

Notes of a meeting with staff members at Thornaby Community School on 10 September

17 members of staff attended along with the substantive and interim headteachers and representatives of staff unions and professional associations.

Local authority officers present:

Julia Morrison (JM - Assistant Director/Head of Schools and Complex Needs)

Sally Walton (Senior Adviser)

Paul Hiser (PH - Human Resources Manager)

John Hegarty (JH - Planning & Policy Development Officer)

Kirsty Watt (BSF Communications Officer)

Representatives of proposed Academy sponsors present:

Lynne Parker (LP - Teesside University)

Martin Clinton (MC – Stockton Sixth Form College)

Sujinder Sangha (SS – Stockton Riverside College).

Q. How will policies and protocols across the secondary school estate be the same?

A. JM - Stockton schools already agree to implement the same strategic level policies relating to inclusion, discipline etc. This would continue with the introduction of the academy.

Q. How do you know the new Principal will agree to this?

A. JM –The sponsors will be looking for a Principal who will build on the good work on-going now and implement the same Campus Stockton policies.

Q. But there can't be any guarantees this will happen can there?

A. JM - Yes there can as the sponsors guarantee this will happen.

LP – We share your views about the impressive work that is going on and we will want to continue this and it would be unreasonable not to. The Principal will be appointed on the basis that they continue the good work and the Academy Governing body will ensure that this happens.

MC – We have a collective Campus Stockton vision and the Academy ethos is based on this therefore the Academy Principal must progress this.

Q. Why can't we keep Outwood Grange on?

A. JM - We have a one year contract with Outwood Grange. They will put into place systems and training which will allow you to cope without them. We want to become as strong as the Outwood schools.

Q. But it is personalities that make it work...

A. Robert Tarn (TCS interim Head) - We won't have done our job if you don't feel you can carry on without us.

Q. If the decision to close the school isn't made what would happen?

A. JM – At the Strategy for Change Part 2 stage we were told that we needed to make radical changes to the three schools below the threshold. This means that if we say no we will put all of the borough's BSF funding at risk.

Q. Why go through a consultation process if the decision has already been made?

A. JM – By law a statutory consultation process must take place. As a leader of strategy I have to make recommendations to Cabinet. £180 million is the most significant opportunity the borough has ever had. To gain this opportunity we have to make a radical change to improve those schools below the 30% threshold. Coupled with that is the issue of dramatically falling rolls. By 2014/15 we will have 3000 fewer students across the borough and we have to build an estate to deal with this. We are an ambitious Council and in terms of regeneration we want to do something that will raise aspirations. 500 pupils living in Thornaby currently go to schools outside Thornaby and we think the introduction of an Academy could turn this around. However, Cabinet will listen to all arguments put forward during the consultation when deciding whether to issue the statutory public notice. Similarly, the Council's Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Cllr Alex Cunningham and the Council's Corporate Director for Children, Education and Social Care, Jane Humphreys will take all views into consideration when making the final decision.

Q. Why do we need a radical change? I am confident we will meet the 30% threshold next year.

A. JM – I share your confidence but unfortunately it is too late as the process will have moved on.

Q. Will staff TUPE across on current salaries or future salaries?

A. PH – When TCS closes staff will TUPE across on their existing terms and conditions as of 31st August 2010. However, the Academy may review its staffing structure in future to meet their needs.

Q. If there is a change in Government is there a chance that new school wouldn't be an Academy?

A. JM – No, the Conservatives want more Academies.

Q. Could we have more information about what the sponsors have in mind?

A. LP – We have completed the Expression of Interest stage which means we have shown we are capable sponsors. The Expression of Interest document will be available on the DCSF website. This outlines the sponsors' vision for the Academy. We are now at the feasibility stage which includes consultation which will start in mid-October. At this point we will be able to provide more information.

JM – The Local Authority is responsible for conducting the closure consultation and the sponsors are responsible for a separate consultation about the establishment of an Academy.

MC (Stockton Sixth Form College) – Stockton Sixth Form College wouldn't be involved if we didn't trust the other sponsors. We want the young people of Thornaby to get a good deal and we are impressed by staff saying that what is in place now is working and we would be silly not to build on this.

