

Oxton St Saviour's CofE Aided Primary School Academy Conversion Engagement Questions & Answers

Parents/ Carers Meeting, Wednesday 17 May 2023, 5.15pm

Attendees:

Alison Williams – Chair of Governors
Andy Ramsden – Headteacher
Rebecca Shaw – Deputy Headteacher
John Richardson – Governor
Rev. Dr. Joe Kennedy – Vicar
Sue Riley – CDAT
Hardip Hayer, Senior Project Manager, AMF UK (Ltd)
Emily Comyn – Senior Project Support Officer, AMF UK (Ltd)
17 parents

QUESTION: What's the purpose of the consultation?

ANSWER: To explore the thoughts of and receive questions and comment from parents. The decision to convert is not one that is taken solely by the governors, though governors are in agreement with the proposed conversion. If governors weren't happy with the proposal, it wouldn't have got to this point. All questions and feedback from parents and carers are welcome and will be considered.

QUESTION: What does Christchurch think of being in CDAT?

ANSWER: The Head and governors of Oxton St Saviour's have been to Christchurch to seek their views and talk about any bad points, but there really weren't any – their conversion was seen as a positive move.

Christchurch were in a very different position when they converted and joined CDAT which made the process more complex.

We spoke to a variety of different members of staff and everyone was positive about conversion. No one from CDAT was there when the visit took place.

QUESTION: Will the resources in the school be better after conversion?

ANSWER: It is up to schools how to spend their budgets, as it is now, but the support offered by CDAT is invaluable for staff and children.

School budgeting will be easier following conversion.

QUESTION: What about Service Level Agreements (SLAs)?

ANSWER: The majority of SLAs would stay the same on conversion – nobody will be forced to change anything, although they will be monitored and reviewed annually for value for money, as they are now.

QUESTION: Will the research done by governors/Head to this point be made available to parents?

ANSWER: Governors have had a significant time to consider academy status and through their role have an understanding of the school, its systems and support that is not available to all members of the community. Information about the proposal was sent to stakeholders at the start of the consultation period.

COMMENT: A parent expressed the view that the material provided was one-sided and didn't talk about any negative effects of conversion

QUESTION: What is the current attrition rate of staff and what will it be after conversion?

ANSWER: It is currently low and we don't expect it to change. CDAT offers training and development to help with career development which encourages staff retention.

COMMENT: A parent expressed the view that they thought attrition rates should be known and would like the figures for other CDAT schools to be made available

ANSWER: This isn't information that we routinely study, although obviously if staff changes in a school started becoming noticeably high, we'd look to understand the reasons why. It certainly hasn't been an issue in any of the other schools to date.

QUESTION: What happens to school policies and who has the final say about them?

ANSWER: CDAT has a raft of policies that schools can use if they wish, but only top-level policies (e.g. safeguarding) have to come from CDAT. CDAT has the final say on policies.

QUESTION: How is CDAT different to Co-op MAT?

ANSWER: CDAT is not top-down, we are bottom-up and we involve headteachers.

QUESTION: Our children are so happy at this school, we don't understand why this is being considered – it isn't broken, so why change things?

ANSWER: The support offered for staff, including the head, is greatly needed – none is given by the LA and we can't do it all on our own.

COMMENT: A parent expressed the view that they felt the decision was being pushed on them.

QUESTION: Can we change trusts once we've made the move to CDAT?

ANSWER: No, unless the DfE feels the trust is failing the school.

QUESTION: Can we speak to other CDAT schools on the Wirral? We're one of the best-performing school in the area - will it dilute our standards?

ANSWER: No, standards will not be diluted, but it will provide opportunities to develop any areas that we aren't so strong in. Staff at the school have spoken to and visited other CDAT schools.

QUESTION: What SEND support does CDAT give?

ANSWER: We provide training for staff, parents and pupils. SEN support will continue to be provided by the LA, but we work with heads and schools to identify areas of need and provide training in those areas. The trust has a SEND lead teacher and an active SENCO network who attend shared training and share best practice as a group.

QUESTION: Is CDAT's role enforcer or adviser?

