



Governor Spotlight June 2019

As you are aware on Monday 20th May 2019, as part of the academisation process, we held three parent consultation meetings in order to offer parents and members of the community a chance to ask questions or share concerns surrounding Sutton Benger School's potential conversion to an academy.

Each meeting had the same format with members of the Governing body, the School and DBAT offering their perspective of the journey so far followed by a Q&A.

Below is a summary from the meetings. Each question is in Bold with the answer below.

If you were not able to make the meetings but have any questions please contact us on admin@suttonbenger.wilts.sch.uk

James Passmore Joint Chair of Governors

Explained that academies are government funded schools independent of the local authority. Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) are groups of academies with a central board of Directors. Despite some horror stories that appear in the press most MATs work well and there is now more accountability to the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC). In the South West 45% of primary schools and 80% of secondary schools are academies. Some local authorities across the country have persuaded schools to find a MAT to join. The Governing Body have been looking at the question for the last 4/5 years and gave an initial presentation to parents and staff in November 2017 outlining the benefits. The advantages of joining a MAT are that it provides more support and security as local authority services contract owing to financial cuts. The governors have looked at a number of other MATs and believe that DBAT offers the best fit for the school. This is partly because of DBAT's record of providing support on school improvement and its emphasis on collaborative working. As a VA school DBAT's strong Christian ethos fits with Sutton Benger's (SB). If the school converts it will not change its name, uniform, the times of the day or its holidays. JP explained the process the Governing Body has gone through to decide it wished to become an academy and to join DBAT. Many meetings have taken place with DBAT staff. Teachers have visited DBAT schools with positive feedback. DBAT has already provided the school with support in various ways. School improvement support is needed at SB especially after our recent OFSTED inspection.

Luke Madison Executive Headteacher (LM)

Described his own school South Marston (SM) and why it joined the Trust. SM is a small village school on the outskirts of Swindon. He came to feel he had less in common with the large urban primary schools and more with the schools in DBAT. The first changes were largely back office. The real positive is the level of challenge. 3 core visits from the School Improvement Officer (SIO). They are full day visits, very detailed and intense which involve paired observation of lessons and the scrutiny of children's work. Mr Maddison expressed that he felt these were more detailed than local authority visits. Can request further visits at no extra cost to the school. Wiltshire Council (WC) still provides some support but not to the same degree as it used to. Mutual support between schools and collaborative working is very strong. An example of a TA supporting a pupil in another school because of their specific skills was given. There are some cost savings because of economies of scale. He organised joint staff training where a maths consultant was bought in for 4 schools to benefit from. An individual school could not have afforded it. Collaborative working is a requirement generally, these days, not an option. A joint training day for the Trust each year brings the staff of all schools together.



Alistair Pickering Chief Operating Officer for DBAT

Explained the geography and make-up of the Trust. Currently the number of schools is 11 primary schools with a new secondary school opening in September 2019 and 2 more new primary schools in the next 2 years. These are divided into 2 clusters: 3 large city schools in Bristol and the other smaller schools in North Wiltshire and Swindon. It is an exciting time for the Trust with a new dynamic CEO. DBAT's philosophy is about autonomy and identity. It has a family approach allowing each school to maintain its own identity and retain a lot of autonomy while getting the support to improve. The Trust is changing. It has a small central team but is improving the support it can offer and reducing costs. For example, it has procured a much better HR service at a reduced cost. Funding is a challenge for all schools especially at the moment. It is easier to address this as a group where there is the flexibility to provide a safety net for individual schools within the Trust.

Jez Piper CEO of DBAT spoke at the last 2 meetings but not the first.

The Trust is about being a family. Our schools are your children. It is important to us to keep that approach. The Directors want to know more from staff and parents in its academies about what they want as DBAT moves forward. It is a larger organisation with everyone working to the same aim. Jez has been in the school a lot working with staff. Ofsted has given an element of direction but where does the school want to go in the longer term? How can the Trust link these together and find the resources and support to make progress?

Questions

Would we still order things ourselves e.g. stationary?

DBAT has delegated responsibility for this to schools. Schools have the autonomy to do their own ordering.

Are all the schools in DBAT primaries?

Currently yes, but DBAT's first secondary school is opening in September 2019.

How big is DBAT?