Q. Do you think we will be in a position to leave Outwood and go it alone in ten months? We want the chance to become an outstanding school.

A. JM – when the time comes sponsors will have discussions with Outwood Grange. Hard work won't be wasted and the sponsors are committed to it continuing.

Q. – Will the sponsors recognise the Trade Unions?

A. LP – we will work with all unions.

JM – the local authority already meets the unions on a monthly basis and is committed to continuing to work with the unions.

Notes of a public drop-in session at Thornaby Community School on 10 September

Local authority officers present:

Julia Morrison (Assistant Director/Head of Schools and Complex Needs)

Sally Walton (Senior Adviser)

Richard Pratt (Human Resources Manager)

John Hegarty (Planning & Policy Development Officer)

Kirsty Watt (BSF Communications Officer)

Parent and Pupil

Q. Will Outwood Grange continue to be involved?

A. Outwood Grange has a one year contract. The school is making very good progress. Outwood Grange aim to train staff so that this progress isn't lost.

Q. Will Mrs Russell-Bond be coming back?

A. She is still the Headteacher at the moment. She is on secondment.

Q. Will staff have a say in who the new Head will be?

A. They will be consulted but the Academy sponsors will appoint the Principal.

Q. What changes will it mean? Why does it have to change?

A. Continuity will be maintained where possible. At the moment fewer than 20% of students achieve GCSE A*-C grades including English and maths.

C. But that is because it is a non-selective school and this is not taken into account.

A. The Local Authority has to follow the Government threshold targets. It is a Council priority to ensure 'Every Child Matters.' At the moment too many students at TCS are underachieving. All schools in the borough are non-selective.

C. This school is good. Children and staff are willing to work and the new people (Outwood Grange) are really good.

A. We need to do something quickly to raise standards. CVA measures the difference between achievement at the end of primary school and the end of secondary school. TCS has the lowest CVA score in the borough.

Q. When the Academy is formed could another language be offered?

A. The sponsors may decide this. Once diplomas are introduced from the age of 14 pupils could chose to study a course offered at another school in the borough. They could do this in the Academy building or actually travel to another school for that particular subject. This means there will be more opportunities.

Q. Where will the new building be constructed?

A. On this site but we are not exactly sure where yet. Once the new building is constructed all of the Academy pupils will move into it. St Patrick's pupils will then move into the TCS building while their school is remodelled. Once St Patrick's is complete their pupils will move back to their remodelled building and the existing TCS building will be demolished and replaced with playing fields.

Q. What is this about using the Pavilion facilities?

A. This would only be a temporary measure until the TCS building is demolished and replaced with playing fields.

Q. What will happen to the current staff?

A. They can choose to transfer to the Academy on their existing terms and conditions. However, if they don't want to transfer they will be deemed to have resigned and won't get any redundancy.

C. I think that is unfair.

A. That section of the consultation paper is written by the Council's HR department and it is the law.

Q. Where will the money for the Academy come from?

A. The money will come to the school directly from Government.

Q. Will the Academy sponsors speak to us?

A. Yes in around mid-October.

Q. So parents will have a say in whether or not they want an Academy?

A. They will be consulted.

Q. Has the decision already been made?

A. No, the decision will be taken between the Government and the sponsors.

Q. Is there any concern that the sponsors may pull out?

A. No. We have carefully selected sponsors who have a record of commitment to Stockton-on-Tees.

Chair of Eastern Area Partnership Board

C. Need to ensure young people engage vocationally in a non-traditional learning environment.

C. Need to ensure the school is embedded in the community.

C. Could help to engage young people in E2E earlier.

C. The Business and Enterprise specialism is extremely positive.

Concerns expressed by a parent in a telephone call

More change may affect my child going into GCSE year.

Why has the school day changed to end at 2.30pm and will the sponsors continue this?

Why create a new building when the current one isn't very old?

The consultation paper says that parents can apply to other schools in the borough but the popular schools have no spaces.

Residents near the school site would want to know exactly where the new building would be situated.

How will anything change if the same staff remain at the Academy?

Consultation meetings relating to Blakeston School and The Norton School

A collaborative meeting held on 7 September

The two headteachers and members of the governing bodies of the two schools held a joint meeting with representatives of the local authority and proposed Academy sponsors .

