



PARENT FORUM MEETING NOTES

MEETING NOTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 28th November 2018 AT 18.00 IN THE LECTURE THEATRE

PRIORY GOVERNORS PRESENT: Tony Smith (TS), Gaydree Wrigley (GW), Graham Arr-Jones (GAJ), John Griffiths – Vice Chair of Governors (JG), Ken Caplan (KAC), Martin Penrose (MP)

APOLOGIES: Peter Colebourn (PC), Sarah Hinks (SHI), Sarah Roberts (SR), Susan Carpenter (SC) and Suzanne Howells (SH)

ALSO PRESENT: Emma Brinkhurst - Clerk

Karen Clinton (KC) - Acting Headteacher

Julian Ashworth (JA) - Deputy Headteacher

JG thanked parents for the large turn out to this Parent Forum. JG introduced himself as Vice Chair of the Governors (previous Chair of Governors for three years.) JG explained SR (the current Chair of Governors) has sent her apologies for this Parent Forum. Introductions were made of members of staff and Governors.

JG provided the parents with an update:

JG opened the meeting by celebrating the schools' outstanding GCSE results:

Priory's Maths and English results grade 4+ A-C 85% - whereas in East Sussex the average was 62%. Priory's Attainment 8 score was 58% and the progress score was a 3rd of a grade above average which meant in terms of outcomes Priory was the highest performing state school in East Sussex. JG explained that Priory has focussed on quality first teaching, recruiting and retaining high quality key subject specialists with degrees. The school had also responded well to the new GCSE specifications, with staff working hard to ensure they understood the important detail needed to support students.

JG then explained that the school continues to face a number of key challenges and the Governing Body has been focusing on securing the quality of provision in both the short and longer term. JG explained that the school is receiving more students who are less well adapted to the demands of secondary education; a small cohort of students who may have in the past not been in main stream education and would have attended special schools. Some of these students present complex challenges and consume significant amounts of school resources – alongside there being fewer of those resources available to help support these individual students. JG gave an example that it can take a several months to secure an Education Psychologist for a student, and once secured the resource is only available for a fixed amount of time. All the LEA resources that are available to schools feel to be at capacity, for example the Pupil Referral Unit in Eastbourne is full with a large number of excluded students making it harder for Priory to access this provision for intervention and preventative work.



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Set against this, Priory School has managed its budget well, but we are starting to use the modest surplus we have carried forward to support the current educational provision.

TS explained that the governors have been researching a range of scenarios to address the imminent pressures faced by the school. The governors have worked with the primary schools' governors and narrowed the options down to three:

- Remain as we are (Local Authority Maintained School) – the governors have had to assess our current situation and predict the likely pressures we could be under in a few years. TS explained he has always been supportive of the Local Authority and has previously been seconded to work for the LA. The reality is the Local Authority is facing increasing pressures to make financial savings and this has impacted on schools and if nothing changes it will get worse if the proposed Core Services Offer currently under review becomes a reality. The Local Authority are having to reduce and are proposing to reduce early help for families, deliver slower assessment of Special Educational Needs provision, deliver fewer (EHCP) Education Health and Care Plan annual reviews, reduce support for families at risk of social care intervention, reduce the current programme of support to improve schools and remove the school Clerking Service. East Sussex LA are required to make a £46 million saving over the next three years and the many of resources schools purchase from them are likely to no longer be available or to be of declining quality. We are aware that people are putting forward arguments about the protection provided by the Local Authority; however, with reduced resources the idea of greater protection is highly questionable.
- TS explained that the governors had explored what joining an established partnership/Multi Academy Trust (MAT) might look like, but this was felt to be inappropriate for our school and the Lewes community context. Some of the issues would include the fact that the schools would have to accept values already in place, adopt the practices of the chain, as well as lose a great deal of autonomy. Some of the larger chains such as Harris have an ethos which is very different to ours and not acceptable to us!
- A third option is to create our own bespoke Lewes schools MAT centred on the town and inclusive (hopefully) of all Lewes schools. This would allow us to develop our own vision, values and success criteria. This would be different to many of the chains and the trustees and members would be local. This would not bring in large amounts of additional funding for our schools but would enable the Lewes schools to use their current resources more effectively. The MAT would be locally accountable with local members/trustees who would have the responsibility to ensure the MAT delivers on the vision and values. The draft vision statements created by the research group are:
 - excellent teaching for all
 - support for families/support for learning
 - and a broad and balanced curriculum.



