**HOLY TRINITY SCHOOL – PARENT CONSULTATION- December 2013**

**Summary question and answers from parent consultation meeting to discuss the conversion to Academy status with Governors at Holy Trinity School**

**Monday 2nd December**

**18.30 – 20.15**

**Governors in attendance: Julian Mathias (Chair), Lorna Buchanan (Head), Paul Branch, Adam Jennings, Nicola Riley, Nova Bradley, Judith Howard**

**13 parents attended**

N.B. This paper is intended to be an integral part of the consultation process. The answers have therefore been reviewed and, in some cases expanded upon, by the governors attending and do not necessarily reflect *verbatim* those actually given at the meeting.

**Q1: Will the teaching staff change?**

**A:** No, all staff will remain in post and stay at Holy Trinity if they choose to do so. There will be no secondments unless a member of staff agrees to this. There may be arrangements made to model best practice to and from other schools in the MAC (Multi-Academy Company). All teaching staff will be employed by the MAC. It would be in the school’s best interests to retain our excellent staff.

**Q2: If only two parent Directors can be represented on the MAC Board, how will the views from parents in the three schools proposed (BGN, St. Joseph’s and Holy Trinity) be represented?**

**A:** Holy Trinity will maintain an Academy Committee for the school with its own parent members (normally two are in post at any one time, in addition to those parents who are also Foundation members) to represent the interests of parents of those at our school. In addition, as we are in at the start of this process, it is anticipated that Holy Trinity may also have a parent representative on the MAC Board.

**Q3: Will the need to attend the MAC Board meetings result in more bureaucracy, not less?**

A: The focus of the MAC Board meetings will be on the financial, academic, and overall well-being of all schools in the cluster. The representatives from Holy Trinity will have the opportunity to learn from best practice in teaching and learning in this cluster, as well as the challenges facing each school, but will spend less time on the day to day logistics of running the school (purchasing, premises maintenance, insurance contracts, etc.). This may result initially in more meetings, but in the long-term it is anticipated that the MAC model will enable the Head and senior leadership team to spend more of their time on teaching and learning, namely school improvement.

**Q4: What does this process of consultation mean to the Governors, how far down the track are you in making a decision about Holy Trinity becoming an Academy, would you take no further action if the parents were adamantly opposed to the action?**

A: The crux of this decision is an assessment of risk; how will this decision impact on the education of your children and that of future children? How will becoming an Academy help us achieve our goal of becoming and remaining an *outstanding school*? If parents object solely on the basis of ‘if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it’ then this is not a good enough reason to reject becoming an academy; but if there are other factors which lead us to believe that the conversion poses too great a risk to our school, then of course we will investigate those risks thoroughly. This is why the consultation is so vital. To date, the Governors have not signed any commitment to becoming an Academy; they have only agreed to take part in a serious process of assessing whether it is right for our school. It has already taken over 18 months of careful consideration by a group of Governors to get to this stage, and has involved many visits to and from BGN, members of the S.Oxfordshire MAC and a visit to St Aloysius Primary School, Oxford, which has currently not joined that MAC for its own reasons.

**Q5: Is it not a risk to try to force a relationship with a secondary school (BGN) with which we have no existing relationship? Practically all our Year 6 children go onto the CN Secondary School or to the Cotswold School.**

**A:** The need tomaintain a strong relationship with the two key secondary schools, to which the majority of our children progress, has been a prime consideration. We are assuming that the majority of Holy Trinity parents will continue to send their children to Chipping Norton and Cotswold schools, but for the 25% of children from Catholic families, the option to have a guaranteed place at a Catholic secondary school would be welcomed. Closer links with BGN through the MAC would make this possible. Mrs Buchanan has already been in contact with Simon Duffy at CN School and Fraser Long at BGN to discuss and clarify this, with positive reactions from both.