Julia Morrison (Assistant Director/Head of Schools and Complex Needs) outlined the need for a statutory consultation process and gave the meeting sight of the consultation papers before their general distribution. She described the proposed model of Academy sponsorship and informed governors that the Expression of Interest had been approved by government on 4 September 2009.

Mrs Morrison explained the rationale for the Academy proposal, timescales involved and implications for staff. She confirmed that the Local Authority would work very closely with both schools and support the staff accordingly,

A question and answer session followed.

Q. Is it worth making comments on the proposals or had the decision already be taken?

A. Cllr Cunningham confirmed that there was a legal obligation to consider and understand all comments made prior to a decision being reached.

Q. Would the Governing Bodies of the two schools remain separate until the potential closure?

A. The two Governing Bodies would remain separate until a closure decision was implemented. It was hoped that the collaborative working party would continue to meet during that period. If closure is approved, a temporary Governing Body will be formed.

Q. How would the Local Authority support the schools during the transition process?

A. Mrs Morrison stated that both schools currently received support through National Challenge, and this would continue. Although no financial support was available, both schools would receive support in terms of human resources.

Q. Would the situation have been different if both schools had achieved the 30% floor target in terms of GCSE standards?

A. Falling rolls meant that the current situation could no longer be maintained.

Q. Could residents in Roseworth be assured of a sports facility at Blakeston?

A. A sports facility would remain at Blakeston.

Q. When would a Principal for the Academy be appointed?

A. The post would be advertised in mid-October, subject to the outcome of the consultation process. A Principal could then be appointed at Christmas. A notice period of 1 term would be required, with the new Principal taking up the post at Easter. This would enable them to be in post two terms prior to the opening of the Academy.

Q. Who would appoint the Principal?

A. The sponsors would appoint the Principal.

Q. Will the current Headteachers remain in post until the closure of the two schools?

A. Yes.

Q. Would the Academy opening mid-year create issues of curriculum continuity for the students?

A. This was something that would need to be carefully managed by the Principal designate, with a shared leadership model across both sites.

Notes of a meeting with staff members at Blakeston School on 14 September

Approximately 50 members of staff attended along with representatives of staff unions and professional associations.

Local authority officers present:

Julia Morrison (JM - Assistant Director/Head of Schools and Complex Needs)

Sally Walton (Senior Adviser)

Paul Hiser (PH - Human Resources Manager)

Lionel Danby (LD – BSF Project Director)

Kirsty Watt (BSF Communications Officer)

Representatives of proposed Academy sponsors present:

Jackie White (JW - NHS Stockton-on-Tees)

Martin Clinton (MC – Stockton Sixth Form College)

Sujinder Sangha (SS – Stockton Riverside College).

JM outlined the statutory process of consultation and decision-making required where a school is proposed for closure. She described the shared vision of the local authority and the proposed Academy sponsors.

Q. Will continuous local government employment be maintained when staff TUPE across to the Academy?

A. Yes.

Q. If the Support Staff Negotiating Body is in place at the point of transfer will staff transfer on the conditions set by them or on the current terms and conditions?

A. If the Support Staff Negotiating Body starts in 2010 staff will transfer on those conditions. We have agreed that TUPE will apply.

Q. Who will be on the Academy Trust?

A. The sponsors.

Q. Will there be any staff representation?

A. Not on the Trust but there is likely to be some on the Governing Body.

Q. Will the Trust change the terms and conditions?

A. No

Q. Will our conditions be the same on the 1st January as they were on 31st December?

A. Yes.

Q. What happens to pay and conditions where there are two heads of department?

A. There is protection in place. This would ensure salary protection for three years. All staff will transfer on 1st January and the Principal and Trust will develop a suitable staffing structure.

Q. If the Head of English doesn't get the Head of English position would they become a classroom teacher?

A. We can't answer this yet as we don't know what the new staffing structure will be. The Academy may not have Heads of Department.

Q. Do you envisage there being interviews for all new posts?

A. We can't answer this as yet.

Q. Do Academies only have to offer the core curriculum and their specialism?

A. Academies do have to offer the core and the specialism but there are flexibilities. The curriculum can be influenced to cater for individual aspirations. The Campus Stockton arrangement would allow children to access courses at other schools and colleges if they wished to do so.

