

13 July 2022

Dear parent/carer,

Further to the initial consultation letter and information that you received from Matthew Parr-Burman, Executive Headteacher for the Isle of Wight Education Federation; we would like to take this opportunity to follow up on some of the responses that have been made to date. We would like to start by reassuring you that the decision to begin the consultation on becoming academy schools by joining HISP was considered in depth and not taken lightly.

Below are some questions that have been raised, with answers from a Governance perspective that we feel may help explain the process so far and a little more detail on what is being proposed.

Why have the Governors taken the decision to look at this?

Our role as Governors is to be responsible for

- developing a vision and strategy for the school
- overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure its money is well spent
- holding the school leader to account to ensure that every student has the best possible education
- engaging with students, staff, parents and the school community to understand their views of the school

These points cover many aspects of this answer and are inherently interlinked.

Governors are not expected/needed/wanted to be part of the operational day to day running of the schools.

Governors play a strategic role only, which is vital when developing and managing short, medium and long term plans for an organisation.

We are confident that all of the sites are well on their way to being rated Good schools by OFSTED and many examples of this can be seen regularly. As a good Governing Board we now need to look to the future and what steps we can take to be even better. Looking at how we support the Executive Headteacher and staff to keep moving forward and improve our learning communities even further. This awareness combined with the recent Government white paper, which has been highlighted previously, means that looking at future options for our federation is necessary.

Why HISP?

HISP approached our federation to discuss whether we would be interested in joining their Multi Academy Trust, as our Federation shared values are in line with the shared values of the HISP Multi Academy Trust.

Have you looked at other options?

Absolutely. The Governing Board and some of the senior leaders spent many, many hours and days considering our options. A SWOT analysis (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) was carried out for each of five options. These options included joining a large national Multi Academy Trust (MAT), forming our own MAT (which we can not do yet as we have not been judged as Good schools), staying as we are and reviewing in the future, exploring a possible MAT within the LA, and joining HISP.

Why did you decide to consult about this option?

Having spent many hours looking at each option, having many open discussions, all of which were very robust and challenging, as well as meeting representatives of HISP in many different capacities, we felt that joining HISP offered the best opportunity for us to achieve the best possible outcomes for our stakeholders (students (current and future), staff, parents/carers and the community).

We looked at our values and their values, and they are very closely aligned. If this was not the case, we would not be consulting on this proposal.

You will lose autonomy and therefore any local influence, so why do it?

We have chosen to explore this route because we retain our local interest. HISP are not a national MAT chain. They are a regional MAT who believe in building excellent educational environments that inspire and unlock potential in all of their school communities.

Please be assured that we are absolutely determined to maintain local control and influence. We would not be proposing this if we felt at any point we would lose this. It is one of the essential criteria that we have.

We spoke to other stakeholders within schools that are already part of HISP and their testimonies and answers to direct questions reassured us that we would retain a local voice and influence.

The MAT has a Scheme of Delegation in place which is a document that sets out who makes decisions and carries out certain functions. The HISP document was shared early in our discussions and we raised concerns about some aspects. The document was promptly redrafted and reshared, taking our points into account. This is evidence of the direct benefit of joining this Trust at the beginning of their growth. We were able to voice an opinion as an equal, that was listened to, considered and acted upon. In a different type of MAT, this would not even have been a possible discussion, with this MAT, it resulted in a change in our favour.

Many of us have been Governors for the Isle of Wight Education Federation for a long time and know how important the schools are to the local community. We are not looking to lose this, we are looking to improve the quality of education that these young people receive and widen their future opportunities.

You have published a lot of the positives about HISP, there must be things that are not perfect.

Yes, there are elements where we think things are not as strong, but having been the ones who have looked at and investigated this, we are confident and want to share our confidence that we feel this is the right opportunity for our Federation.

To give some detail though, one of the weaknesses is that the MAT is fairly early in its journey, so there are questions around their experience of improving schools. Others are not having a VI Form currently, would we lose our identity, can we trust what we are being told. Some of these things can initially appear to be weaknesses but we are looking at them as opportunities.

As already mentioned, by joining early we still have the chance to influence the direction and set up of the expanding MAT. Too much further on, then many things will have to have been established.

The lack of VI Form is not a concern, there is another school consulting to join HISP currently who has one. In addition, they showed interest in us because our VI form is well respected and very popular.

We will not lose our identity, as that is not the philosophy of HISP. They want a group of schools who are individual but can share best practice, experiences and learning opportunities for staff, in order to maximise and improve the education and outcomes for the students.

Can we trust what we are being told?

In the world we live in, nothing is certain. This is why we are consulting. We then enter a period of due diligence. Due diligence 'is the process of ensuring that all stakeholders understand the relevant information, including costs, risks, benefits, assets and liabilities, enabling them to make fully informed decisions about transferring a school into a new academy trust.' Before making a final decision we are, and will continue to ask questions of HISP and test what we are being told. This is healthy and shows that both parties want what is best for the future.

Will you lose control of the finances?

A MAT does operate under one bank account but there is a national funding formula which calculates an allocation for each school, using the school's student numbers and characteristics from the previous October school census. This will be used when determining any of the schools budgets within the MAT. This MAT does not top slice the schools budget, like the Local Authority. Central teams are funded in other ways through the Learning Partnership schemes.

What role will the Governors have?

We will remain a board of interested parties, potentially referred to as an Academy Committee. The Executive Headteacher would report to us, as he does now, as well as the CEO, Su Whelan; who then reports to HISPS's Board of Trustees. We are in place to challenge the senior leaders, as we do now, oversee the finances on a more local level, whilst having the interests of the local community in mind.

How will you ensure that the schools do not let this move affect my child, who is sitting their GCSEs or A Levels next year?

This is a strategic change, not an operational change. The students will be taught in the same buildings, in the same uniform, in the same rooms, by the same staff, learning the same curriculum. The Executive Headteacher will manage this on the ground as the progress of the students is the reason that we are all here.

So, if so much is staying the same, what is in it for them and why join?

It is about creating capacity, broadening staff development opportunities and working cooperatively and collaboratively with other professionals to develop and improve our federation. Which in turn means better education, opportunities and outcomes for our students.

We have much to offer as a Federation and group of professionals. HISP MAT have been clear that there will be mutual benefit from this collaboration, given our strengths in leadership, staffing and curriculum.

Small MATS have a risk of being taken over by larger MATs. Creating a MAT of a reasonable regional size creates sustainability. As MATS hit certain thresholds of numbers of students, increased funding is released from central Government. This is spent improving learning environments and experiences for our school communities.

We hope this has gone some way to provide extra detail to questions that you may have had. If you are sceptical and have concerns then it is very likely these feelings have been represented already by one of the Governors in the process. Questions have at times been aggressively robust and we make no apologies for that. We are therefore consulting on what we believe is a great opportunity for the short, medium and long term for our whole Federation's learning communities.

The consultation remains open until 3.30pm on Friday, 15 July. Please do not hesitate to make a representation, but I would urge you to read all of the information available to you on the website first, in addition to what is contained in this letter.

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