**Q6: In this Academy model, will funding be diverted to benefit children in schools that are struggling to the detriment of our children? Seconding staff to model best practice will dilute teaching availability in our school.**

**A:** No.Funding will be allocated on the same basis as it is currently, for each school based on the specific requirements that they have for each new cohort and pupil profile in the school i.e.: total number of pupils, number of pupils with SEN, number of pupils on free school meals, etc. Each school prepares its own budget (as it does now) and submits it to the MAC Board, which then submits the aggregate budget to DfE. The total funding then comes down from DfE to the MAC, which in turn makes allocations to each school in the group. This will be sufficient for each school to cover its teaching and learning costs – currently these “non-discretionary” costs amount to some 85% of our annual budget. The remainder will likely be a mix of “discretionary” funds passed to each school and centralised funds held by the MAC for essential administration costs (e.g., the new Business Manager) and procurements.

Being part of a bigger group allows some flexibility to make things happen across the whole group of schools. For example, whilst we at Holy Trinity may choose to second a teacher for an afternoon to model best practice in literacy, another teacher may be seconded to us to help with another activity such as SEN support, music provision or whatever it is that we require at any one time.

**Q7: What is a MAC? Does it have to turn a profit? What is the relationship of the Head and Deputy Head to the MAC?**

**A:** A MAC is a not-for-profit company with accounting principles based on a charitable institution, made up of multiple Academies (i.e., Holy Trinity would become an academy as part of a multi-academy company). Its prime duty is to spend its entire budget on the education of children in its care, within all schools in its cluster (i.e., there is no “profit motivation” for the benefit of shareholders or directors, and also no imperative to cut costs unless education budgets from central government are reduced in the future). The Head and Deputy Head will be recruited by the MAC, and will have formal responsibilities to report to it, but remain the senior teaching staff at Holy Trinity where they are also accountable to the Academy Committee (which replaces the current Governing Body). We will maintain our own name, identity, uniform, etc. and any future OFSTED and Diocesan inspections will be made of the school, not of the MAC.

**Q8: I need to clarify a point about the budget: is there one pot of money for 3 schools or not?**

**A:** The Department for Education (DfE) provide funding for all three schools in a single tranche. This budget is based on the funding needs presented to them by the individual schools, based on their pupil profile as outlined in Q6. In this sense, the budgeting is done ‘bottom up’ not ‘top down.’ Any funds remaining will be allocated to each school based on specific needs in each academic year. PTA and parish funds raised by any individual school will remain with that school and not be shared out within the MAC.

The DfE provides an incentive of £25,000 for each school that engages in the conversion process, which should be more than sufficient to pay the legal fees involved (the legal documentation is extensive for each school – new trust deed, funding agreement with DfE, rent-free lease of buildings and land to the MAC, and so on).

**Q9: In the short-term whilst in a period of transition, will our children suffer as a result of the school becoming an Academy?**

**A:** The procedures for converting are stringent so that the duty of care that all schools have to their children is maintained and not compromised. MACs of the model we are proposing are relatively new (estab.2012) and the evidence shows that the funding mechanism is following the pattern outlined above in Qs 6 & 8. We will make every effort to ensure that provision of education for our children now is not adversely affected. Experience in the South Oxfordshire MAC has shown that there is no adverse impact on the children on conversion to Academy status, although there were initially some relatively minor teething problems with certain admin. functions which were soon resolved (these are experiences from which our own MAC would be able to learn).

**Q10: The other primary school in the proposed model has required improvement. Is there evidence to show that Academies improve standards? Would we not be better standing alone, and are we submitting to pressure from the Diocese to become an Academy?**

**A:** It is true that there is yet very little evidence to prove that standards have improved since MACs started in 2012, as not enough time has passed to gather this data. However, neither is there any evidence to suggest that standards have deteriorated as a result of conversion.

The Governors at Holy Trinity have discussed the idea and process of becoming an Academy at some length before reaching the conclusion that to stand still is not a viable option in the current climate, and that it is better to be proactive and be one of the founding members of the MAC rather than a late joiner.

There has been no pressure from the Diocese to become an Academy. They have presented us with the rationale for conversion (and an indication of the potential pitfalls along the way) plus a suite of legal documents agreed with DfE to enable the conversion process. Their preferred model is a multi-academy ‘cluster’, made of at least two schools, to promote sharing of best practice and financial synergies across the MAC. Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Birmingham can only convert as part of a MAC and not as individual academies. The institutional arrangements we would have to adopt have been examined by the various teaching Unions in the case of the S Oxfordshire MAC and found acceptable.

