

Wilsthorpe School

Public Consultation Meeting regarding moving to Academy Status

Tuesday 26th June 2018 at 5.30pm.

Those present:

Mr Jonathan Crofts, Head Teacher WS
Mr Dick Vasey, CEO, Two Counties Trust (2CT)
Mr Andrew Rose, Deputy Head Teacher WS
Mrs Pam Ashley, Chair of the Governing Board WS
Mr Steve Holland, Member of the Governing Board WS
Mrs Carol Edwards, Member of the Governing Board WS
Mrs Julie Nall, Staff member of the Governing Board WS
Mrs Pam Merriman, Teacher and Union representative WS

9 members of the public attended.

Mr Crofts (JCR) gave an overview 'How did we get here?'

Timeline:

Nov 2016 – Ofsted Good judgement

Feb 2017 – Governors discussed the options of joining a Multi Academy Trust (MAT)/starting our own

Feb 2017 – Regional Schools Commissioner advised that Wilsthorpe could not be a lead school due to size/capacity

Spring 2017 – Interviews and investigations with the CEOs of several MATs to ascertain suitability for Wilsthorpe. The main question being "How will you support Wilsthorpe in becoming Outstanding?"

Important points which were considered:

- Ethos
- Professional Development Opportunities
- Level of freedom and independence
- Financial benefits
- % Top Slice payment (per year). 2CT asked for 1% = £40,000
Others asked for 5% on average = £200,000

- Centralised services – HR, finance, legal services etc. are all shared between the MAT members. Current Local Authority (LA) support services are dwindling and getting less efficient. There will come a time in the near future when Wilsthorpe will have to spend money buying these services independently if we stay with the LA.
- Accountability – the MAT would provide supported challenge for Wilsthorpe.
- Governance – the current Governing Board can stay as the decision making body of the school.

In May 2017 Wilsthorpe submitted an Expression of Interest in joining 2CT. The Governors decided that they did not want to go with a MAT which would change the direction of Wilsthorpe or overshadow the school. The chosen MAT needed to be working with schools in a similar context to Wilsthorpe.

September 2017 – JCR visited Ashfield School, a founder member of the 2CT. He saw the accounts of all the member schools and without exception, all schools had made financial savings since joining 2CT.

September 2017 – A Wilsthorpe Union representative visited another founding member school of the 2CT. After talking at length to staff in different roles she considered 2CT to be one of the ‘better’ MATs’.

November 2017 – JCR, the Deputy Head, and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governors, visited Ashfield School to analyse the Ethos, structure and ask other questions. They chose Ashfield as it is the largest school in the MAT and the school where the CEO Dick Vasey had previously been headteacher for 10 years.

February 2018 – 2 other Wilsthorpe governors, one a teacher at Wilsthorpe, visited the Manor Academy, which joined 2CT eighteen months ago whilst in ‘Special Measures’. It has just received a ‘Good’ judgement. A massive turnaround. The governors reported back to the Full Board on the positive impact 2CT had on Manor in achieving their recent Ofsted success.

Mr Crofts concluded that there are multiple benefits of becoming a member of 2CT and urged members of the audience to use the consultation@ email address if there were any questions following this meeting. There is also a FAQs page on the school website which is being continually updated.

Q1. This is all very good but I am concerned about teachers moving on after the merger. Lots may leave and it is scary. I have experienced a merger in a Primary School setting and the Head Teacher is never there now.

A1. JCR.

We are determined not to let that happen here. I too have seen this happen in schools. Let me share with you, however, some of the advantages of staff flexibility in the MAT model:

- a) When we need to appoint part time teachers, we often draw from a very small field. By being a member of the 2CT we can offer a full time post and share teachers, allowing them to work in other schools. This will give us a much larger field of choice, benefitting everyone.*
- b) We are short staffed sometimes through illness and other reasons. As a member of the 2CT there may be opportunity to borrow staff to fill the gaps and education of the highest standard can continue.*
- c) Not all of the teaching at Wilsthorpe is outstanding. There are subjects that need to improve and by collaborating in this way we can borrow expertise from other member schools to support our improvement, giving and receiving best practice at no cost.*
- d) Staff grow from being members of a MAT. There are opportunities for professional development without teachers having to move from Wilsthorpe. We feel this is very beneficial as Wilsthorpe staff can further their career and leadership experiences but continue to teach our students for longer.*

Mr Vasey (DV) The 2CT has been running now for two and a half years. A recent analysis of staff retention showed that retention is higher this year than it has ever been. We want every member school to improve and will continue to offer opportunities to allow them to. For example; Manor Academy has improved so much because of the sharing of best practice with the other member schools. Manor Academy will have the best Maths results of all schools in the 2CT this year and eighteen months ago they were in ‘Special Measures’!

Q2: How many schools are in the 2CT?

A2: DV. In April 2016, the three founding schools were Ashfield School, Swanwick Hall School and Selston High School, all rated ‘Good’ with Ofsted. We now have Manor Academy, Heritage High School, Frederick Gent School and our latest member, Friesland School. It was originally intended to accommodate Primary Schools in 2CT, but the trustees wanted to concentrate on secondary schools for the next couple of years and will then review options.

