

## Minutes of Academy Parent Consultation Meeting

Date: 10.00 am Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> July 2018

Attendees: Simon Jarvis (Acting Chair of Governors)  
Mary Wilson (Co-opted Governor- Staff non-teaching & National Leader of Governance)  
Katherine Bromley (Co-opted Governor- Staff non-teaching)  
Gabriel Gottlieb (Co-opted Governor)  
Jennifer Smith (Parent Governor)  
Rob Tromans (Staff Governor)  
Alina Harris (Chair of Governors, observer due to maternity leave)  
Jill Augustin (Headteacher & Staff Governor)  
Sir Steve Lancashire (Chief Executive Officer REAch2)  
Lee Francis (Head of Projects, REAch2)  
Carol Carroll (Clerk)  
Afua Addai-Diawuo (Observer)

Apologies: Mike Fear (Parent Governor)  
Donna Carby (LA Governor)  
Liz Winder (Co-opted Governor)

Simon Jarvis opened the meeting and welcomed all present.

Good morning and thank to you all for coming to this consultation meeting on Handsworth Primary School's proposal to academise with REAch2.

I am going to say some words on behalf of the governors, Mary Wilson will tell you about Governance Constitution, then Jill will speak and then we'll hear from Sir Steve Lancashire from REAch2. If we could leave questions until the end we will be able to keep to time and will hopefully have the answers to those questions.

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As many of you will know, Alina, our Chair of Governors has recently had a baby and we're delighted she's here today, although she can't be with us this morning in her capacity as Chair so I am therefore speaking on behalf of the governors, to tell you a bit about what we do, and how we came to the very difficult decision to propose Academisation. We recognise the strength of feeling in the room, and on behalf of the Governing Body, we want you to understand our course of action so far.

A little bit about what we do on a day-to-day basis:

We spend hundreds of hours a year unpaid in governing the school, holding the school to account, running the Teaching & Learning committee and Resources committee. We run head teacher appraisals, disciplinary panels where required, go on training courses, manage the school's budget, attend Governor workshops in our own time and generally try to ensure the school is happy, safe, a good place to learn and well run.

We also ensure Handsworth follows the ever-changing rules that govern schools. We feel we do this successfully and the fact we are the first school in the borough to be awarded Governor Mark reflects this.

We have spent years trying to make this the best school possible for children, parents and staff. If there was any possibility that academising would jeopardize all of this hard work, we would certainly not be considering it. I personally have been a parent here for 12 years and have 3 more to go. I have been a governor for 4 and a half years and vice chair since the beginning of this school year. I (and all the governors) love the school as much as you all evidently do.

The governors, and in particular the working party set up to look at Academisation have spent a long time looking at the pros and cons of converting and we have not come to this decision lightly. As governors, we need to make an objective decision based on the evidence placed in front of us, regardless of what we may personally feel about the current Government's policy for education. What is clear is that academies are here to stay for the long term, and we have some very difficult choices to make to help this school retain its identity, whilst keeping its head above water.

We understand people being opposed to the idea of academies, and none of us are card carrying academy promoters. We have had to set our ideological beliefs, whatever they may be, to one side, and look at the facts of the current reality we find ourselves in and have concluded that we need to consider Academisation as a serious option.

We currently face budget constraints and struggle with the Local Authority to get any level of service, and even though we are not being forced to be an academy today, the issue is not going away and we feel it is better to choose our own destiny than have one forced on us at a later date.

The governors have looked at several other options. These include going it alone as a Single Academy Trust but this is now no longer an option that will be approved by the Department for Education.

We looked at joining with local schools but many are already academised or in a soft federation with other schools. In a soft federation, each school has its own governing body, with representatives on a joint committee that meets.

We also explored options with a local secondary.

The fact that schools can only join an academy with a minimum number of pupils severely restricts our options in this regard.

We wanted an academy that focused on the needs of primary schools. Some of us have had experience of other trusts locally that do not have particularly positive reputations.

Following extensive research, we believe that joining REAch2 would give the school the best long term security and stability for children, teachers and staff.

We feel that the values of REAch2 match our own. We will maintain the character of the school whilst seizing the opportunities that will become available as part of being in a wider group - training, continuous professional development and learning from best practice at other schools within the Trust which also haven't changed name or ethos as part of REAch2.

We've had comments from people since our announcement that governors, especially parent governors, have been misled. In fact, it's us who have done the leading on this so there is no question of us having been misled. We've heard lots of comments that we are trying to sabotage the ethos and atmosphere in the school. We would not have put hundreds of hours into creating the best possible primary school we can, only to then choose the wrong option for the school now, and we intend to carry on this work to the best of our ability.