ANSWER: CDAT is here to serve the schools in the Diocese.
CDAT is the formal expression of the Diocese's wish to support children in their education.

QUESTION: If CDAT felt that there was something the school wasn't doing, would you make sure it was changed?

ANSWER: Yes – we would work with SLT and hold them to account if it wasn't changed

QUESTION: Can we have a named point of contact for each CDAT school so that we can get the true picture? We don't want it to come from CDAT.

ANSWER: Please send an email to the consultation email address.

QUESTION: Can we have another meeting and delay the conversion process?

ANSWER: Either party can pull out up until the point that the legal documents are signed, which will be early 2024. Please put the request for a follow up meeting in writing to the consultation email address.

Both during and at the end of the meeting parents and carers were encouraged to send any follow up questions and feedback to the consultation email address.

Parent Feedback Received Through Feedback Form or Email:

COMMENT: With regards to the e mail asking for feedback from parents.

I removed my child from an academy school which was very poorly ran with incorrect priorities, which do not align with how this school is ran at the moment and a frightening lack of actual care for each child as they become numbers.

Unfortunately, this is not a rare occurrence, how most academy schools are operated do not sit well with parents locally, negatively impact the pupils and the end results are not positive.

I put my child into this school safe in the knowledge no such thing could happen and now am devastated that this is a very real possibility.

Obviously, academy status brings much needed funds but the damage the policies these academies bring in, along with diluting the core teaching to include often not valuable other curriculum ideas and thus to the children's education as well as a large scale of additional pressure and dissatisfaction on the teachers' part, mean the benefit of the financial safety comes at a terrible cost to so many.

A lot of pupils at this school do fantastic in the secondary school entrance exams and go on to have the best possible futures.

RESPONSE: I'm really sorry to hear you've had a negative experience with a different academy trust. Please be reassured that not all academy trusts are the same! CDAT's three basic non-negotiables are that all children deserve to go to a great school; that schools working together is one of the best ways of supporting each other and improving standards; and that our schools, as church schools, will always be underpinned by a clear Christian ethos. We're not a 'top-down' trust – we won't impose schemes or curriculum plans on our schools – we just try to work with them to enable each school to be as good as it can be.

QUESTION: What were the previous statuses of the local school's which have been taken over by this academy? Financial status, % of exam passes to grammar secondary schools. What are the statuses of these schools now?

ANSWER: There are 13 schools in CDAT, with a 14th joining on 1st July. At that point, the schools in the trust (in Ofsted terms) will be 2 outstanding, 10 good, 1 RI, 1 serious weakness. Four schools have joined the trust

in an Ofsted category – 3 are now good and the fourth (which is ‘serious weaknesses’) is awaiting its next inspection. The trust and its schools are in sound financial health.

QUESTION: Why the rush for this to happen now? Why can we not observe for a longer period (1-2 more years for example), how the school's mentioned as becoming part of this academy, perform.

ANSWER: There are a large number of schools moving to become academies now, and a big factor in this has been the withdrawal of school improvement funding from local authorities. All schools, no matter how good, need support and challenge to keep moving forward and up to date – and schools are now recognising that this role is being taken up more and more by academies because local authorities no longer have the capacity to do so.

QUESTION: Oxton St Saviours is not in financial trouble and has a high % of year 6 pupils passing grammar school exams. Therefore, a viable concern is that this does not best suit the needs of our school.

ANSWER: There is no reason why that should change. CDAT isn't about changing things for the sake of it, so there is no reason why these successes shouldn't continue.

QUESTION: Oxton St Saviours has done and is doing an incredible job and I'm wondering why they have to give up their identity to become part of an ever growing cluster of academy schools?

ANSWER: All CDAT schools have a very clear identity of their own. We're not top-down or corporate – we want to support our schools to be the best they can be individually.

COMMENT: Schools which convert to academy status have largely been failing schools which is not the case for our school. I asked for the difference between this academy and the co-op academy and was told "we are nothing like them". This is not a satisfactory answer.

