



Notes of Meeting: West Midlands Advisory Board

17 February 2022

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 Schools Commissioner (RSC) chair

- Andrew Warren

Advisory Board (AB) members

- Kate Brunt
- Dame Maureen Brennan
- Sinead Smith
- Sir Mark Grundy
- Mike Donoghue

Guests

- None

Apologies

- Margaret Yates
- Sajid Gulzar

DfE senior civil servants

- Claire Trewartha (Deputy Director)
- Dawn Dandy (Deputy Director)

Representations received

- 1; Whether to issue an Academy Order to St Peter's Primary School, Herefordshire, to convert and become an academy and join Three Counties Multi Academy Trust, Herefordshire.

These representations were shared in advance of the meeting with all attendees and considered alongside their corresponding item.

General Discussion Points

Local Update

- The RSC and AB members discussed the current climate in schools across the West Midlands Region.

AB member reflections

- AB members reflected on events planned for the coming months including the Commonwealth Games.

Converter Academy Orders

Points discussed in relation to school conversion.

Project: Whether to issue an Academy Order to Whitley Village School, Cheshire West and Chester, and The Acorns Primary and Nursery School, Cheshire West and Chester, to convert and become an academy and join The Rowan Learning Trust, Wigan.

AB discussion:

- The Acorns Primary and Nursery School and Whitley Village School are both Ofsted 'Good' rated schools, who due to a federation agreement, operate with shared staff and are overseen by 1 headteacher.
- The Rowan Trust comprises of 7 schools, Ofsted rating ranging from 'Outstanding' to 'Inadequate'. The head of the Trust has been providing support to both schools leading to further collaboration where it has been identified that their values align together.
- The Trust has a primary expansion strategy, looking to bring in 'Good' primary schools to support their primary arm. Whitley and Acorn will be increasing capacity of all schools going forward with additional leadership experience.
- Due to the 2 schools reinforcing a formalised relationship, they will be receiving further support from the trust in School Improvement, School Performance and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provisions.
- The board questioned the secondary school capacity experience which was later reassured by their current experience shared across the trust.
- There were also concerns on the performance of the secondary schools, this was discussed, and they were reassured by DfE Colleagues.
- As part of the decision, conditions have been agreed by the RSC; they include: The Trust to submit a robust growth strategy which explains the vision and targets they have within this sub-region (Cheshire West and Chester) and to provide clarity and confidence in their future growth strategy. This plan must also show an understanding of how the Trust will manage future risks and provide assurances regarding their mitigation strategy.
- The board members supported the recommendation.

RSC decision: Approve with conditions.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Converter Academy Order to be issued to Chair of Governors. Trust and DCS to be informed of decision.

Project: Whether to issue an Academy Order to Ridgeway Primary School, Staffordshire, to convert and become an academy and join Primitas Learning Partnership, Staffordshire.

AB discussion:

- Ridgeway Primary School is a large primary school situated in Burntwood, Staffordshire with a current Ofsted rating of 'Good'.
- Primitas Learning Partnership is a trust currently consisting of 2 schools, both rated Ofsted 'Good'. The trust is wanting to implement its growth strategy and development plan by adding further schools to its current cohort.

- Ridgeway have recognised the benefits of joining a Trust and will be able to share expertise within Primitas such as peer to peer support and primary experience.
- The board discussed the Trustee board and School Improvement strategy currently in place at Primitas.
- The board also highlighted that there was a lack of information on the school improvement strategy. This was counterbalanced by further information being provided on their reciprocal trust support with 2 other trusts as well as relationships with educationalists in the area on both secondary and primary.
- The RSC agreed that a recommendation of a School Resource Management Advisor (SRMA) is to be deployed within 12 months, at a suitable point to be agreed with the trust. If more schools were to join this would be brought forward, especially if they bring additional risk/pressure.
- The board members supported the recommendation.

RSC decision: Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Converter Academy Order to be issued to Chair of Governors. Trust and DCS to be informed of decision.

Project: Whether to issue an Academy Order to St Peter's Primary School, Herefordshire, to convert and become an academy and join Three Counties Multi Academy Trust, Herefordshire.

