

Notes of Meeting: North Advisory Board

Thursday 11 November 2021

Attendance

Attendance data is published annually on the GOV.UK website.

AB members who sent their apologies for the meeting have, where possible, been consulted on all projects before the meeting. Their views are reflected in the discussion at the meeting (where appropriate). This excludes items where that member declared a conflict of interest.

Regional school commissioner (RSC) chair

- Katherine Cowell (RSC)

Advisory board (AB) members

- George Beveridge (AB)
- Lesley Powell (AB)
- Elizabeth Horne (AB)
- Chris Clarke (AB)
- Sir Michael Wilkins (AB)
- Zoe Carr (AB)
- Andy Bayston (AB)

Guests

- None

Apologies

- Nick Hurn (AB)

DfE senior civil servants

- Kim Mitchell (Deputy Director)

Representations received

- No representations were made for any items discussed at this meeting.

General discussion points

Points discussed in the meeting.

RSC welcomed board members to the meeting.

Converter Academy Orders

Points discussed in relation to school conversion.

Project: This is a proposal for St Helen's Primary School, Hartlepool to convert and join Northern Lights Learning Trust (NLLT)

AB discussion:

- St Helen's Primary was judged to be 'Good' by Ofsted in January 2019.
- St Helen's performed strongly between 2017 and 2019 and will add further capacity to the trust.
- The board was advised that St Helen's has been an associate member of the trust since April 2021, a strong relationship has developed and both parties would like to formalise this arrangement.
- The board was informed that St Helen's headteacher brings a wealth of experience in both leadership and school improvement which the trust will benefit from.
- The board discussed the trust's financial health and was advised that the trust will identify further savings through ICFP and shared services.
- The board was advised that the school would benefit from having a SRMA deployment.
- The board supported this proposal, with recommendation that a SRMA is deployed.

RSC decision: Approve

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Project Lead to inform school/trust of decision

Converter Academy Orders

Points discussed in relation to school conversion.

Project: This is a proposal for St Cuthbert's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Crook, Durham, St Mary's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Newton Aycliffe, Durham, St Mary's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Barnard Castle, Durham, to convert and join Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust.

AB discussion:

- The board was advised that this proposal is in line with the Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle Diocese's vision on Catholic education.
- All three primary schools are judged by Ofsted to be 'Good'.
- The schools were interested in joining a multi-academy trust prior to the diocese plan, to help strengthen and develop their expertise, and to ensure future sustainability.
- The board was advised that Bishop Hogarth is the natural local link for all three schools.
- Based on 2019 data, the schools' performance is in line with both LA and national average.
- The board was informed that each school is currently operating below capacity. Work will be carried out in the local area to help raise the profile of the schools and increase roll numbers.
- The trust is financially strong and has confirmed it will focus on improving the schools' financial health.
- The board was advised that this is the final cluster of converter cases moving into Bishop Hogarth CET.
- The board supported this proposal.

RSC decision: Approve

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Project Lead to inform school/trust of decision

Converter Academy Orders

Points discussed in relation to school conversion.

Project: This is a proposal for New Brancepeth Primary School, Durham and Moorside Primary School, Durham to convert and join Advance Learning Partnership (ALP)

AB discussion:

- New Brancepeth Primary School was judged by Ofsted to be 'Requires Improvement' in April 2019 and Moorside Primary school was judged by Ofsted to be 'Good' in January 2020.
- The schools have worked as a federation for the last 3 years and have seen the benefits of working together, the board was advised that the schools would like to join an academy trust to support their journey further.
- The schools have decided that ALP is the right fit, both schools are feeder primaries into one of ALP's secondary schools.
- The board was advised that the trust has already taken steps to expand and establish a primary arm and they plan to appoint a Primary Director of School Improvement for 1 January 2022.
- The board was informed that based on 2019 results New Brancepeth will need some support particularly with writing progress, the trust has confirmed they will have sufficient primary expertise and capacity to drive improvement.
- Pupil numbers are predicted to decline at both schools, the trust is aware and has confirmed that numbers are expected to rise in later years.
- The board was advised that a trustee has stepped down, which leaves the trust board without primary expertise. ALP is addressing this and plan to increase the number of trustees from 9 to 11.
- The board supported this proposal.