2,800 pupils

Are numbers capped?

No. There is a balance to be struck between size that brings more resources and keeping the personal family approach. DBAT has not defined an ideal number of schools/pupils.

What are the disadvantages?

(LM) there is only so much time in the day. Does not see some other Swindon heads as much as before. But then he has less in common with them.

Is funding more secure coming through the MAT than through the local authority?

Not really and the Trust cannot influence government decision, but it can get the most out of the money using central DBAT financial expertise to focus on using resources effectively.

As a small Trust do you have as much bargaining power as a local authority?

11 schools so not as massive as a local authority but by using national frameworks the Trust has been able to secure efficiency and value for money. With 2800 pupils, the Regional Schools Commissioner would consider DBAT to be a medium size trust.

Is LA funding reduced when a school joins a MAT?

Yes, because there are fewer schools in it – funding goes to the MAT instead and is then passed on to the schools (in the same way as the LA would have done before).

**Does employment of staff change?**

Yes, there is a TUPE transfer of staff to the Trust. But conditions of service and pensions are safeguarded.

What's the feeling of the staff?

Staff & Governors have been to visit a DBAT school. Teachers in the schools were happy with the arrangement.

Business Managers have the opportunity to meet together share expertise and develop specialisms DBAT's focus is on developing and retaining staff. Opportunities are much greater for career progression especially for middle leaders.

Does Ofsted reduce inspections because some of the central functions being done by then Trust?

No. Ofsted do not inspect finance and admin in LA or Multi-Academy Trust schools. Central support allows school leaders to focus on improving teaching and learning rather than being bogged down in finance and administration. Schools in MATs continue to be inspected in exactly the same way as in LA schools.

Are there any Trusts that have failed?

Yes, there are horrors stories in the media, but the reality is that this is a tiny number when compared to Trusts nationally.

What happens to the schools in a Trust that fails?

Schools and Trusts are supported by the Government's Regional Schools Commissioners Office. In extreme circumstances where Trusts fail, schools have to be rebrokered into another Trust.

Do schools get taken back under the control of the LA.

No. There is much more scrutiny of Trusts now which means failure is less likely to happen. Trusts are scrutinised financially and educationally in terms of results etc by the RSC.

How does governance work?

Some Trusts centralise everything but DBAT maintains a Local Board of governors (another name for Governor Body) in each academy. There is a scheme of delegation which defines the roles and responsibilities of the Central Board and Local Board.

Isn't it an odd situation when amateurs are interposed between employee and employer?

Actually, Local Boards do lots of good service. DBAT is providing training for Local Board members e.g. on health and safety (and this is the same for LA schools where they have Governing Bodies).

When you send an application to the RSC what do they look for? Do they turn schools down or tell them to go to different Trusts?

You have to show what Trusts you have looked at and why you feel this is the right Trust. The Trust has to do the same. RSC will look at both and make a decision. Sometimes they will direct a school to join a different Trust to the one it wants. In this case RSC agreed that DBAT is the best Trust for SB.

When is the start date for conversion? Is it 1st October?

Yes, this is the planned conversion date - we are in the middle of the formal consultation stage at the moment. After this and TUPE it is for the governors to make a final decision.

What is DBAT's underpinning education philosophy? Slightly fearful of the timing. Will it interfere with addressing the issues raised in Ofsted?

The CEO of DBAT has a background in school improvement and has been a headteacher. Ofsted Report gives priorities. DBAT has already begun to support the school with this. It will also support how the school will progress in the bigger picture. DBAT has a standard approach to assessment which means there is consistency. The school will not lose its individual character but will be helped to make the progress it needs to.



Does the Trust have the capacity to support on maths?

Yes, the Trust and it can bring in additional resources

Have the Trust helped its existing schools to improve?

Of the 11 primaries, 2 are new so have just been inspected. 1 has been rated good and we are waiting for the report on the next one but expect it to be good. Of the 3 Bristol schools, 2 are special measures. One is now RI. Hopeful that one will be good based on internal assessment. The Trust intends that all schools will be good within 3 years. 3 intensive school improvement visits each year help to bring about improvement

Is there support for teachers?

Yes, huge amount of support. 1 person as the key contact with the school. They get to know all staff and are accessible to staff to provide support. They build relationships and build trust; foster collaboration between schools and link staff to people working in similar schools.