There have been a lot of concerns expressed in the protests about what we are proposing, many of which we feel we have answered in our recent communications to everyone. Obviously, at the end of the speeches this morning, you will have an opportunity to ask us any questions.

Academisation is NOT privatisation. There are no profits to be creamed off. Charities are governed by strict rules and any surplus the school makes belongs to the school and no-one else, and would have to be invested in to the school. A surplus can be used for emergencies like earlier this year when we had to invest in a new boiler as a result of the extended period of severe cold weather.

Pupils, staff and parents will not notice any changes in the day-to-day running of the school if the conversion takes place. No-one but the school will benefit financially from all of this, and we intend to use any extra funds to ensure a bright future for the school and current and future staff and pupils.

So, thank you for listening to the governors' side of the story. We really do want the best for everyone and will continue to do what we can to make sure this happens.

Mary Wilson welcomed all present and gave an overview of the Governance constitution:

We have had a number of queries around governance compliance and scrutiny of our practice and I wanted to take a few minutes at the start of this meeting to clear up a few misconceptions. I hope I can do this with 4 points.

1. We are not paid to be governors and there is no personal financial gain to governors through academisation.
2. We are a constituted governing body of 12. We have one vacancy at the moment which can't be filled by a parent, a grandparent or a member of staff. Governor Services are supporting us in trying to fill this vacancy from the wider community and they're doing this based on skill set following our governors' skills audit. This is good practice. Staff governors represent one third of the governing body and not more.
3. We have seen it stated as fact that, because there were six governors present at the governing body meeting on 10th May, the decision to apply and consult on academisation resulted in a vote outcome of 6-5. This isn't true. Attendance was unusually low at this meeting for various reasons (having babies / ill health) but we were quorate. The dates for all the governing body meetings were set and published last year. This wasn't an extra meeting and 'academisation' was on the agenda. Governors have been discussing the pros and cons of academisation and the options and implications for Handsworth, for years. In the published governing body minutes we have discussed academisation in 10 meetings out of the past 27 since 2012. This is not a snap decision. Governors are united we are all committed to the decisions that we have made.

4. The governors at Handsworth are committed to external audit and scrutiny of our practice. The Governing Body has twice been awarded Governor Mark which is a national accreditation of robust governance. As far as we are aware, we are still the only school in Waltham Forest to have put ourselves under this scrutiny and to have achieved this. Ofsted, this year, evidenced the Governing Body as 'highly effective'. As part of the work I do as a National Leader of Governance, I have supported a number of Chair of Governors and Governing Boards in Waltham Forest and further afield. This work not only helps us to reflect on our own practice but also (and I take myself out when I say this) I am constantly reminded that the breadth of skill set, the aptitude and the commitment demonstrated by the governors at Handsworth is pretty exceptional. We really hope that you as parents are able to reflect on this and use your time here today to contribute to what we all want to be a meaningful consultation.

Jill Augustin presented an overview:

Thank you Simon, for so clearly stating what has led the Governors to our current position. Hopefully all of you know I am Jill, the Headteacher at Handsworth. As Simon has stated we are currently going through a period of consultation to gather the views of the stakeholders regarding whether or not Handsworth should academise.

I am hoping that this will be a meaningful consultation. I would like to thank all of the parents who have already emailed into the governors or spoken to me personally. I appreciate the fact that people are thinking deeply about the pros and cons and asking some very constructive questions which continue to form the basis of our own due diligence. As the governors have already stated academisation at Handsworth is not a done deal.

I am proud to lead Handsworth, we have a well-deserved reputation stemming from our vision and values of creating a culture of resilience, where we provide exceptional opportunities through an innovative approach to teaching and learning which we hope results in confident, curious and ambitious children.

We are a very good school and we believe that we have a lot of excellent practice that we can share with others. As some of you are aware, in recent years we have supported a number of local schools and this has had a positive impact on the outcomes for those schools and our own.

The staff have been able to access high level Professional Development which we would not have been able to afford on our own, staff have been able to develop their own skill sets by delivering training in other settings and we have been able to take part in cross school moderation. This has all been incredibly valuable. However, these opportunities as Simon stated are becoming more and more difficult for us to access as a single local authority maintained school.

As a school we are constantly evaluating our practices and processes to ensure that we are delivering the very best for our children. With the education environment change is inevitable, therefore, I cannot guarantee that nothing will change in the coming years. What I can guarantee, however, is that I, the governors and the staff are fully committed to changes that only seek to benefit Handsworth School. The decision to investigate academisation is rooted firmly in wanting to maintain these values and our ethos. It is my job to constantly search for the best opportunities for our staff and children.