RSC decision: Approve

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Project Lead to inform school/trust of decision

Converter Academy Orders

Points discussed in relation to school conversion.

Project: This is a proposal for Burnhope Primary School, Durham to convert and join Stanley Learning Partnership (SLP)

AB discussion:

- Burnhope Primary School was judged by Ofsted to be 'Good' in January 2019.
- The board was advised that Burnhope already has links to the Stanley cluster of schools and by joining SLP existing relationships will be strengthened.
- Burnhope is a short distance away from SLP and the school feels it would benefit from being part of the trust.
- The board was advised that SLP is working with Academy Ambassadors to fill the current trust board vacancies. The board raised some concerns with the current mix of skills and suggested that the governance should be strengthened and additional business skills, particularly finance should be added.
- The board discussed the trust finances, the trust has had a recent SRMA deployment, however, given their rapid growth the board agreed that a further deployment would be beneficial.
- The board challenged the current top slice figure and suggested that this should be reviewed.
- The board supported this proposal with recommendation that the school accepts some support from an experienced mentor.

RSC decision: Approve

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Project Lead to inform school/trust of decision

Converter Academy Orders

Points discussed in relation to school conversion.

Project: This is a proposal for Oakdene Primary School, Stockton on Tees to convert and join The Enquire Learning Trust.

AB discussion:

- Oakdene Primary School was judged by Ofsted to be 'Outstanding' March 2013.
- The board was advised that Oakdene already has links to the trust, by joining Enquire, existing relationships will be strengthened.
- The board discussed the school's finances, the trust has confirmed that further savings will be made through the use of the trust central services and implementation of ICFP.
- The board was advised that Enquire plans to grow its Northern and Yorkshire and Humber hubs further.
- The board supported this proposal.

RSC decision: Approve

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Project Lead to inform school/trust of decision

Converter Academy Orders

Points discussed in relation to school conversion.

Project: This is a proposal for Willowtree Community Primary School, North Yorkshire to convert and join Northern Star Academies Trust (NSAT)

AB discussion:

- Willow Tree was judged by Ofsted to be 'Requires Improvement' in February 2020.
- The board was advised that Willow Tree has concluded that the best way to sustain improvement would be to join a trust.
- Willow Tree leaders have witnessed the support NSAT has given to other local schools and therefore would like to become part of the trust.
- The board was informed that Harrogate High School, which is part of NSAT, is the secondary feeder for almost half of the Willow Tree pupils.
- The board was advised that NSAT is an established trust with a strong record of school improvement activity, who are well placed to support Willow Tree.
- Demand for school places in this area is stable, reduction in numbers represents a shift in parental preference. Pupil numbers should recover when standards improve.
- The board supported this proposal.

RSC decision: Approve

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Project Lead to inform school/trust of decision

Trust Change

Points discussed in relation to academies moving to a new trust.

Project: This is a proposal for Holley Park, Sunderland to voluntary transfer to Northern Lights Learning Trust (NLLT)

AB discussion:

- ACER Learning Trust is an empty MAT with 1 primary school Holley Park Academy.
- Holley Park was judged by Ofsted to be 'Good' in March 2015, a short inspection took place in December 2018 and the school remained 'Good'.
- Based on 2019 data the school's performance is in line with both LA and national average.
- ACER has considered a voluntary transfer to another trust for some time, RSC approved a previous transfer request, however, this did not go ahead. ACER now feel it is the right time to make this move with NLLT.
- The board was advised that Holley Park is a good geographical fit and will be in close proximity to one of NLLT's school.
- The board was informed that the decision to transfer into NLLT is mutually beneficial to both trusts, Holley Park will be able to help support the academic improvement of schools within the trust.
- The board discussed the governance structure and was advised that NLLT have confirmed that a full governance review will be carried out
- The board supported this proposal.