AB discussion:

- St Peter's Primary School is a primary school with a current Ofsted rating of 'Good' and is known to be popular in its local area resulting in oversubscription for the past 3 years.
- The proposal is for the creation of a Trust titled Three Counties, Bredenbury to become a sponsor and then St Peter Primary School to become an academy. Together they will form the new Trust and if approved, Bredenbury, will receive support from Queen Elizabeth High School, also in the Bromyard area.
- All schools already work closely together in a federation, with a shared executive headteacher, and have further increased their collaborative working and mutual support during Covid.
- St Peters is already benefitting from collaboration with the other two schools in the proposed new MAT including shared staffing and resourcing.
- Leaders and governors are confident that the ethos and vision for the MAT closely aligns to that of St Peters.
- Discussion on the public representation expressing concern about the formation of the MAT.
- The board discussed viability and the concerns that had been raised, reviewing the solutions that can be taken in the area to aid in future development.
- The RSC approved the decision with a condition of: The trust to submit monthly management accounts for a period of 12 months from the conversion of Bredenbury; as well as this, post-conversion the trust must conduct a skills audit of the trust board and submit it to RDD by 31st December 2022 and that Members duly consider appointing one or more Academy Ambassadors to fill any skills gaps identified.

- The RSC also added a recommendation for the CEO to have appropriate CEO mentor support from the CEO of a strong MAT.
- The board members supported the recommendation.

RSC decision: Approve with conditions for the trust to submit monthly management accounts for a period of 12 months from the conversion of Bredenbury; as well as this, post-conversation the trust must conduct a skills audit of the trust board and submit it to RDD by 31st December 2022 and that Members duly consider appointing one or more Academy Ambassadors to fill any skills gaps identified.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Converter Academy Order to be issued to Chair of Governors. Trust and DCS to be informed of decision.

Project: Whether to issue an Academy Order to Pitcheroak School, Worcestershire, to convert and become an academy and join Central Learning Partnership Trust, Wolverhampton.

AB discussion:

- Pitcheroak School is community special school based in Redditch, Worcestershire, with a current Ofsted rating of 'Good'.
- Central Learning Partnership Trust is currently built up of 15 schools with three geographical hubs across Wolverhampton, Rotherham, and Worcestershire with a specialism in Special Educational Needs (SEN) within its Worcestershire hub.
- Pitcheroak School and CLPT have shared aims to improve the life chances of young people and provide the best fit of education for pupils with an ethos of sharing expertise.
- The school has developed close links with Kingfisher School, which is already part of CLPT, joining the trust would formalise that relationship.
- The board discussed governance, trustee board numbers and finances, particularly staffing costs and the school improvement strategy created by the trust.
- The board members supported the recommendation.

RSC decision: Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Converter Academy Order to be issued to Chair of Governors. Trust and DCS to be informed of decision.

Sponsored Route:

Points discussed in relation to a school's sponsor status.

Project: Whether to approve a sponsor for Bredenbury Primary School, Herefordshire.

Reason for Academy Order: Ofsted Category 4.

AB discussion:

- Bredenbury Primary School is a small village school, located in Bromyard, Herefordshire. They currently hold an Ofsted rating of 'Requires Improvement'.
- The proposal is for the creation of a Trust titled Three Counties, Bredenbury to become a sponsor and then St Peter Primary School to become an academy. Together they will form the new Trust and if approved, Bredenbury, will receive support from Queen Elizabeth High School, also in the Bromyard area.
- All schools already work closely together in a federation, with a shared executive headteacher, and have further increased their collaborative working and mutual support during Covid.
- Due to Bredenbury's small size and low percentage of students on roll, the area is in need of growth and capacity with the proposal being supported by the LA.
- Ethos and vision of the MAT closely align with St Peters; they wish to work as a family of schools through federation leaders.
- Discussion on the public representation expressing concern about the formation of the MAT.
- The board discussed viability and the concerns that had been raised, reviewing the solutions that can be taken in the area to aid in future development.
- The RSC approved the decision with a condition of: The trust to submit monthly management accounts for a period of 12 months from the conversion of Bredenbury; as well as this, post-conversion the trust must conduct a skills audit of the trust board and submit it to RDD by 31st December 2022 and that Members duly consider appointing one or more Academy Ambassadors to fill any skills gaps identified.
- The RSC also added a recommendation for the CEO to have appropriate CEO mentor support from the CEO of a strong MAT.
- The board members supported the recommendation.

