

ACADEMY STATUS CONSULTATION MEETING – PARENTS

18 January 2012, 6:30 (Crawshaw School Theatre)

Presented by Mrs Joanna Ruse, Headteacher - supported by Mrs Lorraine Barker - Principal, Mirfield Free Grammar and Mrs Claire Stephenson, Crawshaw Business Manager

Parents signed in on record sheet with email addresses to circulate minutes following the meeting.

Introductions were made.

Mrs Ruse explained that the proposal would be an important decision which should be made by consulting with parents, staff and governors. The meeting, the second of two, had been convened to give information to parents so that that an informed choice can be made at a later date. When the school applied for trust status there was a clear time line for consultation but this is not the case when applying for academy status. The length of the consultation will be determined by need and the school had not yet made a formal application – the Governing Body needs to hear parent and staff views before moving forward. Mrs Ruse invited any questions from those present.

She went on to explain that the government first introduced academies for failing schools i.e. schools with low attainment / poor achievement. These schools had sponsors who gave direction. This is no longer the case and the opportunity to become an academy is now available to all schools. The government expects that in time all schools will move to academy status. (**Sponsorship** criteria for having to become a sponsored Academy would not apply with Crawshaw as the performance data is strong & the school has been judged as good by OFSTED).

The criteria for Converter Academies is:

- Good exam performance
- Comparison with local and national performance
- Latest Ofsted findings re “capacity to improve”, and “outcomes” and “leadership”
- Any other matters that the school may rely on to demonstrate that the school is performing well.

Crawshaw has very strong results and, therefore, the above is an option for the school. There are different types of academies. Parents need to consider all options. The Governing Body has looked at converter model and the flexibilities and constraints. Crawshaw is already a Trust School and, therefore can alter terms and conditions for associate staff; it has chosen not to do that. The school holds the land in trust and Governors are already the employers of staff etc. Converter academy status provides flexibility around national curriculum. At KS3 and KS4 we have students who are struggling to study subjects because of their ability. In terms of the national curriculum, we need it to be broad, balanced and right for our students. This will be discussed if we go down the “converter” route. Currently we are tied to five training days and this does not necessarily suit the school. We need more time for training and to reconsider how we deliver training.

Constraints: We need control over how we support our students. The current model does not currently benefit our students. We need to use the money available to match the needs of students. We don't have a “say” at the moment. For example, money for behaviour, school improvement, attendance would come directly to the school so that it can buy into those services that are effective, for e.g., counselling for students and apply principles of best value to all services. We currently buy into a consultancy and have our own HR service in order to get fair, objective advice. Governors would consult on these important decisions.

Terms and Conditions: There is no intention to change terms and conditions and this is not the purpose for considering academy status. We could have already done this with support staff and have not, choosing instead to stick with Leeds City Council policies. It is about using the money to support the school, to get better deals, if necessary, for our students and staff. We have lost staff to academies which have more money to pay them. We have never paid our staff less but nor have we had the money to retain our staff. If anything, we would want to pay our staff more. It would be in nobody's interests to pay staff less.

Consultation Process: Governors spent a long time considering whether or not to go to consultation. Our Governors have the best interests of our students and staff at heart and asked questions and challenged. Following the Governors' meeting, letters were then sent out to staff (by email), the unions were contacted and letters have been sent to parents inviting them to meetings. JRu is also speaking at the Family of Schools. She will attend their meeting in January. Unions have been into school and held a meeting with staff on 16 January

and were also in attendance at one of the staff consultation meetings. Governors will take into consideration parent and staff views when making a decision. All concerned need to consider what is in it for the students and for them i.e. how could our students and staff benefit bearing in mind the history of our examination results, the developments/ changes that the Trust has brought (& how staff have not been adversely affected by Governors being their employers) , the strong leadership and governance & therefore our ability to continue our journey our way.

Money is always an issue whether schools are maintained, Trusts or Academies and we need to make decisions on how best to spend what we have e.g. there are students who need counselling – we could spend money on appointing a counsellor. Mrs Ruse does not believe that we currently have staff with the skills or time to do this correctly. The idea of Saturday working has been raised as sponsored Academies do use Saturdays to raise standards for under-achieving students. It has never even been considered here nor would it be unless some staff wanted to work differently. In terms of sponsored academies, we would not have control over terms & conditions.