Q. Would Academy staff follow pupils to other schools?

A. No, you would still teach your subject at the Academy so students from other schools could access your courses.

Q. Will the school day change?

A. We don't know as yet. However, staff will transfer on their existing terms and conditions.

Q. Is there a possibility that pupils may travel across both sites when the Academy is established in the existing Blakeston and Norton School buildings?

A. We don't know as yet. This is something that the Principal will decide. This will be discussed in November/December of this year.

Q. Will we lose our sports specialism?

A. It will be within the health and well-being theme.

Q. Does that mean the sports facilities won't be as good in the new building?

A. It will be a brand new building which you will help to design. It will have strong facilities to support the specialism and they will be inferior to what you have here. We are also committed to retaining the gym and playing fields at the existing Blakeston site for community use.

Q. The consultation paper states that "where possible staff will TUPE across" What if there aren't sufficient vacancies?

A. If that were the case it would mean redundancy. However, we hope that every school in the borough will agree to a staffing protocol which will mean Blakeston and the Norton staff are given prior consideration for any positions which may arise.

Notes of a public drop-in session at Blakeston School on 14 September

Local authority officers present:

Julia Morrison (Assistant Director/Head of Schools and Complex Needs)

Sally Walton (Senior Adviser)

Lionel Danby (BSF Project Director)

Richard Pratt (Human Resources Manager)

John Hegarty (Planning & Policy Development Officer)

Kirsty Watt (BSF Communications Officer)

2 Parents

Q. How will students get to the new Academy? Parents send their children here because it is a local school.

A. The new site is less than a mile away.

C. The proposed site of the new school isn't in a safe area. I wouldn't want my daughter walking through that area.

A. Safe walking, cycle and green travel routes will be provided and policies will be put in place to ensure travel concerns are addressed.

Q. Why can't this school be extended?

A. It is too close to Bishopsgarth.

Q. Why can't the Academy wait until the new school is built?

A. Despite recent gradual improvements and the hard work of staff and pupils we have to do something quickly to raise standards.

Q. Will our children have to travel to the Norton?

A. We can't answer that as that will be up to the Academy Principal and Governing Body to decide. However, this would only happen if it would benefit the young people.

Q. Can the amalgamation be stopped?

A. A decision hasn't been made. This is a formal statutory consultation process about the proposed closure.

C. I want to lodge an objection.

Q. Can you apply for other schools?

A. Yes, if there are places.

C. We chose to live here so our children could walk to school and take part in after-school activities. You are taking the school away from the area and I've got concerns about the reputation of the area where the new school will be built.

A. Major regeneration is planned for the area including new private and social housing, a new youth facilities called My Place is being built on the same site as the new Academy, Tilery Primary is due to be upgraded through the Primary Capital Programme and the gateway roads into Stockton will be redeveloped.

Q. How will standards be maintained?

A. It is paramount that every child reaches their full potential. The sponsors will carry out a feasibility study to ensure standards are maintained. We need to introduce some change in order to improve however there are also a lot of good elements here that we would want to continue. The sponsors will work with the school to maintain improvement and the Academy will provide a flexibility that isn't available at the moment.

Q. Will all staff transfer?

A. All permanent staff will transfer across.

Q. Will there be a new Head?

A. Yes.

1 Parent, 2 Year 10 pupils and 1 primary pupil

Q. How will these changes affect next year's GCSE students?

A. What is happening now will continue. You shouldn't notice much change.

Q. Will any changes made have an effect?

A. Any changes will be made to bring about improvement. If there is a change it will be about how learning is organised and will be for the better. There will be little noticeable change for exam students.

Q. Will the uniform change?

A. Yes, at the point the Academy is established across two sites. However, there is likely to be some transition for those in Year 11.

Q. Will the teachers be different?

A. All staff will become Academy staff and any change will be thought about carefully.

Parent/resident

Q. Is the school definitely closing?

A. Blakeston School and the Norton School are proposed for closure subject to consultation. The Academy will initially be formed in the existing school buildings and the Academy Trust will decide how this will operate.

Q. What will happen to the Blakeston site?

A. The sports facilities and playing fields will be retained. The school buildings will be taken down. Only the amount equivalent to the footprint of the school buildings can be sold for development.