RSC decision: Approve

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Project Lead to inform school/trust of decision

Decisions escalated to the NSC/Minister

List of decisions that have been escalated to the Minister.

Project: This is a significant change application from Brighter Academy Trust to increase capacity at Farringdon Community Academy, Sunderland

AB advised on:

- The board was advised that Farringdon Community Academy has been judged to 'Requires Improvement' by Ofsted at its last three full inspections in April 2019, November 2016 and September 2014.
- The school has been offered funding from Sunderland Local Authority (LA) to expand its capacity at the same time as the development of a full school re-build which is being separately funded through the DfE's School Rebuilding Programme (SRP).
- This significant change application to increase capacity from 900 to 1,050 by 2023, is being made now to factor any increase in capacity into the planned rebuilding of the school and achieve better value for money.
- The board was advised that LA projections suggest a long-term deficit of secondary school places in the geographical area due to a large housing development. The LA has considered expanding capacity at other secondary schools however, Farringdon has current and possible future capacity as well as being in close proximity to the housing development.
- Formal consultation has been carried out and there were no objections to the proposal.
- The board made it clear that as the only school in the Brighter Academy Trust, Farringdon would benefit in being part of a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) to provide more capacity and expertise to help improve standards. They also raised concerns about the disruption this new build will have on the leadership of the school and the potential to distract them from improving educational provision.
- The board had a number of concerns about Brighter Academy Trust's governance structure, in particular the small number of members and trustees, and the subsequent lack of knowledge and expertise.
- The financial health of the trust and ongoing low pupil numbers over the next few years was also raised as an issue. The DfE will continue to monitor this and ensure the governance structure is reviewed.
- The board supported the proposal due to the clear need for a substantial number of school places in the area, however they advised that strong expectations should be placed on the trust to review their finances, governance arrangements and consider joining a MAT as soon as possible.
- The RSC decided to escalate this application for ministerial approval due to future sufficient school places being reliant on expanding a school with 3 consecutive Ofsted RI judgements along with our ongoing concerns around governance and financial health.

RSC decision: Approve

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Project Lead to inform school/trust of decision

Academy opening approved in principle

Project: St. Michael's C of E Primary School

AB discussion: Proposed opening date 01/12/2021

RSC decision: Approve

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: No further action required

Academy opening approved in principle

Project: St John Vianney RC Primary School

AB discussion: Proposed opening date 01/12/2021

RSC decision: Approve

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: No further action required

Academy opening approved in principle

Project: St John Fisher Catholic High School

AB discussion: Proposed opening date 01/12/2021

RSC decision: Approve

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: No further action required

Academy opening approved in principle

Project: Malton Community Primary School

AB discussion: Proposed opening date 01/12/2021

RSC decision: Approve

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: No further action required

Academy opening approved in principle

Project: Evenwood CofE Primary School

AB discussion: Proposed opening date 01/12/2021

RSC decision: Approve

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: No further action required

Decisions taken between AB meetings

List of decisions taken by the RSC outside of AB meetings.

Project: Chetwynde School – Cumbria

Decision type: Significant Change - to amend the school's age range from 4-16 to 3-16 from January 2022

RSC decision: Approve

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Project Lead to inform school/trust of decision

Project: The King's Academy – Middlesbrough

Decision type: Significant Change – increase in capacity

RSC decision: Approve

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Project Lead to inform school/trust of decision

List of projects listed on the published draft agenda, but were removed before the meeting

List of projects that were on the published agenda but not discussed at the meeting.

Project: The Dove Academy Trust, Sunderland

Type of decision: voluntary transfer to Melrose Learning Trust, Stockton on Tees

Reason for why it was taken off agenda: deferral requested by the trusts

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