Mrs Ruse introduced Mrs Barker, Principal of Mirfield Free Grammar school who has first-hand experience and knowledge of the process. Mrs Barker said that she is passionate about education. Mirfield F.G.S. has been an outstanding foundation school since 2008 and was 80% on the way to becoming an academy. The government invited the school to become an academy. The decision to go forward was not rushed and the school took advantage of the summer break to think about it. At the time Mrs Barker promised that there would be no big changes i.e. uniform, holidays etc. She has stuck to this. Accounts were kept rigorously and the process was not completed until April (the start of the new financial year). Her school preferred to take the initiative rather than be forced to do so further down the line and wanted curriculum freedom - the best for students and parents. There was no wish to change terms and conditions as staff would not want to come and work at the school – the intention was to keep good staff. Experienced people have been recruited to support the school in business and finance areas. It was not done for financial reasons, but it has brought more money to the benefit of the students. Before the change the authority kept money back (LACSEG) and services that were offered were not always suitable. The school is now in a position to buy resources in that are appropriate to children's needs (for example a counsellor has been appointed).

Question: What will happen if you don't do it? Is there a financial dependence i.e. will the financial amount dwindle the longer you wait?

Mrs Ruse: The Government can't keep giving the same amount of money. If we convert this year the amount is a lot less than what Horsforth or Mirfield received and from next September, the pot shrinks again. However big or small the "pot" is – I need to make sure that is it used to our students' best advantage.

Question: The initial early balance could be "green" and then get tough – the school would just have to deal with it?

Mrs Ruse: Whether we become an academy or not, all schools need to address finances within such economic constraints. When I arrived here we were £250K in deficit and we now have a surplus of £60K. The money has to be handled carefully

Question: If Crawshaw became an academy would it leave the school open to being "swallowed up" if it gets into financial difficulty? What about if you were to leave – would your successor have different ideas?

Mrs Ruse: Academies are not allowed to have financial deficits We would not be allowed to become an Academy if our finances had not been well managed.. There are no guarantees about change as that could happen now. It has nothing to do with Academy status. However, if we don't become an Academy & our results drop, we would be at risk of having to accept a sponsor.

Mrs Barker: We have not taken anyone else's money (schools who have not managed their money). We feel that we are getting something back. It also provides an opportunity to help other schools – we can target money and resources. Once a school has been swallowed up by a chain – the authority can do nothing about this and the unions cannot stop it. There are no guarantees either way.

Mrs Ruse: In Leeds the government has said that if a school is not good enough they would become an academy. They found sponsors for schools – this has happened. There are no primary academy schools yet other than those with Garforth to my knowledge?

Comment: There is talk about making some primary schools into academies.

Mrs Ruse: I was told a while ago that there were 24 Leeds primaries which have been identified as underperforming, perhaps more now and they will become academies. There is a meeting next week of the Family of Schools to discuss options for primary schools to become a trust or part of an academy – some of these schools will be told quite clearly & have no choice according to the DFE. The last thing I want is someone else running this school. There are no guarantees about anything in the future but we have Governors who are passionate about this school and will direct and run this school effectively and with passion.

Question: What happens if financial circumstances mean that a chain needs to come in and take over the school? In three or four years the extra benefit will dwindle away.

Questions: What about buying services?

Mrs Barker: We can decide which services and plan forward to see where a cushion is needed. It is about looking after finances and also bringing in the best teachers and support staff to keep students numbers up. There is lots of support and advice available to academies (either HR or finance). I think that schools that stand alone will become isolated – my governors do not want a sponsor.

Mrs Ruse: Every year we have predicted massive deficits and every year have set a budget. We have never made a teacher redundant. We plan and work to the worst case scenario taking into account possible government cuts, birth rate drop etc. We have to plan and that is our job. We have compiled a “skill set” showing the expertise of our current governors who are well qualified in appropriate areas to support the school.

Question: Finance – does the school get a “pot” from the education authority at the moment – all in one big lump sum which is ring fenced. You manage this money and make sure you are always able to plan with the little that you have got. The education authority is cutting back on things?

Comment: It is exactly the same everywhere. I work in a primary school, not a trust – we haven’t had a school improvement visit.