OCC is strongly promoting Academies, and has an objective to see all schools in Oxfordshire convert to academy status by 2015. In addition, they have stated that a multi-academy grouping gives the best prospects for school improvement. DfE also strongly encourages multi-academy groups, and has provided an additional financial incentive of £25,000 for each MAC comprised of three or more primary schools.

**Q11: If there is a change of government, will there be a change of policy and reversal of the Academies process?**

**A:** We do not have a crystal ball to know exactly what will happen in 2015 but there are no indications that a Labour government would reverse the Academies process which is now rolling out across the country (at the last count, 51% of all schools (secondary and primary) are now academies). They and the Coalition government seem to agree on the need for another level of regulation/control between Academies and the DfE (8 regional Head Teachers Boards) so it is unlikely they will disband Academies if they win the next election.

**Q12: Once we go forward, is it possible to come back? What happens if it all goes wrong?**

**A:** Once a school becomes an Academy it cannot then change its mind and operate independently as a maintained school within the LA structure. However, the DfE will remain the paymasters and provide central government funding. If the MAC is not performing in terms of pupil attainment and progress, they will take control, as happens currently with failing schools.

**Q13: What are the blocks for us being an *outstanding school* currently? How will the Academy model help us overcome them?**

A: From the latest Ofsted inspection in 2012, lack of substantive and secure leadership was the main reason for Holy Trinity not achieving *outstanding* status. With this now in place and with the support of the governing body, the school is now in a far better place. The Academy model offers scope to support and enhance good leadership in each of the schools in the MAC and offers the help of a Business Manager to take care of the many logistical operations currently managed by the Head, such as: insurance, buying in of specialists (Ed Psych), ICT, SENCO, School improvement partners, etc. There is no guarantee that the Academy model will lead to *outstanding* status, however – but we believe it does offer the best prospects for this to be achieved and maintained.

**Q14: If we stay put, what will happen?**

**A:** We will continue to be funded by government through OCC, but we will probably have less bargaining power to procure goods and services (especially those no longer offered by the LA or planned to be offered on a commercial basis). We would not have the additional expertise and synergies available to us through being part of a multi-academy group, so in our view the chances for improving teaching and learning at Holy Trinity would be reduced. Staff may also look elsewhere for better career development opportunities.

**Q15: What are we getting out of the other primary school in the MAC?**

**A:** In our view, the ideal number for the new MAC would be 5 schools rather than 3, with the two other *good* primary schools also joining, as they may well do. Each governing body has to make its own decision based on the knowledge it has of the children, parents and staff. We do not yet know the details of possible synergies between Holy Trinity and the other current primary school in our MAC, but this is a process of consideration that we have only just begun. BGN is currently also a *Good* secondary school, on a par with Chipping Norton ‘Top School’, so there are benefits in terms of sharing staff expertise to be gained there.

**Q16: Does becoming an Academy have implications for teaching the National Curriculum?**

**A:** Theoretically, any school becoming an Academy can set their own Curriculum, but this is a complex and time-consuming process. Holy Trinity will follow the new National Curriculum, which will be launched in September 2014 by central government. This is a decision for each school in the MAC, not one that is made centrally by the MAC on behalf of each school.

**Q17: 75% of our children are not Catholic. Will the Catholic influence or ethos get stronger under a MAC?**

**A:** Our school is fully inclusive and serves 100% of its children equally. This is not expected to change significantly, if at all, if we join a MAC, although a formal partnership with other Catholic schools would provide greater confidence in preserving our Catholic ethos. It would however add weight to our case for providing one of the Parent Director roles on the MAC Board, in order to reflect the make-up of the MAC.

**Q18: Why did we not join the S.Oxfordshire MAC?**

**A:** We did consider this option and could do so again in the future. However, it is currently a large group of one big secondary and six feeder primary schools, and we would be a late joiner and it is therefore unlikely that we would be in a position to seek representation the Board of the MAC.