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Resources would be used to meet local needs. This is different from the LA who use resources to support all schools in the LA so some monies are, rightly, used to support schools in other parts of the LA. However, in times of tight resources we need to make better use of those resources we have for our students.

JG said he felt a potential Lewes MAT was radically different than that of other MAT's – based very much on a culture of working together to solve local problems through a locally accountable body.

GAJ explained that the Lewes Co-operative Learning Partnership (LCLP) was set up in 2014 and involved all local primary schools, with the exception of Wal lands/St Pancras, working together. Priory and Western Road are a Foundation Schools and own their land and buildings and employ their staff. While that model has worked very well to foster cooperation and good communication between the Lewes schools, limited resources of £2 per student has capped progress and moving to the next stage which requires more formal structures and commitments. When it was announced that Pell and Rodmell would close it was the LCLP that helped support the placement of students and staff. We all want every child to have the best access to education and support in our community.

Parents questions:

Q A parent said they are grateful for the work the school has done – is there any extra money – how is circle squared – can a MAT be taken over - if one school within the MAT fails does it pull the whole MAT down?

TS explained that one reason for considering a local MAT is that the responsibility to support local schools would sit with the MAT. The Regional School's Commissioner (RSC) would work with the MAT to help resolve the issues. The MAT has a responsibility to protect all of the local schools in the MAT and all the resources of the MAT can be brought to the aid of a school facing challenges. Currently, each school stands on its own.

Q In the press we hear of bad news in regard to MATs – could you give some names of good ones?

TS advised we have visited many MAT's in our research and seen several 'good' ones : we have hosted Evolve Trust, researched Inspiration Trust, visited Brook Learning Trust, visited Guildford Education Partnership and some primaries have liaised with Brighton University MAT; all of which have stronger schools supporting those in challenging circumstances.

Q Why cannot we carry on with the LCLP arrangements of sharing staff?

TS explained that if where we currently have staff working across schools, the 'risk' of employment sits with one school and long-term funding for say a specialist post is not secure. If a school decides to opt out of the purchase of their share of the staff time, the 'home school' has to carry the costs. If we were a MAT we could bring in specialist staff who could work across schools with long term financial security. Priory Staff are currently going into Wallands – and we know more of this support would be helpful, but we cannot employ more staff for this without a longer-term financial strategy in place. Another example is the Data Protection Officer who is employed by Priory. We know other schools would like to share this service, but it would be a large risk for Priory to increase the hours of our DPO without some form of financial security.



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Parents mentioned the cuts at the Music Service and felt this was effectively resisted. There are, however, many other services which have not been protected and EAL is now under threat.

A parent said children at another MAT take school holidays at different times to other schools which means parents can take children away at cheaper times is this something that could happen here?

TS said it is a possibility, but it does require consultation with parents and other stakeholders.

TS explained that staff from six Lewes schools attended a joint INSET day in November and this was the start of showing the potential of how we could work together.

JG mentioned that at previous Parent Forums he has spoken to parents about the research into MATs.

Q. Why don't schools do more to address the crisis?

JG reminded parents that the Headteachers had marched on Westminster to raise awareness of the lack of school funding, but the reality is that we are still facing reduced resources with no real longer term prospects for that to change on the horizon. JG said that he has also written to and met with, the local MP Maria Caulfield.

Parents raised concerns that once the MAT is created schools are removed from the community and removed from the Local Authority and parents.

Q What is the LEA top slice if resources are going to other parts of the LA such as Hastings?

TS said this is a complex question, but over the past 9 years we have seen LA priorities increase to support the challenging schools. What is a concern is the reduction in a number of services for example, the EALS (English as a Additional Language Service) is now under pressure as maintained secondaries decided to no longer pool resources. TS explained that Priory School have employed our own Student Support Officer as the resource provided through the Local Authority ESBAS (Education Support Behaviour and Attendance Service) was so stretched and ultimately of poor value.