Mrs Ruse: It is a Leeds issue due to cuts and is true of many Local Authorities

Mrs Barker: The authority gets 12% of the budget for central services – “one size fits all”. Some of these services are not appropriate for my school – my school is unique and it suits us to buy in exactly what we need.

Question: What is the difference between an academy and a trust?

Mrs Ruse: We became a Trust a year ago thinking we could get money from the national lottery. It is about partnership – our partners are Leeds United and Barnardo’s with Trinity as a co-opted partner. We have had no money but as an example of the benefit of these partnerships; the government gave LUFC £4000 to develop literacy and a group of our Y9 boys have been going to Leeds United to work on a literacy programme – it has cost us nothing.

Question: What are the views of staff?

Mrs Ruse: Can I come back to this when I explain the consultation process?

Question: You don’t intend to change the terms and conditions for your staff; however you would have the power to change holidays and curriculum?

Mrs Ruse: Yes.

Question: Just wanted to clarify – speaking from the children’s point of view – if you change holidays that would be something huge. You said you would not want to make these changes, but what about you successor – they might want to go down that line.

Mrs Barker: There are no guarantees. If a headteacher did that, it would be to their detriment. Staff would leave.

Comment: It is not so easy to leave a job with the recession.

Mrs Barker: My good staff would leave.

Mrs Ruse: Why would anyone want to work in my school (if I were to do this)?

Comment: If schools become academies, people might have to do this – they won't have a choice.

Mrs Barker: I want to attract the best staff so as to remain an outstanding school. Support staff at Mirfield were given a 1% pay rise (we budgeted for that). Support staff in Leeds have not had a pay rise for three years.

Comment: It's the children that I am concerned about i.e. holidays – if you change the dates.

Mrs Barker: It would not be an option - bearing in mind siblings. I would not do that.

Comment: We know that you would not do that.

Mrs Barker: Why would any Head do that?

Question: It is possible that the school may become a sponsored academy in the future. You may look at finances now but can the head guarantee the future arrangements?

Mrs Barker: More likely to be taken over – can't let finances run away – It's all about leadership of the school.

Question: Can you become a sponsored academy if you don't perform and finances are in a bad state?

Mrs Ruse: The governing body has a role to oversee the school. If the school is going down the pan, they would know about it & then they would intervene. Cllr Mick Coulson is one of our governors and he can explain what the local authority can do to support schools. If schools get into financial difficulty then they will be asked to prepare an action plan – this is standard procedure. In answer to the question about holidays – recruitment of students is important. We want local primaries to choose our school. It is also where the money is. Any Head or Governing Body would consult with local primaries and would not change dates that local primaries have set for their holidays. It would not make sense and no headteacher would do that.

Mrs Barker: Crawshaw also has a shared sixth form with two other schools – it would not be feasible.

Question: Sixth forms are dying – students are choosing colleges.

Mrs Ruse: Our sixth form numbers are the same but funding has changed. However, it is hard to retain students because we cannot offer the courses that students want. Some students think that courses at college are better or want to leave. We often talk about how to retain our students. Our main competition is Notre Dame.

Mr Preston: Students have gone to Notre Dame and returned because they did not like the set up.

Question: If it were to go ahead, when would it happen?

Mrs Ruse: It depends - you don't go to consult for a year; nor do you rush into it. Why would I do this if there was nothing to gain from it? It would be a lot of work for nothing. My aim is to make this the best school in Pudsey.

Question: Do you have to become a specific school i.e. Sports?

Mrs Ruse: I think you are thinking of specialism – this is different – our school is already a specialist humanities school.

Comment: And then the money was removed!

Mrs Ruse: The government is already talking about extending the school day. I would not do this. Teachers need time to plan and for family life.

Question: Rumour has it that the school might start at 7.30 a.m.?

Mrs Ruse: Absolutely not. E.g. In schools we have a new set of teachers' standards – for all teachers. When it comes to appraisal and capability it is only for maintained schools but if we were to become an academy we could do what we wanted. As long as lessons are good and well-prepared, I would not question what time my staff leave. We have to look at terms and conditions to get staff in. The school will achieve more and good teachers will want to work here. There will be no Saturday mornings.