We have already had discussions with their Executive Principal on many aspects of conversion, and these will continue, and include how their budget has been organised and the implementation issues they faced. A couple of inputs have emerged already: a) don’t rush the implementation process – 6 months is a realistic target; b) each academy in their MAC contributes £50 per pupil to the MAC for centralised costs.

**Q19: Will the Business Manager be a new position in the company?**

**A:** Yes. There will be a recruitment process to appoint a professional Business Manager reporting to the Board, and the costs for this will be shared between all schools in the MAC. However, there will be no paid CEO and all members of the MAC Board will occupy their positions on a strictly voluntary basis.

**Q20: The material provided to parents to date has been unbalanced, not clearly outlining the pros and cons of becoming an Academy.**

**A:** The Governors have tried to provide as much information as we have about the relative merits and potential pitfalls of this proposed change to our school and will continue to do so. There is much additional information on the DfE, DES and OCC web sites.

**Q21: Do the staff at Holy Trinity have concerns about the school becoming an Academy?**

**A:** They are not worried about their pay and conditions, as these are guaranteed for 2 years after conversion and have already been changed recently by the current government. In order to recruit and retain good staff we will always need to be competitive and reflect their market value. Academies will not change this. One concern is the good partnership that Holy Trinity has within the CN partnership for academic moderation, sports, workshops for the gifted and talented, etc., and there is every reason to maintain this should the school become an Academy. Mrs Buchanan has discussed this with Mr Duffy who also wants to maintain a strong relationship, as Holy Trinity provides excellent pupils for his school. She has also discussed it with Fraser Long from BGN who understands and supports the CN Partnership.

**Q22: Do you (the Head) have any reservations about our school becoming an Academy?**

**A: ‘**It would be unprofessional of me not to have any reservations. Whatever decision we take must be in the best interest of the school.’

**Q23: Back to the financials, will we be better or worse off? You talk about economies of scale, but there is the cost of the Business Manager to consider. Will there be other costs as well?**

**A:** At the start of the national process to convert schools to Academies, there was a real financial incentive but this is no longer the case. The Business Manager, if they are worth their salt, should pay for themselves over time and the 10% cut that OCC (Oxfordshire County Council) took will now be included in the funding paid directly to the MAC. However, it should be remembered that we already operate on a tight budget, of which 85% is spent on teaching staff. There is no exact business model for this process, but, as a school within a MAC, we will have more flexibility about how we spend our funds.

**Q24: What is the timescale and what are the next steps?**

**A:** The decision as to whether to convert to academy status is one for the governors to take but there is still work to do.We will continue to provide relevant information and, if necessary, refer back to parents during the decision making process. The consultation with staff has started and will continue (including TUPE negotiations with staff representatives). We expect to be in a position to make a final decision early next year with the objective of being up and running by 1st July 2014.

**Q25: Which OCC LA services have been withdrawn and which will remain?**

According to its website and other documents distributed to schools, OCC sees its future mission as being the champion, for children and families, absolute commitment to improving educational standards, and supporting the conversion to academies and other new forms of schools. Specifically the services it will retain in-house are support for: Early Years SEN, Children’s Centres, and oversight of education performance standards.

The services which were most important to Holy Trinity and which have been cut significantly include provision of a School Improvement Partner to support monitoring and analysing performance, staff recruitment and Head Teacher performance management. We have looked to various other providers for these services.

By April 2015 OCC is planning for the following frontline services to be offered on a commercial basis, through external providers, if there is sufficient demand from schools:

Foundation Years support SEN advisory teachers

Primary Support Inclusion support

Newly Qualified Teacher support Dyslexia services

Governor advisory services Behaviour support

Governor Clerk training Anti-bullying support

Residential and other educational visits

**Plus the following back-office services**:

HR, finance, pay/employment support & payroll, ICT services, Health & Safety support.

**This paper is posted on the school web site for all parents to view and consider. Any other questions and comments are welcome before 14th January 2014, when they will be gathered and answered online.**

6 December 2013.