Q A parent asked if the school is actively pursuing option three forming a Lewes MAT- what are your time scales?

It was said no decisions have been made as yet – no firm timeframes have been set as this is a complex process involving 6 schools and a great deal of work still needs to be done.

Parents mentioned one of the primary schools is holding a meeting after this session about the MAT and their letter to parents gave more information than Priory's and Priory's letter took a long time to come out which parents felt was causing anxiety amongst Priory parents.

Q Parents asked if there will be another meeting and will it be before Christmas as the other primary schools are holding theirs?

Yes, if we are going to pursue the MAT option another meeting will be held, but this will not be before Christmas as there is still a lot of work to be done and it is recognised that parents need to be provided with much more comprehensive and detailed information to consider. We will share information when we



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have firmer details to share with parents.

Parents asked if pros and cons of MATs have been looked into. It was mentioned that at Tuesday's public meeting it was said that if the government changes or there is a different Headteacher you can't reverse this decision, so parents are worried that they will be left with a MAT which might look very different in 5 to 10 years' time.

Parents mentioned that at the public meeting 75% of people who attended opposed the idea – parents thought 150 people must have been in attendance. Parents expressed worries that a MAT would create overheads, legal costs, management costs etc. Parents felt that a more business like model might not be the right option. Parents asked will you be asking teachers/staff what they think too.

It was explained that this was the start of the process and the governors had decided to share the work with staff first, hence the recent all Lewes schools INSET day.

Q Will option 3 be a PPE – registered charity which is privately run? A parent explained that in London they are aware of a MAT which is run like a business not an educational establishment. This London MAT delivered cost cutting by selling land – there was massive cuts to everything and it was profit making.

JG said a MAT would be a registered charity focused on delivering excellent education to its students - all the money will be spent on the children as that is the primary purpose of the MAT we have been researching.

Parents commented they feel they will have less accountability if the school become a MAT.

TS mentioned that if we stay with the Local Authority it is highly unlikely, we would have access to the resources we need. As the pressures filter down to school level more and more parents will approach schools to deal with issues. Already schools are approached about medical problems, including mental health issues, but schools do not have the resources so refer parents back to seeing their GP. Parents can be unhappy with this as they find securing appointments with external agencies (Drs etc) very difficult to make.

It was outlined that some of the pros from a Lewes centred MAT would be sharing resources/working together/Continuing Professional Development (CPD) like Priory have been doing with Wallands. The schools would like to work more closely and ensure improved services and processes (such as transition).

JA explained that in the current Year 11 cohort we have 70 students studying Latin, which is exceptional for a state school.

Q A parent of a child at Priory and a child at a primary school as well as being a teacher at Southover wanted to know if the MAT could safeguard the quality of teaching by ensuring qualified teachers will be employed, rather than non-qualified teachers (which has been a way some MATs have cut costs). It was felt the school might have the best intentions now, but what about in five years-time could schools failing be taken over?

TS advised that we want the MAT to be the employer of choice – we want specialists in front of our children. The MAT would not achieve educational excellence without qualified specialists. There are no advantages of using unqualified teacher.



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Q Parents asked if negatives of forming a MAT have been looked into as well as positives?

Parents said that Newhaven UTC failed.

It was explained that the pros and cons documents are not finished yet – these will be shared with the governing bodies and parents as soon as the research work is completed.

Q Parents asked if TS would share, in writing, the challenges the school face with the Local Authority and why these can't be overcome.

It was agreed that when the research is done and we are in a position to do this we will do it in writing to all stake holders.

TS drew attention to the current proposed Core Offer from the LA and urged parents to engage in this and to make comments – details are on ESSCC web site.

Q Do parents have the right to veto the decision?

No – governing bodies make the decision - a formal consultation will take place to gather views.

Q Parents asked if a ballot could be held on this?

It was said a ballot was not contemplated but a formal consultation to solicit all stakeholder views is a statutory requirement.