We have asked REAch2 as part of this consultation process to speak with yourselves and staff as we feel their ethos and values are aligned with ours at Handsworth. REAch2 are a very established multi-academy trust,

This is not intended to be a sales pitch for REAch2. We want our stakeholders to be well informed. We can already see that you are deeply invested in the school and passionate about your children's education, just as I am.

Sir Steve Lancashire gave an introduction about his background:

Sir Steve has been involved in primary education for 30 years and a Head Teacher for 20 years. Sir Steve has worked in Waltham Forest for 15 years, 13 years at Hillyfield Primary Academy, the founder school for REAch2, and having lived in Waltham Forest for 12 years, knows the area well.

Hillyfield is a PFI school that converted to an academy in 2011. It went from being in special measures to outstanding within 2 years and is now a popular 7-form entry school. Sir Steve has worked with lots of schools across different local authorities. He is a National Leader of Education and has been a lead adviser for the Department for Education, taking the lead in supporting schools to move from 'Good' to 'Outstanding'.

Sir Steve set up the REAch2 Trust in 2012 to provide a formal way for schools to work together to raise standards of education for children. He is passionate about primary education and wanted to give primary schools the opportunity to join a primary only multi academy trust (MAT). He looked at other large MATS, but wanted something different for a unique community of schools. REAch2 is not a corporate organisation and not all the schools are the same, they each retain their own unique identity. The Trust is made up of clusters of schools in local areas, working together in areas across the country in collaboration.

Governors have options to join a single or multi academy trust. Large MATs have similar structural set up and legal arrangements as Local Authorities. There are now 60 schools in the REAch2 Trust over 4 regions of the country, set up across different Local Authorities, learning from different practices. The MAT has local decision making and schools have their own identities. REAch2 works against branding. Schools have Local Governing Bodies so parents can have their say. The Trust follows a high-achieving, broad and rich curriculum.

In answer to some myths:

- Handsworth would be joining a family of different schools in different areas and a diverse range of schools
- REAch2 spent the early days working with challenging or failing schools, most of which have improved. REAch2 is now engaging with good schools like Handsworth, leading to the sharing of best practice.
- Staff terms and conditions of employment will remain the same and positions remain safe.
- MATs are different from Local Authorities where levels of support for schools is becoming difficult. Sir Steve has no interest in the politics of academies. REAch2 build a team of education and service providers around the school (School Improvement Team) for whatever is needed, led by an Education Director who has lead an outstanding school. REAch2 also provide a business and services team, e.g. Human Resources, Estates, Business, etc.

Sir Steve's passion is children, making a difference and helping to improve leadership and the curriculum. Handsworth is a very impressive school, but there is always more to do and learn.

REAch2's innovative commitment of 11 before 11, which includes a range of experiences that are designed to inspire and stretch REAch2 children, including: camping in a field or a forest; visiting a foreign country; climbing a mountain; learning to play a musical instrument; and performing in a major concert is REAch2's national promise to children. Aspirations can be regional, national or local to provide the best experiences for children.

Impact: 80% of schools in the MAT were underachieving and 17% were good. Now 78% are good and 3 are outstanding, although REAch2 have not always got it right.

Values: Visit any of our school websites where you will read our commitments to inclusion, the breadth of the curriculum, ambition and opportunities for children. We provide a local school for local child.

The process: Governors discussed academisation and researched different possibilities, including REAch2. They contacted and visited local REAch2 schools, including Chapel End and Woodside Primary. Governors entered into a dialogue not knowing how it would end. The option of Handsworth joining REAch2 has not yet been discussed with Trustees yet, this would only happen when Governors agree that they would like to join the Trust. The decision remains with Handsworth Governors.

Questions & Answers Session:

Many parents thanked the Governors and Jill for the hard work that they do as parents and volunteers.

Q - How will governors reassure parents that the consultation process will be meaningful? Will there be a ballot for parents:

A – We are the Governing Body for the school and have helped to provide an external consultation process, but the decision whether to convert remains with the Governing Body. Staff will have separate consultation meetings to help us gain the views of staff. Balloting of parents and other stakeholders is not an option. We are listening, as this is a huge decision. Many of you will be with us for 1 to 6 years and we are very aware of the longevity of the decision we are making. Governors are listening to your views. We are still conducting our own due diligence and asking questions, which all forms part of the process.

