

Response to questions asked by a parent

The consultation period is very short. This is exacerbated by the consultation period having started before the letter was issued to parents. I would request you extend the consultation period to ensure the community can contribute and hold another meeting on another date.

Answer:

The consultation period was started the day after the staff were informed. Parents can still ask questions and will receive feedback after 24th November. We would be happy to arrange another meeting if needed as well as meet parents individually. Stakeholders are free to ask questions and give feedback throughout the whole process.

'We know Local Authority budgets will continue to decline. This is an assumption rather than a fact. I feel this is disingenuous and scaremongering. I realise that this appears to be the direction of travel but want to understand why the school feels the need to move so quickly.

Answer:

The school is looking at its position and budget and felt that it was important to inform current and prospective parents that we were proposing to join the Graveney MAT in 2018. Therefore, when parents are making their school choice they know we are intending to be part of Graveney Trust in September.

I have just become a governor of a school that is the lead school in a MAT. I therefore have received a crash course in the technical detail. I do not feel the letter you issued is correct technically. It says that the school will continue to have its own Governing Body. This is technically untrue. The MAT will have a board of trustees and the school will have local management committees. I as an elected parent governor of my MAT had to resign and be reappointed and the position I hold is now different. There is no indication in the letter of what representation Franciscan staff or governors will have in the MAT trustee body. These are important questions for us to understand in deciding whether or not this is a positive thing for our children. Whether, Pat will remain as Head of Franciscan. The letter says that staff will be TUPE'd and retain current terms and conditions. Is that true of all staff? What will happen for new staff? What is the longer term plan around staffing and terms and conditions.

Answer:

Franciscan governing body can remain as it is, with the addition of an extra member nominated by the Trust Board

The headteacher will remain in post.

As a foundation primary school, the Headteacher will be invited to join the Graveney Governing Body as preparation for a position on the Board of Directors

All staff will transfer via TUPE process on their existing terms and conditions.

Terms and Conditions applying to new Trust staff almost entirely in accordance with national:

Teachers: Teachers Pay and Conditions Doc/Burgundy book with the exception of one term's notice

Answer:

clause

Support Staff : National Joint Council for Local Government Services

There is no expiry date once staff have been TUPE'd

The letter doesn't explain what research or options were investigated and why Graveney is the preferred choice. It would be helpful to parents to understand why other MATS have been rejected. My view is that joining Graveney will not enable the school to keep its identity whereas other MATS are clear this is a key part of their philosophy. Plus the change of name and uniform do not signal a wish to keep Franciscan's identity. They signal the exact opposite and this concerns me.

Answer:

We looked at other options that we thought could be a possibility but felt that with Graveney being a local school that our parents know was the preferred option. We are part of a local school cluster with Graveney and have had a professional relationship with extends back over a number of years. The governors believe that it is important being involved in a MAT that is part of our local area and community. Also Graveney are committed to working with schools in the local area and so are not looking to become a very large MAT. Graveney values are those of having a culture of success and never being complacent. Also, an ethos of respect, appetite for learning, citizenship which we agree with.

I strongly object to the change taking place mid year. My child as you know is in year 6. It seems horribly unfair to strip her and other year 6 pupils of their connection with their school while they are still there. I would like the reasoning explained as to why this change is being proposed mid year as opposed to at the start of an academic year - that would seem to make more sense. How does this affect parents that have already applied to schools for next year? This is moving the goal posts and seems unfair.

Answer:

The academy conversion is proposed for 1st April 2018 and this would mainly affect the financial arrangements of the school as our financial year ends on 31st March. There is unlikely to be any major observable changes that would affect pupils until Sept 2018.

The letter indicates the school name will be changed as will the uniform. Please explain why these decisions have been taken.

Answer:

The governing body felt this the minor name change and updating the school uniform would signal the new chapter in the life of the school to parents and the community.

The letter makes no mention of costs. The school has invested significantly in brand and signage in the last few years. Changing the name of the school means all this will be wasted. The school changed the uniform and made a big thing despite parental objections in September. This seems nonsensical if you planned to change the name of the school and move to a MAT. These conflicts suggest this decision is being rushed. What is the panic? Is the school in some sort of financial trouble?

Answer:

The school uniform has not changed, we have put on emphasis on wearing a red sweatshirt and pupils wearing the correct uniform overall such as navy blue trousers/skirts and black shoes. There is no

panic, however we feel this decision will result in providing us with a more secure future and effective use of our budget. The cost of branding and signage will come from the grant allocated by the DFE.

You describe one of the benefits as being having freedom over the curriculum. I would like to understand what this will mean in practice. You say it would only be in exceptional circumstances the national curriculum would be disapplied. Please give some examples of what sort of circumstances that might be.

Answer

The school will continue to follow the National Curriculum. The information on the curriculum in the leaflet was providing additional information about academies and that they do not have to follow the National Curriculum. We do not intend to make any changes to our present curriculum.

I would like details about what exactly has happened so far. Has the school already registered interest with the Department of Education?

The school has registered its interest. Graveney Trust has met with governors and staff.

Which governor meetings was this proposal and decision discussed at? When and how was the decision formally taken by the Board of Governors? What consultation has been undertaken with Staff and their trade unions.

Answer:

In the Spring term full governors meeting we informed them that we had attended training and were planning to visit a MAT. We also circulated information received from the training to all the governors. At the Finance & Personnel meeting in May in the confidential part, we discussed our visit to one of the MATs and informed the governors we would be having discussions with Graveney. At the summer term governors meeting (confidential part) we presented our findings about the MATs and options were discussed. It was agreed by the governors that we should invite Graveney to do a presentation to the governors in September. Following the presentation the governors discussed and voted to join Graveney MAT. The presentation was shared with all the governors. Those who were unable to attend gave their opinion and sent in questions that they wanted asked.

We have had an informal meeting with staff. Additional meetings will be held once we have our Academy order approved. These meetings will include unions and representatives from HR.

Has the school applied for an Academy order?

Answer

Yes

Pat Andre-Watson & Kathy MacLean