ANSWER: There are now over 10,000 academies across the country, of which only about a quarter are ‘sponsored’ academies (i.e., used to be failing schools) – so the vast majority are successful schools like St Saviour's who have chosen to convert – no doubt for similar reasons to St Saviour's. This is a similar picture to CDAT. We are a primary-school only trust made up exclusively of schools in Chester Diocese. Co-op is a much larger trust, with schools in 3 geographic areas across the north: they work with primary and secondary schools and a higher % of their schools are sponsored academies. All of their schools are named as ‘Co-op Academy X’ – we don't use that sort of corporate branding. We are two different organisations.

COMMENT: Academy school's such as Portland Primary, Townfield Primary, St John Plessington, Park High School are not schools to aspire to and it would be a huge injustice to foist this on our children and us as parents, who deserve better.

ANSWER: A number of CDAT schools were fully subscribed this year and are the school of choice in their area, and the same can be said of other schools in other academy trusts too. Lots will depend on the previous reputation of a school – even from before it became an academy.

COMMENT: Positive relations between other schools can be forged without such an extreme measure.

RESPONSE: Absolutely – and CDAT encourage our schools to work together with other local schools.

COMMENT: There is no get out if down the line, things aren't working in the best interests of the staff and/or pupils. This is a huge risk to take especially since many questions raised at the meeting could not be answered by the academy's representation. This has increased my concerns as a parent and nothing that was said has allayed these.

RESPONSE: There are systems for academy re-brokering if things should go badly wrong, although we obviously hope that these will never be needed.

COMMENT: The fact that only positives were provided and not a single concern or teething problem in the interim period or going forward doesn't seem legitimate in the real world where every single person's opinion (staff, pupils, parents/carers) do not always align in every circumstance, all of the time.

RESPONSE: In consultations with any school, we always encourage governors and staff to talk to other schools in the trust to get an honest picture of what being part of CDAT is like. I know that the decision to move to formal consultation with CDAT is not one that governors and school leaders have taken lightly, and that a great deal of thought and due diligence has gone into it. There are bound to be teething problems – getting used to new office systems for example – but other schools have found these manageable.

COMMENT: With regards to the "support" which was mentioned a lot, there has to be other ways we can support all of the staff at school which does not mean effectively handing over control and our children's futures to outsiders who do not have enough years of educational experience or enough proof yet of successful outcomes for the schools they are taking over.

RESPONSE: Please note my previous response re. funding for LA school improvement support. In terms of being outsiders – St Saviour's and CDAT are both already part of the broader Diocese of Chester's education arm and so there is already a natural relationship there. In terms of lack of educational experience, I can only talk for myself as CEO – I was a primary school headteacher (of a CofE school in Liverpool Diocese) for 13 years, during which time the school became one of the first group of 'teaching schools' nationally. I moved from there to be an HMI before becoming CEO 4 years ago. Our school improvement team consists of 2 other former headteachers and a former local authority advisor.

QUESTION: Can you clarify what CDAT ask for as a top slice of the school's budget and how does that compare with what is currently being paid to the LA?

ANSWER: It's difficult to make direct comparisons because there is a big difference between what CDAT provides for schools and what the LA provides. Our 'top slice' is capped at 5% of the school's general grant – and all pupil-led grants such as SEND, Pupil Premium and Sport Premium are delegated to the school in full. Our experience across the other schools in the trust is that none of the schools have lost out financially by becoming an academy, and most make some savings – e.g. from trust-wide contracts that we are able to procure.

QUESTION: Multi Academy Trusts have the ability to financially sure up schools within their Trust by using reserve funds from other Trust schools that are financially stable. Has CDAT previously used this mechanism to protect one of its schools? Will it use this mechanism in the future? What guarantee can it give the staff and parents at Oxton St Saviours that reserve funding from our school will not be spread to other schools within the Trust?

ANSWER: CDAT does not divide the funds amongst other schools within the Trust. The GAG funding for the school would remain with the school.

Any school reserves transferred over on conversion would remain with the school and not the Trust. The LA can take up to 16 weeks to refund the reserves. The LA will ensure that all liabilities have been met. After which point the reserves will transfer across as the school's reserves.

QUESTION A Multi Academy Trust board decides which powers, if any, to delegate to its local governing body. Indeed, going forward there would be no legal requirement for parents to be represented on the governing body. What reassurance can you offer to parents that they will always be represented on the governing body and our local governing body will have the same authority it currently holds, not be overruled and disregarded by the Trust board?

