

This report describes the responses to the governors' consultation with parents on the proposal to convert to academy status within DCAT, recommends a way forward and proposes a draft message to parents about the decision

Process

Consultation documents were issued to all parents and to all members of staff and were placed on the school website and communications app. Letters issued on 14 September and set a deadline for responses of 12 October 2018.

The school held a consultation meeting for parents on 27 September attended by the Chair, the head, other governors, Mark Talbot, Darren Carpenter and Beruk Berhane from DCAT, Adrian Smith and parents and staff. A report on the consultation meeting and the presentations used were placed on the school website on 3 October. The report is attached at Annex B.

Response

At the end of the consultation period 41 consultation responses had been received – 36 through Survey Monkey and 5 as paper copies in school. Of those:

18	(44%)	ticked Yes – to indicate their support for the proposal
14	(34%)	ticked No – to indicate opposition
9	(25%)	ticked Not Sure.

A print of the individual responses received via Survey Monkey is attached – and a transcript of the 5 paper responses at Annex C.

Assessment

A response of 41 (20% of pupil numbers) is a high rate – **although a the majority of parents have expressed no view.**

Governors will also wish to review the issues raised by respondents and the extent to which the concerns reflected may represent a misunderstanding of the proposal. Increasingly in academy consultation, parents and other stakeholders assume that the poor behaviours reported of some academy trusts reflect the norm for an academy sector as a whole. That is generally not true of the sector and is particularly not true of this specific proposal. The consequence of the wider context is that governors' presentation of a proposal intended to allow the school to continue and develop with minimal change has been regarded with some scepticism. It would be helpful for governors to address some of that in reporting their decision to parents.

Parents supporting the proposal express their confidence in the governors and staff to make the right decisions; that it is the right time to move on from the LA; and that if this helps to make a good school better that is a positive step forward.

Specific concerns expressed include:

- That no other Trusts were considered, and either that the reasons for choosing DCAT over other Trusts were not set out; or that parents might have been given a choice.
- That conversion means change. A lack of clarity on the benefits or opportunities of the conversion, and in particular how it would benefit the children. Not clear how this outweighs the risks. That there is no guarantee that commitments made by the Trust would be adhered to.

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- That the local DCAT school is struggling and that Mrs Metcalf and March staff would be deployed to support its improvement – or moved elsewhere in the Trust.
- That conversion would lead to more centralisation and loss of autonomy for the school and accountability to parents
- That the consultation itself came late in the process – after the academy order – and therefore is not a real consultation.
- The lack of support from WSCC and that this had not been shared with parents previously; some respondents have interpreted that as a particular failure to support The March.

Some of those who were not sure raised particular questions. Many of these were answered at the parent meeting and answers are included in the report for parents placed on the school website. The headteacher has had an email exchange with some parents – including respondent #8.

Recommendation

Governors are invited to note the outcome of consultation and the comments made – and to agree to continue with the conversion process.

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