

Meeting with Cassie Buchanan (Headteacher)

Monday 9th June 2014

Present: Rebecca Kaloo (Chair – Parents Forum) and Cassie Buchanan (Headteacher)

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss issues arising out of the Parents Forum meeting held on Friday 6th June 2014.

1. Foundation School Status

We worked through the questions raised by the Parents Forum meeting. Summarised responses given by Cassie Buchanan are in blue below. Where questions have been considered together, these are grouped.

- Is it a done deal?
No. Governors will take on board the outcome of consultation before making a final decision.
- Given other changes is now a good time? - Head, Increased intake (2 form entry), Building Works.
In terms of timing, the major concern for the governors is multiple consultation at the same time, particularly given the recent consultation over changes in intake and the ongoing building works consultation.

In practical terms, any changes resulting from a move to be a foundation school would be administrative and HR changes rather than pupil facing ones. As the school is currently in the process of succession planning for admin staff there is additional admin support available to support any admin changes as well as the capacity to get the current bursar in for more hours should this be necessary.

Although the school would become the admissions authority, rather than the Local Authority as currently, it must continue to comply with the School Admissions Code. This means that no changes can be made to the admissions policy, with the exception of aligning it with the national admissions policy (which would mean the inclusion of children of staff who have been employed at the school for over 2 years). However, the school does not plan to make this change.

- Why now?
As background information, the governors have had a discussion every year for a number of years on whether academy status would be a good thing for the school. In general, governors have been attracted by the flexibility being an academy offered but have felt this benefit was outweighed by losing the ties with the Local Authority.

The governors feel that foundation status is a way to increase financial flexibility

(see below for what this means for the school) and keep the current links to the Local Authority. The governors have been discussing this possibility for some time with a small working group of governors looking at the issue in detail and reporting back to the main governing body.

- **What is driving it? Why do we need it? What are the positives?**
The main benefit to the school would be to give the governors and school more financial flexibility. The key element of this is greater control over the school site. This would mean they would be able to prevent things happening to the site in future, would have more control over repairs (which have been an issue in recent years) and would potentially mean the school is able to save up funds to pay for long term changes to the site.

In the short term there are no plans to carry out any additional building works. In the medium to long term, the increased control over the school site would mean there is the possibility to use the assets of the school to raise money to build further facilities, such as an arts block. These could be designed to include income generating facilities, so could potentially be rented out for non-school purposes.

There are no definite plans for this type of development currently.

The governors are aware that the current level of pupil premium monies is predicted to decline significantly in future years due to demographic changes in the area and therefore the pupils at the school. The funding formula currently used means that this can be predicted relatively reliably. To maintain current staffing levels, it may be the case that in future additional cash is needed to compensate for a decline in pupil premium.

Again, the school has no current plans to generate additional income but foundation status would give additional flexibility to do so were it to become desirable in future.

- **And negatives?**
There is a risk associated with the transfer of contracts of staff. The school will work to transfer all current contracts so that staff are on identical terms and the transfer complies fully with the TUPE regulations. Teaching staff will continue to work under the terms of the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document. Support staff will continue to be paid in line with Hay pay scales. There will though be greater flexibility to reward support staff and teachers for performance.

The risk is mitigated by a strong control process around the payroll and HR functions. The Local Authority audit all staff contracts a part of the HR contract the school has with them. This will continue in future. The outsourced payroll contractors also perform an audit. In addition, the school finances are audited by

Southwark annually as well as by an external auditor.

There is a risk associated with the control of the land – bad decisions could be made. The risk of this is mitigated by controls such as the need for planning application, consultation and governor oversight.

- Have the risks been assessed? And outcome scenarios considered?
A formal risk assessment for a move to foundation status has not been carried out however the above risks associated with contracts and the impact of additional admin responsibilities have been considered.

As part of the annual school audit, the external auditors look at risk assessment and how well risk is managed in the school. This is also done by the governors on a regular basis.

The ongoing costs and administrative time for a foundation school are expected to be broadly the same as currently. The school outsources a number of key functions such as HR and payroll and will continue to do this in future.

The bulk of costs associated with a move to foundation status will be the cost of transferring contracts. As above, planning for succession that is already happening in the school means that there is an overlap of admin staff roles and therefore additional admin staff are available to manage any transition.

- How much say do parents have in the decision? If parents object, will it go ahead?
Governors have to take parental views into consideration. They are keen to take on board any valid objections. It is possible that the change to foundation could still go ahead despite parental objections, however this will very much depend on the nature of the parental objections raised.
- Will the detail of the financial aspects be shared? i.e the business case?
A formal business case has not been developed. As above, the ongoing costs of managing a foundation school are expected to be broadly similar to what is currently the case or slightly reduced. The transitional cost of moving contracts is not expected to be significant.
- What is the vision? What is the school planning to do? (as regards....)
 - Land
As above, the school has no definite plans with regards to the school site but may seek to use the land to generate income in future as part of a scheme to improve pupil facilities.
 - Governors
A move to a foundation school would mean two additional partnership governors. These are appointed by the governing body as they have skills

needed to contribute to the success of the school. The governing body must first try to appoint these governors from parents at the school.