Do you (DBAT) plan further expansion?

SB would be 12th. The Deanery secondary academy will be 13th Talking to another school and have 2 new schools joining in the next 2 years. That will bring us to 16.

Do you have a growth aim or limit in mind?

No limit but there is a need to strike a balance. Bigger means more resources but it is important this does not make the Trust less personal. We constantly review this. Aiming for 3,000. Trust developing a model around hubs. Currently the Bristol cluster of 3 big schools and the N Wilts and Swindon Cluster of 8 schools. This approach can bring the Trust closer to it's schools. Working on school improvement and business teams. Also reviewing the structure to make sure it adapts to a changing picture.

Does DBAT provide capital?

There is devolved formula capital which provides each school with a small amount of money. Schools can bid for government funding. Assessed on security and health and safety grounds. Within the next year the Trust will hit 3,000 pupils and will then get a regular capital allocation given to the Trust by the Government. Then there will be an internal bidding and assessment process.

Questioner was asking about VA funding – will the school still have to contribute to capital investments (through LCVAP)?

This will stop once the school becomes an academy.

How much do schools have to contribute if they get government capital.

LM's successful bid for SM saw the school contribute only 1K to a bid for 60K. No strict guidance on level of contribution a school should make – this is done on a case by case basis.

Do we cease being a VA school

In terms of status, Governance and SIAMS we remain VA. SB becomes an academy within the Trust.

How will things feel after 1st October?

No real difference for parents and children. Behind the scenes will see more support for teachers and an improvement in teaching and learning. Structures behind the scenes change. Preparation has already begun so there will not be a big difference for the staff. Important it is not a big shock. Support for staff before conversion. More accountability and financial reporting after conversion. More support from officers who will be more visible.



How does it work with supporting the governors? This was mentioned in the Ofsted Report

DBAT will do an audit of governance and put together a programme of support based on their needs. Directors and officers attend governors' meetings. If needed the Trust will put together a support plan to get governance back on track. Officers have the knowledge to support the Local Board.

How has it benefited children at SM, how would it benefit the children at SB?

(LM) If you improve the teaching this will improve the learning of the children.

Has it improved SM?

Yes. The school was good before but is better now.

The Trust enables schools to develop the curriculum that suits them best. Not tied to National Curriculum and so can adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of pupils. Tadpole Farm (TF) has a different curriculum based on experiential learning. Huge gains in understanding and outcomes have proved this is a really good model.

Does the Trust use that model in every school?

No, the model does not fit in every single school.

Whole process of curriculum change is about what is best for the children. This model worked at TF where it started from a whole school approach in a new school. In a different school it needs to be introduced in a different way. It must be done so it meets the needs of the children.

How do you choose which school to use this model in and which classroom?

It is important to have a look at TF to see how the model works. but also see what works at SB. Most people want to use the most effective learning strategies so there is normally no need to compel them to. An example is the White Rose maths school. This has been trialled in some schools and is now being picked up across the Trust because it works. The Trust has been involved in whole process.

AP responding to the question how the children benefit from a business perspective. Funding a restructured business team across schools charged to maximise the level of resource to go into the classroom benefits teaching and learning. Cutting costs as a Trust on admin and finance can free resources for learning.

How does it work? Do the funds get pooled?

Money comes to Trust which takes a central contribution and pass it to the individual academies.

Is it more or less than from LA?

Finance is similar. It is about providing better quality for the money.

Does each school keep its own pot of money?

Yes, DBAT does not centralise all funds like some MATs. The Trust's Board has to sign off budgets. Schools retain autonomy, but the Trust brings more capacity and can act much more quickly than a local authority.

How is funding calculated?

Stays the same (as it is under LA control) based on pupil numbers. More challenging for smaller schools. Saving centrally is a benefit. A school in a Trust is part of a bigger organisation. The Trust can support fragility in an individual school. Provides a safety net. Helps with consistency. Schools across the Trust are using similar systems. This makes it easier to work together more efficiently. There are opportunities for children to work together across the Trust. Inner city Bristol and Chippenham schools can visit each other. Combined residentials can make them more affordable for smaller schools while offering pupils a wider experience.



If the consultation is successful. what are the plans for future leadership of the school?