The size of a MAT, as recommended by the DfE, is 8 – 12 schools. As members all schools can achieve savings and efficiencies e.g. Catering services are much cheaper when contracts are larger. 2CT has realised savings of over £200,000 in Catering services alone for its member schools.

Q3: Where do JCR and the current Governing Board fit in with the autonomy of decision making within the MAT?

A3: DV. *The local Governing Board remains in place. We have a fundamental belief that this is how decisions for the school should be made. The Board of Trustees at 2CT is made up of 9 Trustees, each chosen for their expertise. This board oversees the MAT; the local Governing Board oversees the school.*

The only difference is finance. The budget is recommended by the school but approved by the trustees.

Last year, when the Head of Selston High School left, the LGB advertised and shortlisted candidates. As CEO I was involved as an advisor and on the last day of interviews but have no role in shortlisting and do not have a vote.

Q5: How is the funding allocated to schools in the MAT?

A5: DV. *Money is allocated by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) to each individual school so in effect at a school level nothing changes. We are moving towards a national funding formula which may vary between Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire but each schools will continue to get its own funding delegated to the local school.*

Q6: With regard to the new build, will Wilsthorpe be penalised and have to supplement the maintenance of other, poorer standard schools?

A6: DV. *No, not at all. In 2012 Ashfield School became a stand-alone academy and have access to the Conditional Improvement Fund to bid for funding for repairs and maintenance of member schools. On joining, all schools are surveyed for structural repairs. Each school is asked to produce a 5 year building plan and top of Wilsthorpe's list will be the Sixth Form and the Sports Hall. As a MAT with more than 5 schools we get allocated automatically School Condition Fund money which is based on pupil numbers. This year 2CT was allocated £1.1m. The Board of Trustees decides how it is spent across the schools in the MAT.*

Q7: The new build is a significant asset. Will it be offset against liabilities in the MAT? Is there any protection in public funding to protect Wilsthorpe in the MAT?

A7: DV. *The level of scrutiny and accountability is intense and we are audited every year.*

JCR. If we remain in the LA, they are highly unlikely to support our buildings. For the last 18 months, projects have been 'pulled' in the light of our forthcoming new build. Even projects on retained buildings.

Q8: The new school is a gift to the private sector. If the MAT collapses, what happens?

A8: DV. *Should this situation arise, the trustees will wind up the MAT and member schools will be moved to another MAT.*

Q9: Is there a commitment to retain terms and conditions for staff on transfer?

A9: DV. *There are protections for staff in TUPE and these will not change. The teaching and support staff will not be worse off and new staff will be appointed on the same terms and conditions. There are also incentive schemes – private health care, benefit schemes, etc.*

Q10: As an academy, can you change the curriculum or is it set by the LA?

A10: DV. *Nothing will change. The curriculum and timetable will continue to be the responsibility of the Local Governing Body (Wilthorpe).*

Q11: I have a daughter coming here in September. Will you offer A Levels and BTEC as an academy?

A11: JCR. *Yes, both. The Sixth Form is quite academic at the moment but we offer BTEC courses alongside A levels. In September we will be evaluating the existing pathways for students and looking to develop*

bespoke routes for students 11-18. We want to increase the breadth of subjects offered in the Sixth Form over the next few years to encompass the variety of subjects students wish to study.

DV. One advantage of the MAT is that we have the skill sets and experience already and the facilities to study a variety of practical subjects. Wilsthorpe can improve what they offer without the MAT but there is much more opportunity within the MAT.

Q12: Having Friesland as part of the MAT, would you share courses?

A12: JCR. We can, and do, share staff already though it proves difficult with timetabling and payroll. The opportunity to consider more sharing will be exciting though there are no plans. It is all about attracting good staff, finding creative ways of working together and sharing staff to achieve best practice.

Another example is that within the MAT there is a bank of cover staff which we could use when we need staff to cover sickness and other absences. At the moment it is currently £220 per day to have agency staff in. With the MAT, that money would be saved. (Mr Vasey pointed out that the MAT is in the process of negotiating a reduction on the cost of agency staff, realising a considerable saving with selected agencies).

Q13: Is 2CT a business or a non-profit organisation? A school is for providing education, not making money.

A13: DV. We are a business. The "profit" is savings made on sharing service provision and when purchasing contracts and services. All this money can then be poured back into Teaching and Learning.

Q14: Tonight has been about money and not about teaching and learning.

A14: JCR. We have been talking about Teaching and Learning and the retention of staff. If we can save money on services, the resources for providing good education can be increased.

DV. League tables for MATs are now published but 2CT has not been running quite long enough to be included. However, using the same formula, we have produced our own league tables.

- *From day 1 to this year there has been a clear upward trend across the MAT.*
- *Other schools have also recorded an upward trend since joining*

JCR. In September, class sizes for Y7 will average 24. This is because we have made savings elsewhere and we choose to invest in teachers. We genuinely believe that this is the best way to improve teaching and learning. Teachers are our largest expense; money is a huge factor.

