

Questions and Issues raised by staff

Why has this happened so suddenly?

The dramatic fall in parental first choices for the school has led to us needing to look urgently at the school's immediate and long term future. This coincides with the government's latest push for schools to acquire a trust and the need to be clear about how we are going to approach both Foundation and Foundation Trust status – if governors and staff think this is the right route to take.

How will this affect the daily running of the school?

On a day-to-day basis, there will be no change.

If this is to change perception of Holly Lodge, are there other priorities to improve standards rather than a change of name or status?

It is important that we concentrate on standards at the same time as seeking Foundation Trust status. For example, we need to ensure that school uniform is worn by pupils and that there is a culture of learning and positive achievement in the school. This has the potential for a major 're-launch' of the school with a joint standards and Foundation Trust agenda, potentially a very powerful combination.

Changing a name won't change parent perception.

Not on its own – see above.

If all other Sandwell schools are to become foundation Trust schools we will not be differentiated or gain an advantage.

In marketing terms this is arguably correct. However, at this point in the future, we would have the benefit of Trust partners supporting the school in a long-term, sustainable relationship. We also need to make sure that we were at the forefront of change in Sandwell and not left behind by other schools acquiring Foundation Trust status.

Is it better to be in at the start of the push towards Foundation Trust status than to follow later?

Yes – see above.

Will the same procedure for staffing adjustments be followed under Foundation Trust status for teaching and non-teaching staff?

Yes. However there is no intention to 'adjust' or re-structure staffing in the foreseeable future.

What is in it for the Trustees?

It depends on the Trustees. For example, a university would build a long term relationship with a school that would lead to placements for ITT students as well as progression routes for Holly Lodge pupils (ie better recruitment for them). Or a public health organisation would have better access to pupils and their families

and be able to trial health promotion and community programmes through the school. Finally, a private charitable trust would want to be associated with a high profile Trust school and would want to know that donated funds were being used to further its own charitable aims – in conjunction with a range of other initiatives and projects. Potential Trust partners will need to explain “what’s in it for them” in the consultation phase before Trust arrangements are finalised by staff and governors.

Staff were clear they would like the opportunity to express their views via a vote organised by staff governors before Governors voted on formal consultation.

Once staff’s initial issues and questions have been addressed, there should be an opportunity for staff to express an opinion as to the long-term future of the school.

Will the Governors listen to views of staff?

Yes.

Are any group of lay governors equipped to take on responsibilities of Foundation Trust?

Governors will need to be advised by school staff as they are at present. Specialist advice and information will be available from a variety of sources. The school will continue to buy traded services and benefit from expertise and guidance that these bring. Governors currently come from a range of backgrounds including public service and private industry and bring with them a range of skills and expertise. This should be further increased by the appointment of Trust governors.

Is it correct we will not have any control over admissions because we will not be full?

At the point we become fully subscribed at some point in the future, we would have far more control than we do at present. If we become a Foundation trust school, the arrangements for admissions into Year 7 will remain the same. In-year transfers will be handled by the school and not by the Local Authority.

Head teacher and governors will not be eternal and neither will be their good ideals.

Agreed! We must not, however, assume that ‘good ideals’ will become bad ones. Over time things inevitably change. The issue is whether Foundation Trust status will make change for the worse more likely. Given that the aims for the charitable trust will be set from the start and can only be changed with the agreement of all parties and the school can if necessary dissolve the trust, it should be apparent that safeguards are built in throughout the life of the trust.

What safeguards are there that a future governing body won't change arrangements?

Several – see above.

Health status is in place and developing. Why do we need Trust status for it to develop further?

The current relationships are not necessarily sustainable in the long term. By having a number of key partner organisations linked through a trust, it would be a case of the sum of the parts being greater than the whole. Organisations are prepared to commit to a school's long term future if they see others doing the same thing. It is possible at the moment to bring partner organisations together to support the school, but the effort required to do so is enormous and not sustainable in the longer term. A trust would have the potential to move our health status in to an even more exciting and productive phase for the benefit of pupils, their families and the wider community.

For staff this seems high risk for uncertain gain.

I am not clear what the "high risk" is. Certainly other schools contemplating Foundation Trust status perceive no disadvantages and no risks. Whether or not the school will "gain" will depend on the nature of the trust and the ability of partners to support the long term development of the school.

What happens to agreements already won with single status? Would people lose the right to claim back pay?

The school has to honour agreements made by the Local Authority with staff through single status. At present we do not know what those agreements will be. Clearly there would be dialogue between individuals, unions and the school regarding back pay if applicable.

How can governors guarantee that staff will stay on national pay and conditions in the future and that a foundation governing body will not apply to vary these?

Current legislation states that staff have to stay on national pay and conditions of service. In the future the school as a Foundation Trust school might want to improve on these arrangements. Any change at some point in the future would need to be subject to full consultation with staff and unions. Long term guarantees are not possible, but the commitment to maintaining current arrangements (a no detriment clause) could be written into the Memorandum of Agreement that Trust partners (including the school) will draw up and commit to. It is clearly not possible to make any guarantees about the long term whether or not the school has a Foundation Trust.

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