Mrs Barker: Failing academies have had to do this (Saturday mornings). They have had to play “catch-up” and get students in to do the work.

Question: The current government wants all schools to become academies. What happens if the government changes?

Mrs Ruse: I can't predict what another government might say. Labour says that they can't change everything as it would be too difficult to undo everything that this current government has done. All the schools affected have gone through consultation – it would be impossible to unpick.

Question: If you did get a bad teacher in – the government is now saying you can get rid of them in a term and not a year as previously. If a teacher underachieves, will he/she be replaced a lot quicker?

Mrs Ruse: Teaching standards change in 2012 and staff will be measured against them. As an academy we will be able to decide whether to adopt the appraisal and capability process. The process goes from formal to informal and you have to follow it. Teachers can be given a chance to improve through performance management. After that you make a decision as to whether the person should be a teacher or not. There is a three to four week window – it is swift but does state that you have to give the teacher time to improve. Changes are voluntary for an academy but not for a maintained school. The government will make it easier for a teacher who is not effective to be removed from their role. I don't want ineffective teachers at Crawshaw. It is in no-one's interest for a teacher to fail in a school and certainly teachers do not want that. When I arrived at Crawshaw there were staff who had not moved with the times and were not comfortable with how schools are now run– they went.

Comment: Teachers have to move along with the world.

Question: What about admissions?

Mrs Ruse: We have to abide by admissions code. Fair Access Panel – every school is included. As an academy we would still have to take students. The school volunteers to take difficult students or is instructed to do so and does not have the choice to select or refuse disadvantaged students.

Mrs Barker: We won't select and also work with the sibling rule (at Mirfield).

Comment: There will be huge benefits for some kids and not for others i.e. SEN. Difficult – you can see where anxiety arises.

Mrs Ruse: We make sure that no child is disadvantaged. We have a good reputation for supporting SEN students.

Mrs Barker: The school would have the freedom to change the curriculum to suit students.

Comment: It's a leap of faith – down to individual schools.

Mrs Barker: Schools will be inspected. They will inspect the curriculum to see whether it is right for the students.

Comment: It sounds great and scary at the same time. Is the curriculum going to become more individualised?

Mrs Ruse: We have to decide what is right for our school. Certain things are not left to individual schools. I am held to account by the Governors and by the local authority.

Question: You touched on curriculum. What about MFL and RE?

Mrs Ruse: RE is not part of national curriculum.

Question: You can say you are not doing it?

Mrs Ruse: It is a core subject – kids have to do it. Some parents don't want their child to learn it.

Question: Can you choose other things in the curriculum?

Mrs Ruse: yes, non-core subjects. I want all students to be able to have a language and we have changed options so that able children have to do a language. There are students with poor literacy skills and we need to improve these in order to introduce them to a language. I have visited academies and they all tailor the curriculum.

Mrs Ruse then gave her views of some of the advantages the school could consider if academy status was agreed:

- It would afford curriculum opportunities for students who would like to go to college etc., but can't because we can't afford to pay for places for large numbers of students.
- We would have the ability to personalise with students what they want to do.
- The school would be able to buy in pastoral support for students who need more specialist support e.g. counselling, bereavement counselling. A bigger behaviour management team e.g. ideally one behaviour team leader per year group. Access to an Educational Psychologist. We no longer employ a Parent Advisor.
- Rewards: currently we only have £100 allocation per year group for rewards. This is not adequate and we could look at increasing this.
- National curriculum: Huge changes are due again in all key stages. This will be compulsory for maintained schools. With academy status we could tailor curriculum to students' needs provided it is broad & balanced or delay it.
- School Improvement: Teachers' CPD – we currently have five training days. It is a rigid model. We would not have to stick to that. There could be professional development opportunities - new opportunities for associate staff.
- Extra-curricular clubs – could buy in support.
- Trips – some parents can't afford them – the school could help here.
- Youth involvement in school – the school could buy in services.
- Career Advice is minimal.
- We are currently launching 360 web system for students. Limited to 1 yr group due to lack of money
- Job security – there is no such thing whether a maintained school or an academy.

FINANCE: Claire Stephenson (Business Manager) gave basic financial information on how academy status would change the school's situation.