ANSWER: The trust's Scheme of Delegation, which can be found on the CDAT website, sets out these responsibilities and provides the assurance that the school's local governing body and headteacher very much retain control. The scheme of delegation also outlines that for each LGB, there would typically be 2 parent governors elected in the same way that they are at present.

QUESTION: If academised into CDAT, our school can no longer decide to walk away from being an academy. However, if CDAT collapses or decides to walk away from our school we would be forced into another Multi Academy Trust and we would have no say in which. What guarantees can you offer to ensure this would never happen?

ANSWER: CDAT is committed to working with diocesan schools – as the Diocesan trust we're not going to walk away from one of the diocesan schools. The trust is financially secure – and academy finances are very carefully scrutinised (by ESFA, and by annual external audit) to ensure that they remain so.

QUESTION: When TUPE has concluded, what guarantee are you offering that staff salaries will remain in line with those their counterparts in the locally maintained schools? DfE data for last year shows primary teachers in Academies earned, on average, £1300 less than those under Local Authorities.

ANSWER: CDAT has a moral safety net that comes from its Christian ethos – morals are paramount – it has no plans to become a 'business' or make any changes which would be a detriment to our staff and therefore ultimately our pupils. We want the best staff in our schools, and we won't attract the best staff by paying them below the proper rate for teachers (STPCD) and support staff (NJC).

QUESTION: CDAT is under no legal obligation to offer the same terms and conditions to staff that join the school following academisation. What legal promise will you make that all staff, new and old, that they will be treated equally and be subject to the same terms & conditions along with the same salary scales and job descriptions?

ANSWER: We work very closely with union colleagues – we have regular JCNC meetings with NAHT, NASUWT, NEU and Unison – and all matters about pay and conditions, policies etc. go through these meetings. As stated before, we are not here to disadvantage our staff as we want to attract and keep really good staff.

QUESTION: Is there a price per pupil at the school in monetary terms from the local authority funding and if we move to CDAT does the price per child increase?

It seems that you referenced greater autonomy of funds which is excellent but I would like to know if this in literal terms means there is greater funding per pupil at the school by being an academy rather than LEA school.

ANSWER: The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) funds academies on the same basis as maintained schools, with the same General Annual Grant (GAG) per pupil. The school would receive the GAG into the school's own bank account minus the CDAT top slice of 5%. So, whilst the funding per pupil from the ESFA remains the same, there is an overall benefit to the school as they are generally paying less to CDAT than they would to the Local Authority and will most likely be able to make savings through procurement efficiencies negotiated by CDAT.

QUESTION: Please can you give real life examples of day to day benefits of my child being at an academy school rather than an LEA school as discussed at the meeting today. I can understand greater pastoral

support and training opportunities will transcend I would hope to a higher level of education to my child but I really would love to hear more feedback from your experience of visiting or liaising with other CDAT schools.

ANSWER: As the trust grows, opportunities grow too. You're right – a lot of the benefit to pupils is through the trust helping to maintain a high quality of education in the school. We've seen in the last 12 months more pupil-focused activities across the trust – from dance and music workshops and events to joint work between ethos councils and poetry competitions. Our SEND lead teacher is now looking at how we can enhance SEND provision as well.

QUESTION: Since becoming CDAT schools how have other schools' academic attainments in SAT results and Ofsted inspections fared? How do you envisage becoming a CDAT school impacting the academic attainment of St Saviours?

ANSWER: Pupil outcomes in individual schools are typically improving year on year; since the new education inspection framework came out, we've had 9 Ofsted inspections: in 8 of these, schools have retained their 'good' rating and the ninth improved from 'inadequate' to 'good'. This is against the national trend – under the old inspection framework 94% of schools were good or better – under the new framework it's just 85%.

Additional Parent Feedback Received Through Feedback Form or email after 7 June 2023:

COMMENT: Thanks for the update. I would suggest at this point, as the questions were posed on the 20th May and have not yet been answered, the consultation be extended. Consultation should be a two-way process with both parties having a right to reply. By the time these questions and answers are published the consultation will be almost concluded. Other parents and staff would not have had the time to access or process the information that has recently published and there would be no right to reply, thus rendering the consultation unfair.