Q. Where will the admission zone be?

A. Parents have a level of choice now and can apply to any school provided that there are places available.

Q. Will pupils have to reapply for places?

A. No they will automatically transfer.

Written comment received from a parent

I am very disappointed to hear that Blakeston School is going to be replaced by an Academy. Both my husband, elder daughter and myself have attended this school and I have a younger daughter that would be attending in 2012 but now we have to consider her attending another school that is not close to where we live. I'm sure that we are not the only parents that are in this position and would like to know if this is going to happen or if it is still being considered. My daughter is upset that she may not be going to Blakeston as it is only a 5 min walk from where we live and I would prefer her to go there and not have to get a bus or rely on lifts. I think that there will be a lot of parents who agree with me as Blakeston School is a good school and is in a prime location.

Notes of a meeting with staff members at The Norton School on 15 September

Approximately 50 members of staff attended along with representatives of staff unions and professional associations.

Local authority officers present:

Julia Morrison (JM - Assistant Director/Head of Schools and Complex Needs)

Sally Walton (Senior Adviser)

Paul Hiser (PH - Human Resources Manager)

Lionel Danby (LD – BSF Project Director)

Kirsty Watt (BSF Communications Officer)

Representatives of proposed Academy sponsors present:

Jackie White (JW - NHS Stockton-on-Tees)

Martin Clinton (MC – Stockton Sixth Form College)

Sujinder Sangha (SS – Stockton Riverside College).

JM outlined the statutory process of consultation and decision-making required where a school is proposed for closure. She described the shared vision of the local authority and the proposed Academy sponsors.

Q. Why is the Academy proposed to open in January rather than September?

A. We thought September would be too soon as joining two schools to form an Academy is more complex than replacing one school with an Academy.

Q. Will the Principal designate be based at one of the existing schools when they are appointed?

A. The Principal designate will take up post in September 2010 and will probably be based in Council buildings until the Academy opens.

Q. Will our terms and conditions be secure?

A. Everyone with a permanent contract will have the right to transfer on their existing terms and conditions. At some stage in the future the Academy may review their staffing structure as any school would. The proposed capacity of the Academy is 1050. The new building is likely to be ready in September 2013. Between January 2010 and September 2013 the Academy would operate across both existing school sites. The Principal will work with the leadership team to develop a staffing structure. We want the Academy to be part of the family of Stockton schools and not sit outside it.

Q. Could the Principal use the run-in period to develop a staffing structure and restructure on the 2nd January?

A. They could potentially develop a staffing structure but this would require consultation and the consultation couldn't start until January 2011.

Q. When would interviews take place?

A. We don't know as yet as it is too early in the process.

Q. People are concerned about their job security. When will we know for certain?

A. We don't know as this is something that will be discussed during the feasibility stage. Everyone will transfer on their existing terms and conditions other than agency staff and those on fixed-term contracts. We will be in a position to say more by mid-October.

Q. Will staff have to have another interview?

A. You don't need to be interviewed to transfer. There may be a need for interviews if the Principal develops a new staffing structure which may include changes to designation.

Q. If there are two heads of department will the position go to interview?

A. We don't know yet.

Q. What would happen if that were the case?

A. If there were interviews for one post and it was ring fenced the unsuccessful candidate would get salary protection for three years. It is likely that they would be offered a position incorporating duties that would be to the value of the salary that they would continue to receive.

Q. Will there be any redundancy packages?

A. The Council doesn't have a budget for this. The Trustees would need to discuss if they had a budget for redundancy packages.

Q. When will the Governing Body be in place?

A. The Trust appoints the Principal and establishes the Governing Body which is likely to have parent, teacher etc representation. The Trust will appoint a temporary Governing Body in the run up to the Academy opening. Members of the existing Governing Bodies could become members of the temporary Governing Body.

Q. Could staff be relocated?

A. We are developing a staffing protocol which we hope the Governing Bodies of all schools will sign up to. It will ensure that Blakeston and the Norton staff are given prior consideration for vacancies at other schools in the borough if they are displaced in future.

Q. What if the other schools' Governing Bodies don't agree to this? Would this mean we wouldn't have any priority?

A. Yes, but we expect it will work like it did with the Northfield-Campus amalgamation.

Q. If we became surplus to requirements at the Academy and there were no vacancies at other schools would we be made redundant?