We are looking for balanced budget for 2011/12 & 2012/13. Funding in future years will decrease due to falling student numbers and this will affect funding for the next five years. In addition the school will see staff costs increasing (due to staff progression through pay scales for both teaching and associate staff) costing an extra £40K.

Additional Academy Funding: A set up grant of £25K is available to converting schools. This money would be spent on legal fees in relation to TUPE for staff (£10K) and new accounting software (15K). Money would be funded monthly on an academic year basis and we would have to manage accounts and budget very differently to how we currently manage it. The academy would have to be audited annually and give accounts to Company House.

LACSEG (Local Authority Central Spend Equivalent Grant) Additional funds through the LACSEG would come direct to the Academy worth estimated £308K, in addition to rest of budget. This is based on current figures (January PLASC) of 1123 students and from September 11 to Aug 12 the amount is £351 per student. From September 12 to August 13 the figure is estimated to reduce to £275 per student. As an academy we would be responsible for our Support Staff pensions. Some schools have seen savings with this and some have seen an increase in costs. A 1% increase would cost the school £7500. The school would also be responsible for all payments of maternity, paternity, adoption, redundancy pay etc. Costs would be incurred as a consequence of staff restructuring i.e. we anticipate that the school would need more business/finance staff to deal with cash flow etc. There could be a small increase in premises costs associated with energy. The school will have to negotiate with LCC on costs of services currently provided and buy back these services if they are effective and meet the schools needs. We anticipate that we would increase the support from LCC Financial Services for the 1st yr. Annual legal and accounting costs would cost approx £15K. An additional contingency of £10K per year has been built in.

Total expenditure of £200K per year from the LACSEG has been estimated which would leave around £100K balance for the school and Governors to put to best use for the benefit of students and staff.

Question: Would you have to employ an accountant?

Mrs Ruse: No, not full time but we would buy into an accountancy service.

Question: What about payroll?

Mrs Stephenson: No we are happy with the service we have from the local authority and would buy back into this.

Question: Would this cost any more or less for an academy?

Mrs Stephenson: Leeds is changing the charges – some have gone up – others have become negotiable.

Mrs Barker: We do payroll “in house” and save £15K per year.

Mrs Ruse: We were paying for HR service at a cost of £16K p.a. It was a poor service. We now employ a HR Advisor for two days a week who holds surgeries for staff. We have also bought into an excellent HR consultancy service.

Question: As far as buying in other services. Is there not a risk that you may not get good quality services?

Mrs Ruse: I like to go on word of mouth (recommendation) before I employ someone. The governors would also have to approve services that we bought in.

Question: I have recently spoken to a parent who has a child at Prince Henry’s G.S. and would like to know what happens when a specific amount of money has been spent and then the school finds it has have to buy back services – Prince Henry’s lost out on funds and, therefore, were not able to buy back the services the school needed.

Mrs Ruse: Prince Henry’s was not handled well. There were issues with the Governors’ vote and various problems. We are not Prince Henry’s and anyone can have access to our finance documents. Anyone is welcome to see how they are run. I am conscious of value for money and what we buy in for our kids. It won’t happen here. All I can do is be honest with people.

Questions: Will you be staying with your current trust partners?

Mrs Ruse: Yes, the trust board has to agree academy status. If they don’t agree, it will not go ahead. We are also looking for support (if anyone has contacts) from industry/business for work placements. We would like to speak to anyone with business acumen who may be able to offer advice.

Question: There was no work placement this year – is this because of funding?

Mrs Ruse: No, it was my decision. Some students were going where they did not want to go. Some placements were not appropriate. We have had to balance it with the learning that students miss whilst they are out of school and tailor placements to student tastes. Some students are going out on work placements based more on their need & at parents’ request.

Question: Is it OK to arrange a work placement for my child during school holidays?

Mrs Ruse: Yes. We would look carefully at when they are going out to fit in with work commitments – what they will be missing and how they can catch up. It does not have to be for two weeks.

Mrs Ruse outlined the process for consultation so far (3 x staff meetings, 1 x Union meeting with staff, 2 x parent meetings, information on school website, regular updates with Governors and channels for communication.) She then thanked parents for taking the time to come in for the meeting and, again, invited them to contact her via school or email her P.A., David Jowle, with any thoughts, comments or concerns on jowled01@leedslearning.net.