RESPONSE: Following feedback received the consultation process has been extended by just over 2 weeks to 4pm on Tuesday 27th June. It is also worth noting that once the consultation ends, it is at this point that a report is produced for governors to consider their decision as to whether to proceed with the academy conversion. This report will include all feedback received from stakeholders to allow them to make an informed decision.

COMMENT: I am grateful for the extension of the consultation process and would like to repeat my request for another consultation meeting but I would also ask that parents, staff and if required by staff, unions, be invited to the meeting so all present can fully understand the positive and negative implications involved with academisation. This can then be discussed within the room and all parties, I'm sure, will feel more at ease with any final decision made.

RESPONSE: While we value open communication and collaboration between stakeholders, we believe it is not appropriate to hold a joint meeting with parents, staff and, if requested by staff, unions.

Parents, staff members, and unions have distinct roles and responsibilities within the school community. While parents play a vital role in supporting their children's education, staff members are responsible for delivering quality education and implementing school policies. Unions, on the other hand, advocate for the rights and interests of their members. Combining these distinct roles in a single meeting could lead to confusion and hinder effective discussion. By maintaining separate forums for parents and staff members we can ensure a focused and productive discussion that respects the different roles and responsibilities within our school community.

Four requests were received via email for a further parental meeting.

RESPONSE: We fully appreciate your reasons for requesting this and have tried hard to accommodate this request however it has not proved possible to achieve this due to a number of resource and availability factors. We very much value your input and would please encourage you to continue sharing your thoughts, concerns, and questions through other channels, such as email or conversations with staff in school. Your feedback is very important to us, and the Local Governing Body are committed to making informed decisions that always prioritise the best interests of our pupils and the school community.

COMMENT: We need an extension to this consultation period with all the questions answered! Or if the school continues to go ahead I will be considering taken my children out, which this will be something I would not like to do given the fact that I trust the staff, they work very hard and feel they support my children but I do not trust CDAT! To me all the care about is getting paid!

RESPONSE: I'm really sorry to hear that you don't trust CDAT. I can assure you that, as the Diocesan trust, what we care about is making sure that children in our schools get the best possible education – that they achieve well both academically and across the wider curriculum. Our role is simply to help our schools to achieve that.

COMMENT: The meeting was held with relatively short notice and for only an hour (at perhaps not the most convenient of times).

RESPONSE: When scheduling the consultation meetings there are a number of factors which are considered. The meeting was held in the middle of the consultation period to allow time at either side for questions and feedback and it was held as late in the day as possible taking into account staff and building availability, as well as what be most convenient for the majority of our working parents with young families.

QUESTION: The benefits to the pupils in Oxton St Saviours becoming an academy. There was discussion that it provides support for the Leadership team and more autonomy on the curriculum it did not expressly say what the benefits are for the children.

ANSWER: A number of or schools in CDAT have worked together on different projects – for example, Ethos Councils meeting (virtually and in person), joint dance workshops, inter-school football tournament, a cross-trust poetry competition etc. Three of our schools are now working together to bring in a trained counsellor/chaplain.

QUESTION: Improvements (or not as the case may be) on academic results from other schools having joined CDAT.

ANSWER: Due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, 2019 data is the latest available results data for all schools in the country and therefore would not be a true reflection on the current position of CDAT schools.

QUESTION: Indicative retention/turnover rates of existing members of staff having joined CDAT – whilst existing staff will be TUPE transferred so have existing T&Cs protected, future employees may not have the same benefits and create a two-tier structure (including an increase of TAs rather than qualified teachers)

ANSWER: We don't have a two-tier structure within schools – we follow the same pay scales etc. for new staff as for existing staff in each school. We also believe in the importance of qualified teachers – so much so that we run our own teacher training programme – and have not replaced teachers with TAs.

QUESTION: Anecdotal feedback from other CDAT schools on improvements since becoming an academy

ANSWER: I'm afraid anecdotal feedback from other CDAT schools can only really come from the schools themselves. I know that staff and governors have been in contact with counterparts from other CDAT schools.