Parents asked if governing bodies could be told that the parents view is 'they would like a ballot'.

Commenting on the recent INSET Day JA said in the twenty-seven years he has been at the school he has never known all the schools to come together in one place like they did for the INSET day; it was a major achievement. JA felt some staff concerns have been addressed and some staff are more confident – but not everybody. JA felt this is a good opportunity to work together to solve some of the complex challenges we all face. One example JA outlined was with the teaching of languages in the primary schools. In Year 6 there is no consistent language provision across the partnership of Lewes schools, so in Year 7 Priory the school has to effectively start again with teaching French and German to ensure all at least start with a good foundation in the languages. Under a MAT the curriculum could be more clearly identified to avoid this duplication for some students. With the Ebacc curriculum languages are an essential part of the secondary school curriculum.

KC explained that Priory has been actively involved in a range of work with the Primary Schools as part of the Teaching School Alliance work. KC explained that there is now a lot more collaborative work across the schools.

Parents felt that communications have excluded parents and that the consultation is only going to happen as it is a statutory requirement.



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A Parent mentioned they have been through three consultations in Yorkshire. It was mentioned perhaps an IT solution could be used to give parents information on the MAT i.e. a website. It was expressed that there is a risk that only extreme views get heard. Keeping talking so not to divide the town was felt to be key.

Q Why a MAT and why can't the LCLP continue?

The LCLP is a soft federation and a MAT is a hard federation which has several advantages. As outlined earlier the LCLP has too many limitations to allow the provision of the services we desire to deliver.

Q A parent had a worry that the LCLP had many of the attributes and ambitions of the proposed MAT i.e. skill sharing, unlocking doors and joint training. At the start of LCLP, Western Road was not always positive.

The Vice Chair says 'the structure is not so relevant, but it is important to secure the right people as trustees and members'.

One parent commented that if people knew more about Brexit they may have voted differently. Regarding consultations, in the parent's opinion and they had been involved in them for over 20 years) was that the views of others never made a difference to the end result.

One parent commented that a ballot is not necessarily helpful but what is needed is greater parental participation in the debate

It was suggested that we could look at parents helping with working groups/meetings and with the effective communication. If we could achieve this it would do more to improve understanding and allow people to make an informed decision rather than a hasty one.

A parent spoke of American state schools using council tax towards funding, \$25,000 average spend and expressed concerns about how education can create greater inequalities when not carefully coordinated.

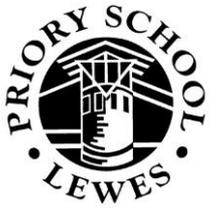
JG reminded the audience that Priory is one of the lowest funded secondary schools on per pupil basis in East Sussex and that East Sussex is already funded at a lower rate than many LAs.

Q Parents asked if the schools have timeline/timescales in mind for the MAT – next September?

TS said that no timeline has been agreed and next September would be hugely ambitious. Some of the other schools are less positive, others more so.

Parents asked if there could be a pros/cons document for option A to give more clarity i.e. not letting the LA off the hook as it was felt Priory and the schools would be taking on more.

TS mentioned about the East Sussex core offer: <https://consultation.eastsussex.gov.uk/governance-and-community-services/a-core-offer-for-east-sussex> (closes 26 Dec 2018)



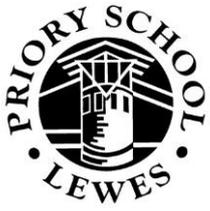
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JG concluded the meeting commenting that what governors were looking to create was very bespoke and unique to the Lewes environment, namely a Lewes based MAT would:

- Be inclusive and allow for the participation of both faith and non-faith schools. The mixed MAT format is still very uncommon but works well for our community school structure
- Be created by a group of like-minded schools, with common values creating the MAT all together. All join together and therefore no one school will be dominant as is often the case in MATs
- Be made up of successful and financially stable schools – most commonly a MAT has been created when an academy has been forced to take on a failing school with its attendant problems
- Be of sufficient size to be financially viable day 1

JG thanked the parents for their time, questions and continued support of Priory School.

Parent Forum closed: 19:20



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