requires notice of 7 years; but in order to leave ODST, the school would need to find a different MAT to join.

Who arranges supply teachers?

That remains a school responsibility?

Who pays the costs of conversion?

A DfE grant covers the costs.