QUESTION: Cost of academy conversion

ANSWER: There is no impact on the school budget for an academy conversion. Each school can apply for its £25,000 conversion grant (plus any additional grants, if available) once the DfE has approved the conversion application and the Secretary of State has issued the school with its academy order. This then pays for the legal and project management fees associated with the conversion to an academy.

QUESTION: Positive and negatives of joining an academy – presentation was particularly one sided

ANSWER: As an academy, there are a number of additional responsibilities placed on the school in terms of financial management and reporting. It is expected that on a day-to-day basis the pupils and their parents and carers, teachers and staff will not notice the difference if we become an academy. There will however be additional workloads for members of staff in the school office. CDAT recognise the additional pressures and will provide the school with a significant amount of support from specialists who will be able to pick up the majority of this additional work.

QUESTION: Plans for Ofsted in the future

ANSWER: When a school converts to an academy and it has been previously assessed as good or outstanding in its last inspection, the first inspection for the converted academy is typically an ungraded inspection, rather than a graded one. However, there may be instances where Ofsted determine a graded inspection to be necessary for these schools.

Ofsted would usually look to complete the first ungraded inspection around 4 years after conversion, which is consistent with the frequency of ungraded inspections for other good and outstanding schools.

Nevertheless, Ofsted would take into account the inspection history of the school to determine the timing of the inspection. For instance, if the school was last inspected several years before the academy conversion, they may consider that an earlier ungraded inspection would be beneficial for the school.

QUESTION: Have you considered other academic trusts?

ANSWER: The school cannot just join any MAT. It has to join a MAT on majority church papers (this means the school can only join a MAT where the majority of trustees are appointed by the Diocese, much like the majority of Oxton St Saviour's governors at the moment are foundation governors appointed by the church). There are other Trusts on majority church papers, for example the Liverpool Diocesan Schools Trust (LDST), but Oxton St Saviour's would want to join a Trust within its own Diocese which already provides excellent support for our school. The school would wish to join a Trust where a strong church ethos exists; an ethos that we can share and where it brings a wide variety of expertise.

COMMENT: As it stands am feeling very concerned over the school moving to an academy status!

I feel there has been a complete lack of transparency and not all the information which has been provided is true? Or is there a reason as to why CDAT are willing to change the rules, a little research shows there is a higher fee for the school to pay to CDAT as well as the school budget! It's Also worrying as to why the CDAT member of staff were unable to answer 1 question at the meeting!

RESPONSE: I'm sorry that you feel that there has been a lack of transparency – every effort has been made to answer questions openly and honestly and the consultation period has been extended to ensure views

can be properly heard and answered. I don't fully understand what is meant by "CDAT are willing to change the rules". Our Scheme of Delegation is available on our website and is transparent about finance matters etc.

COMMENT: Why were the school governors given quite some time to research without speaking to parents? Why is the information from the research being made available!

RESPONSE: The decision about becoming an academy is one that governors have to make. They are the group who represent stakeholders in the school – staff, parents, school leaders and the church – through the election/appointment of governing body members. They too are the ones who are ultimately accountable. It's normal practice for the school governors to 'do the legwork' in terms of researching options around academisation, so that they can confidently make a recommendation to the people they represent.

COMMENT: When are we getting a point of contact for each school so we can discuss and hopefully get some questions answered?

RESPONSE: All of our schools are listed on the CDAT website and their details, including contact details, are available there. Again – I know that staff and governors have spoken to other CDAT schools and may be the best people to get feedback from.

Staff Meeting, Wednesday 17 May 2023, 3.30pm

Attendees:

Alison Williams – Chair of Governors

Andy Ramsden – Headteacher

Sue Riley – CDAT

Hardip Hayer, Senior Project Manager, AMF UK (Ltd)

Emily Comyn – Senior Project Support Officer, AMF UK (Ltd)

12 members of staff

QUESTION: What happens to the PGCE students that CDAT trains?

Answer: They can go to any school they like, it doesn't have to be a CDAT school, but it's a good opportunity to build relationships

QUESTION: Can we still have students from Hope University to study here?

Answer: Yes.