Mr Maddison's secondment at SB is currently in place until the end of August 2019. Governors are working on confirming the leadership for September 2019 at the moment. If conversion is successful, Governors and DBAT will work together to plan and communicate the leadership structure for the future.

Do other schools have Exec Head or Head of school

Bristol schools are larger and have a headteacher. Small schools tend to use executive heads, to benefit from their experience and to support budget management.

Do they come from within the Trust?

Varies. The Trust has used different approaches to get the best person

Is LM paid by DBAT or school (currently)

There is a Service Level Agreement. 3 days at SM 2 days in SBN.

Can we spread the resource saved back into SB?

The executive head role is flexible not set days but proportional to need. The Trust always back fill in the schools affected. Mr Maddison is an academy Principal for DBAT; SB is a Wiltshire school. So, it has to be a temporary arrangement until that difference is resolved.

If we do not join what is plan B?

Staying as an LA school is the fallback position because SB would be a maintained school. It would remain under the control of WC but look to outsource the additional school improvement support it needs through local Teaching School Alliances and/or DBAT.

Why not do that anyway and work in a joined-up way?

The Hobbes Alliance was a loose partnership and when time pressures mount the working together gets lost. If collaboration is informal it tends to fall away and is harder to maintain. That is why the Trust is better because collaboration is an obligation. There are much higher levels of accountability to ensure that school improvement work takes place.

How long SM been an academy?

Since Nov 2016.

Is support still there?

Yes, and has increased. Much more collaborative work now. At the start it was more in isolated pockets now there is much more collaborative work across the whole Trust.

What is the Ofsted rating of the schools in DBAT?

7 in N wilts good. 1 waiting judgement

2 schools in Bristol requires improvement and 1 is in special measures. 1 confident will be good at the next inspection.

How long have they been in the Trust?

Bristol schools were forced to join because there were put into special measures. They are all on a journey from special measures. One joined in 2012 moved to good and back to RI. One joined in 2014 in significant special measures and is expected to be good at the next inspection. The final one joined in 2017 again in special measures.

How is teacher turnover in those schools?

As schools improve there is less turnover. Consistency of staffing helps improvement. Each school has a single point of contact from the Trust but also access to other members of the team. Need to know all the staff and to know pupils.



The key is to build up trust and have discussions about where they are. Make sure the key link knows everyone. Staff can email CEO and will get an answer. That would not happen with WC. Heads are also mutually supportive.

What support has LM had from WC?

2 weeks ago, we just started to get some support. There has been a huge amount of support in the past but much less so now due to lack of capacity. When Wiltshire were asked for help in appointing an executive head they were unable to recommend anyone. The Trust immediately offered 3 potential candidates, one of which was secured – Mr Maddison.

Is it going to become very much more religious? Will RE take up more time?

Nature of the school will not change. Vision and values will not change.
It will remain a Church school as an academy or a maintained school.

How does DBAT benefit from SB joining?

SB does lots of good things. The Trust has the understanding and experience to support SB to develop best practice to model and use in other schools. There is lots of good practice at SB, and a strong ethos and family feel. DBAT are hoping SB will join to be part of a wider network of sharing expertise

What drives the CEO of DBAT?

Finding the best quality education for all. All DBAT schools have a curriculum that meets needs of all children and is best suited to them, so they thrive within a strong Christian ethos. Serving communities is the key.

Is DBAT run for profit?

No – all reserves go back into education.

How long will it take to improve SB?

Some schools have been on a long journey.
On conversion DBAT look at a 3-year journey. Once all the systems are in place the journey should not take so long. The expectation is that SB's journey should not be too long.

How will parents know?

The Trust is looking to improve how it communicates with parents. In addition to communications from the school, parents will have regular updates from the Trust. Data on results will also give evidence of progress. Trust's intention is to communicate on a fairly regular basis.

Have there been previous discussions with teachers

Teachers, parents and governors have all been involved and will continue to be involved. Teachers have been able to speak to governors about their views. The process has been going for 4 to 5 years. There have been lots of opportunities to look around and visit DBAT schools.

Do we want the school to remain very similar to what we have currently at SB?

We want the feel of the school to stay the same but with improved outcomes and teaching and learning. The CEO has spoken to staff without governors. He has had free and open conversations, and these will continue.