RSC decision: Approve with conditions for the trust to submit monthly management accounts for a period of 12 months from the conversion of Bredenbury; as well as this, post-conversion the trust must conduct a skills audit of the trust board and submit it to RDD by 31st December 2022 and that Members duly consider appointing one or more Academy Ambassadors to fill any skills gaps identified.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: To inform the school and trusts.

Significant Change

Points discussed in relation to significant changes application(s).

Project: Whether to approve the removal of a Sixth Form at Harborne Academy, Birmingham.

AB discussion:

- Harborne Academy is a secondary school based in Edgbaston with a current Ofsted rating of 'Good'.
- The academy had submitted this application however it is a retrospective change as the sixth form hasn't had any students for past 2 years but hasn't officially closed due to trustees wanting to ensure interest was low.
- The academy proposed the removal of their sixth form due to a decrease in pupil admissions, leaving the sixth form an unviable option for the academy.
- The Local Authority (LA) supported the closure due to the surplus of post 16 places held in the area that sufficiently support current pupil numbers.
- The board discussed the impact of not approving the closure.
- The board members supported the recommendation.

RSC decision: Approve with condition to hold an External Review of the Trust's Governance.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: To inform school of decision.

Project: Whether to approve a capacity increase at The Axis Academy, Cheshire East.

AB discussion:

- The Axis Academy is a Free School based in Crewe, which opened in 2020 as part of Youth Engagement Schools Trust.
- The academy is a SEN school with a Social, emotional & mental health difficulties (SEMH) focus with a proposal to increase their capacity due to local demand in the area.
- The additional capacity will be added across both Pre and Post 16, adding a Sixth Form and aiding students in the area to access further education as well as vocational training.
- The LA is fully supportive of the proposal with a consultation held across 6 weeks with no concerns raised.
- The board discussed the current capacity of the trust and how this was a positive step for the SEND provision in the area. They also talked about the physical space available for students in the building – they were reassured by staff who had attended for a school visit.
- The board members supported the recommendation.

RSC decision: Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: To inform school of decision.

Project: Whether to approve the closure of a Sixth Form at Moorside High School, Staffordshire.

AB discussion:

- Moorside High School is a provision based in Staffordshire which has proposed a retrospective change in their age range including the closure of its Sixth Form.
- The application has been submitted retrospectively due to receiving 0 applications in a previous academic year.
- The Sixth Form provision has never been taught on the school site. Moorside High School's Sixth Form students have always attended the collaborative Sixth Form in Staffordshire, Moorlands Sixth Form College, a joint provision run by Cheadle High School, Painsley Catholic College and Moorside High School. This collaboration ended in 2018.
- Many students from Moorside secondary provision attend Sixth Form elsewhere: at City of Stoke Sixth Form College, Newcastle College, Leek and Buxton College and at Painsley Catholic College.
- If not approved, parents and students may consider Moorside's Sixth Form offer when considering local 16 to 18 provision and may not be aware that due to small numbers, actual delivery is unlikely to take place at the academy.
- The board members supported the recommendation.

RSC decision: Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: To inform school of decision.

Decisions taken between AB meetings

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

Project: St Clements CofE Primary School, Worcestershire.

Decision type: Significant Change – increase of age range.

RSC decision: Approved.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: To inform the school of the decision.

Project: Warrington Primary Academy Trust, Cheshire West and Chester.

Decision type: Funding approval – Sponsorship Funding.

RSC decision: Approved.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: To inform the school of the decision.

Project: St Bernard's RC Primary School, Cheshire West and Chester.

Decision type: Significant Change – increase of age range.

RSC decision: Approved.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: To inform the school of the decision.

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

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

Project: Endon Hall Primary School, Staffordshire.

Type of decision: Converter Academy Order.

Reason for why it was taken off agenda: Insufficient information to present at AB.

Project: All Saints National Academy, Walsall.

Type of decision: Trust Change.

Reason for why it was taken off agenda: Insufficient information to present at AB.

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