See below for additional information regarding governors and governance.

- Staff
As above, contracts will be transferred with no change. In future, there will be additional flexibility to reward teaching and support staff for performance. There are no definite plans in this regard currently.
- Educational approach
There will be no changes to the educational approach. In addition, the relationship with the Local Authority in terms of educational support will continue as currently.

Governance Issues? How are the governors elected? How accountable/ how are governors reviewed? What are the safeguards? What are the skills needed to run a foundation school? – School, staff, governors. (Is there a skills gap? If so, how will this be addressed?)

The governing body does a skills audit to assess whether they have the skills needed. They have recently completed this and have appointed 2 additional governors with the skills needed to plug the identified skills gap.

Parent governors are elected by parents. Staff governors are elected by staff. Local Authority governors are proposed by the LA but are appointed by the governors. Community governors (and partnership governors for a foundation school) are appointed by the governors – all governors are part of the decision making process and vote to approve new governors. As above, partnership governors are initially looked for among the parents of the pupils.

All governors are re-elected (parent/staff governors) or re-appointed at regular intervals.

Governors are expected to be committed – if they don't turn up to 2 consecutive meetings, governors are asked to consider their position.

The Ofsted review of the school also covers the governing body.

In what way might it distract from the principal activities of the school? How will a greater financial focus impact the education? If not, why not? What will the direct impact on students be? (parents/carers concerned about well being as well as education issues)

As above, in the short term the main changes will affect the administrative and HR aspects of school life only. It is not expected that the principal activities of the school will be impacted and it is expected that there will be no direct impact on the students.

How will the governors/school ensure full consultation in an environment of trust? – covering staff, parents, governors, pupils.

A formal consultation with staff is in process, including Union meetings and meetings with the Local Authority. In addition, individual staff member meetings with the senior management team are taking place as requested by staff.

Governors have been reconsulted individually to give them additional opportunity to give their views.

Formal consultation meetings have been arranged for parents. Parents have been invited to give their opinions in a recent letter.

Pupils – Cassie Buchanan has spoken to the school council but getting meaningful feedback from pupils is difficult given the abstract nature of the question and a lack of comprehension of what this change means.

Can we hear about the experience of other schools? E.g. Direct meeting with key people from other foundation schools.

The school would not oppose this, but in practice there are no local schools that have recently converted to be foundation schools that can share their experience so finding someone to get in would be tricky.

Current Issues

RK advised Mrs Buchanan of the areas raised by parents as key issues for them (as below). Mrs Buchanan provided additional feedback on the area of diversity.

Staff & pupil diversity

Maintaining standard of education

Balance between ethos and achievement

Special education needs/ gifted and talented

- Staff & pupil diversity
Pupil diversity is changing as the local demographic changes. The school continues to be highly diverse but pupils now come from a wider range of ethnic groups.

As above, no changes that impact diversity may by law be made to the admissions procedure.

Staff diversity – the school has a strong commitment to equality and diversity. Recruitment is done on a level playing field basis and the school actively monitor diversity in the pupil population, staff and governing body. The school follows the Southwark Schools' Single Equality Scheme and the policy in this regard is published on the school website (About us, Policies, Single Equality Policy).

(Note from Rebecca Kaloo: The School Admissions Code which the school must by law comply with says that if a school is undersubscribed (i.e. there are more places than pupils applying), any parent that applies must be offered a place. If a school is oversubscribed (more pupils applying than school places), the school must allocate places in line with their oversubscription criteria. By law this must be reasonable, clear, objective, procedurally fair, and comply with all relevant legislation, including equalities legislation. Admission authorities must ensure that their arrangements will not disadvantage unfairly, either directly or indirectly, a child from a particular social or racial group, or a child with a disability or special educational needs.)

2. Home Learning

The school will look at running some parent workshops in the Autumn term, particularly in the area of maths, to give parents additional information on the teaching approaches used and ways in which they can support their children.

The satisfaction survey for parents/carers will be carried out again during the Autumn term.

3. PE Kit

Mrs Buchanan advised that children are required to bring the correct kit to school. Where they do not have this with them, they will be given a task to do. This may be related to the PE lesson, involve some degree of movement around the hall, or be reading.

Pupils may also be given the option to wear the lost property/ spare PE kit.

4. Travel Plan / Green Cross Code

The school has a travel plan which is available if anyone would like to see it. Yr1/ Yr2 do specific road safety training with Southwark. Cycle proficiency is done in Yr5/Yr6. The school has recently successfully applied for a grant and have purchased a number of bikes and helmets. This means that they can now teach cycling in playtimes as well as formal cycle safety.