Q – Why were absent governors not asked to vote by proxy?

A – All governors were in agreement (as stated in the previous meeting) and the meeting was quorate and the statutory number of people were at the meeting. All governors have been on board for years.

Q – We feel that parents' views are worthless because the decision has already been made by governors. We can't see the advantage so what is the point?

A – Governors approached REAch2 and have looked at many options. For years Handsworth has provided school-to-school support e.g. Longshaw, forming relationships with other local schools. As a non-academy we cannot continue to do this as failing schools are forced to become sponsored academies, so our options are being limited.

Q – If Handsworth join REAch2, we would not be able to opt back into the Local Authority. 2 academies have left REAch2 and have now been left for other academies to mop up. Selwyn is an example of an academy with a £155k deficit. We do not want this for Handsworth.

Q – As a parent my interest is for my daughter. We visited schools, including Hillyfield, and Handsworth shone out above all others. We want assurances because we know a business has to make money. We believe REAch2 can make money, but how will you continue to look after my daughter?

A – Sir Steve is glad you went to find the right school as all are different. Academies have to be a company, but academies are also charities registered by guarantee so charity law applies to MATs, which states that we cannot make a profit on educational activities and cannot have a surplus of funds, unlike a building company. The charity number is shown on the website.

Q - Handsworth is struggling financially like all other schools. Can REAch2 help with this?

A – Yes, all income is government money, as it is with the Local Authority. When a school is a member of a MAT, the funds go straight to the MAT, not the LA. Becoming a member of a large multi academy trust brings economies of scale so services and resources are bought as cheaply as possible. Large MATs have buying power and we also produce a business plan for the school.

Q – Can we see the business plan?

A – That is up to the governors. Governors are still undertaking due diligence and waiting for answers as to whether joining REAch2 will be financially viable, if not the process may not proceed. MATs have bargaining powers. Local Authorities are getting squeezed e.g. the school is charged 11.5% on top of any building works.

Q – Leaving the finances and business to the experts, but in the best interest of our children, why are we looking to academise now?

A – It is not about finances, but the quality of the provision. Governors looked at the option of joining Yardley School in 2012. At that time only 5% of schools were academies. Now 41% of schools in Waltham Forest are already academies, 46% including those in consultation which is putting additional pressure on the other schools. We see this squeeze every day in the quality of support provided to LA schools. We have to have these discussions. The thing that makes a good school is good relationships between parents and staff.

Q – Why have you left it so long to inform parents, risking losing their trust? Why go to the Head Teacher Board before the consultation process is over?

A – The application is made to the DfE, which may not be successful and could be turned down.

Q – How will you tell us whether the application is approved?

A – The application is scheduled to be presented at the next HT Board on 19/7/18. We have no influence over dates and this date could change. The Local Authority published this information to other Waltham Forest schools.

Q – You cannot lose the trust of parents. You only called the meeting because parents asked for it. We have not been involved with the process.

A – The application to the DfE provides us with a timeline, it has not been presented to the HT Board yet. A successful application does not mean it is a done deal. If the application is successful on 19/7/18, we would have to 1/12/2018 to make our decision.

Q – Do you guarantee that qualified teachers will still be working at the school? Will they be drafted into other schools during Ofsted inspections?

A – REAch2 is committed to Teachers terms and conditions, their professional development and they work hard with unions. Qualified teachers will be in the classrooms. If the school chooses to join REAch2, a legal Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 (TUPE) process will commence, protecting staff terms and conditions of employment.

Q – This is only guaranteed for 2 years. Have staff terms and conditions changed after this period?

A – REAch2 has not changed staff contracts or pay scales since the MAT began. We have good relationships with the unions. The best CPD for staff is working in other schools, but this decision would remain with the headteacher. Staff cannot work in other schools until the school is good or outstanding.

Q – A concern was raised that as the decision to academise rests with governors, this is an onerous responsibility for 11 people, 6:5 split at the FGB or the 8 present here today. As a part of the community, morally the decision should go out to the community. Academies have not worked and do not raise standards and we would be naive to think one MAT is different. Handsworth should halt the process until 1/10/2018 so that the community can take part in the process. Will governors give up if positives outweigh the negatives in favour of converting?

A- There will be some compromises, mainly operational. We would need to move to different operational systems for assessment, accounts, etc. Accountability is much stronger for academies. Some Trusts do not engage enough with the local community. REAch2 is the only MAT with locally elected governors.

Governors thanked everyone for their contributions today. There will be another meeting on 16/7/18 and a further meeting scheduled for September.

Meeting closed at 11.20 am