A. Yes but we hope this won't happen. The Academy will have a capacity of 1050 and will need staffing.

Q. Where will the pupils come from?

A. Firstly from the two existing schools. At the moment significant numbers of students travel out of North Stockton to other schools in the borough. We want to create an Academy that will attract these students back.

Q. If numbers continue to fall when the academy opens across the two existing buildings do you envisage closing one of the sites?

A. The projected numbers don't suggest this will happen.

Q. Will the facilities at the new school be better than what we have now?

A. Staff and pupils will be involved in the design of the new building. It will be brand new and state of the art. We are working closely with Neil Russell to identify the sports offer and see how best to spread this offer across the borough. It won't be possible to have all facilities at all schools.

Q. Does this mean students will have to travel to other schools?

A. A core offer has been identified with the borough's headteachers and a broader spread has been incorporated into this. The Academy won't be able to deliver a strong health and well-being theme without good sports facilities.

Q. How will the green agenda be supported if some pupils will travel between schools?

A. It depends on how they travel.

Q. Two communities will be brought together - will work take place to ensure they are integrated successfully?

A. Yes, that is why we wanted more lead up time. We also want the new building to be on a completely different site to aid this. The Tilery site is being proposed as it is already owned by the local authority so is free to use (BSF money can't be used to purchase land,) it supports the regeneration plans for the northern area of Stockton and is in the right position with Bishopsgarth in the west and the Academy in the east.

Q. Will people in Tilery be involved?

A. Yes, as part of the planning process.

Q. Do you envisage that staff and pupils could end up travelling between sites?

A. The Principal Designate will decide this.

Q. Will increased resource become available when the schools become an Academy in the existing buildings or will this be held back until the new build?

A. The Academy funding stream will be available from January 2011. There are also different grants available and movable equipment will move to the new building with you.

Q. How will new uniform arrangements be managed from January 2011?

A. The Principal will discuss this and part of the grant will be used to subsidise this where necessary.

Q. Some departments have built up equipment. Will this move with us?

A. An audit will take place to identify what the school has and the condition it is in. If it is in good condition it will move with you.

Q. It seems that this process would have been helped if the two schools had agreed to federate. What is the LA's view about this?

A. We were disappointed that it didn't happen. However, we can revisit this with the Headteachers and Chairs of Governors if you would like us to.

Q. It seems that the closer the relationship between the two schools the easier the transition will be. Does the LA have the authority to enforce a federation?

A. No. Federation is a decision entirely for governing bodies.

Q. What will happen if a decision is made to close the schools but not open an Academy?

A. This would only happen if the Academy idea was rejected by the sponsors and by Government. The consultation will take place to explain the proposal but it will not be a referendum. If the Academy proposal is rejected we would have to hold a competition for a new school.

Q. How would that affect the closure date?

A. The closure date would be put back.

Q. How is the design of the building decided?

A. Partnerships for School (the national delivery agency for BSF and Academies) will require us to work with the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE). The Government will review the designs which are created with input from the school and suggest amendments. The design will then be taken to bidders for them to develop further. Staff, residents, pupils and planners will all be involved in developing the design.

Q. Could the PCT be represented in the school building or close to it?

A. JW - It could be an option if it supports our vision. We are keen to work with wards in Stockton to improve health and if it is a priority to put more resources into that area of Stockton we would commission it. Our involvement with the Academy also means we have a link into all schools in the borough.

Q. How confident are you that the new building will be ready by September 2013?

A. The LEP will be responsible for this. The BSF team has experience of working to timescales for this kind of project. We will have to work with national contractors, but we are confident that we can keep to that timescale.

Q. Will the regeneration of the north Stockton area be complete by 2013?

A. No. It is a long-term regeneration programme which will be completed in phases. Housing development on the Sarek joinery site is likely to happen soon. The My Place project will be complete about a year before the Academy. Tilery Primary is due to be upgraded through the Primary Capital Programme and the gateway roads into Stockton will be developed over a ten-year period.

Public drop-in session held at The Norton School on 15 September

A three-hour public session was advertised and attended by local authority officers. No parents, students or community members attended.