Mrs Merriman, teacher and union representative reassured the audience that she felt confident her role will not change on joining the MAT.

An audience member related her experience of teaching in her school. She described working for the LA and wanting to network. She requested being able to observe colleagues at other schools and share best practice but was refused permission to do so. She feels confident that the MAT will allow this to happen and the children of Wilsthorpe will benefit.

Mr Holland (parent and governor) added that Wilsthorpe already operates several successful strategies for sharing best practice and being a member of the MAT will further increase the opportunities to do so.

DV. To achieve an 'Outstanding' Ofsted judgement a school must show the consistent sharing of best practice.

Q15: Will the admissions process change if we join the MAT?

A15: JCR. No. Admissions are managed by the LA at the moment and that will continue.

DV. Governors could change the process if they wanted to but none of our member schools have done so far and 2CT would not recommend it.

Q16: Will joining the MAT change the way the school functions? Will it change the way new staff are appointed?

A16: *No. The Board of Trustees is dedicated to supporting the school to continue as it is. The Board of Governors are also very strong here and will ensure the school continues to function to its best potential.*

Q17: What are the negatives of joining the MAT?

A17: *DV. These are included in the consultation letter you will have received. The biggest risk is that there is no going back.*

JCR. *The Governing Board of this school has carefully considered all the MATs in the area and want to do the best for the school. I have invested a lot of my life personally in this school and could not make a decision that I did not believe was right for the school.*

Q18: Are the new Y7s involved in the consultation process?

A18: *JCR. Yes, all parents of year 6 and year 5 students at all feeder schools have received the consultation letter.*

Q19: What if the Trust folds?

A19: *DV. The MAT will be wound up and all member schools placed with other MAT's.*

There has been a lot of careful consideration taking place at Wilsthorpe about becoming a member of a MAT, in particular 2CT.

Mr Rose, Deputy Head teacher: The LA is unable to support us financially or practically as funding is cut and systems are collapsing. It would be very difficult to withdraw from a MAT and return to the support of the LA.

DV explained a failed MAT in a different area and what happened.

Q20: Year 10 students are nearing their GCSE's. How will they be affected?

A20: *DV. There will be no changes to the curriculum or the timetable. Everything will carry on as it is now. The MAT will facilitate, as required, the broadening of courses offered in future years, extending the learning opportunities for students and widening career choices. The 2CT employ their own careers officers to assist students in making the most suitable choices for their future.*

JCR. *We have invested too much time and effort into the current exams to change anything. There are still some poorer performing subjects at Wilsthorpe and we will be looking to the MAT to support us to improve in these areas.*

Q21: What has been the staff response to the consultation?

A21: *Mrs Merriman read out the results of the staff survey recently undertaken. Approx. one third of staff registered concern, one third were not concerned either way and one third supported the proposal. This survey was conducted before the staff consultation meeting. [Since the full staff meeting which took place just prior to the public consultation, some staff have reported to the headteacher that they now do not have the same concern]*

Q22: Will you consider the staff survey results when making your decision?

A22: *Mrs Ashley. This will be the Governing Board's decision. We will take into account that staying with the LA carries an element of risk also.*

Mrs Merriman added that the LA is changing and not for the better. The unions support the choice of 2CT as a MAT. Staff at Wilsthorpe have a mixture of positive and negative experiences of academisation.

Mr Holland pointed out that happy stories about academisation don't make the news, just the unhappy ones. Increased funding inevitably will improve the standard of education.

A parent felt that the consultation letter gave the impression that the decision to move to academisation was already made, that it would go ahead whatever was said this evening.

Mr Crofts answered that the school had followed the prescribed course of action and he was very disappointed at the poor turnout this evening. He added that it was certainly not a 'done deal'; that some staff still have concerns and these will all be addressed.

Mr Crofts added that he is increasingly frustrated over the lack of support for essential services from the LA. He feels that the LA is vanishing as we speak and he needs to ensure that the education of Wilsthorpe's students remains paramount at all times. Being a member of 2CT will free up time and money to support high quality Teaching and Learning.

Mrs Edwards pointed out that the Governing Board had followed a rigorous process, asking gruelling questions to ensure the security for both students and staff at Wilsthorpe. 2CT came out on top of all the MATs the Governing Board looked at – the others all had faults when considered by governors.

Q23: When appointing new teachers, are you going to be looking for qualified staff?

A23: JCR. We only have one unqualified teacher whose skills are excellent for the subject he instructs. For every other subject we always appoint qualified teachers.

Q24: You have a really good relationship with Harrington and Parklands – will that continue?

A24: There is no reason that this should change and it would be detrimental to stop it. We work closely with all our partner Primary Schools in many ways and hope to continue to do so.

Q25: Do the Governing Board make a decision on a majority vote?

A25. Mrs Ashley. Yes we do.

Mr Crofts concluded by thanking everyone for attending and reminding parents to use the consultation@ email address for any further questions or comments. He assured parents that this is a major decision for the future of Wilsthorpe School and its staff and students and will not be taken lightly.