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Dear Parents/Guardians

Thursday 25th October 2018

Re: MAT Update

As we approach the half term break, we felt it was important to provide you with an update about the potential academisation process, advised to you by the letter dated 10th September.

Apologies in advance that this is a rather long letter; however we felt a comprehensive update would be appreciated by all parents/guardians.

Since sharing news of our intentions in September, the executive headteacher, heads of school and governing board have received valuable feedback from a number of parents/guardians. We are appreciative of the healthy level of engagement thus far: it's demonstrative of the affection and importance placed on Penns School by our community. It's encouraging to find many parents/guardians are in favour of the proposed conversion; others however have rightfully asked for clarification on the process, further reassurance that the appropriate steps are in place, and that there will be an opportunity for concerns to be aired prior to a final decision being made.

To that end, we would like to take the opportunity to further explain the process, answer the questions asked of us, and update you on the status and next steps.

Current position

* It is firstly important we are clear about the current status of the proposed conversion.

The only formal decision made by the governing board in relation to the MAT conversion thus far is the one to continue to move towards the formal process of application to the Department of Education (DfE). This is nevertheless a significant decision, and one reached after an extensive period of exploration, discussion and challenge by the governing board, before being put to the vote.

It is important parents/guardians and other stakeholders understand that the final decision to convert to academy status has not yet been made – and indeed cannot be made until the formal process commences (more on this below). That decision is some way away, following this formal process, and will still be subject to a final vote by the governing board.



This application to the DfE has not yet been submitted.

* When we wrote to you on 10th September to advise of our decision to explore this process, we voluntarily commenced an ‘informal discussion’ with staff, parents/guardians and the wider school community. This precedes a formal consultation process, which itself cannot commence until the application has been made and permission granted by the DfE to proceed. With the benefit of hindsight, we recognise that the use of the word ‘consultation’ in some of our early communications was premature. We can appreciate this may sound like semantics, but it is in fact an important distinction and is a likely root cause of much of the concern expressed so far.

* This informal discussion has so far included update letters, a comprehensive Q&A document, the sharing of various independent documents relating to the pros and cons of MATs, and a presentation delivered on 20th September. This information has all been made freely available on the school website.

This informal discussion will continue over the coming weeks and months as the formal process begins. This will include additional information on the alternatives explored by the senior leadership team and governing board and our rationale for the decisions made to date, and the educational benefits we believe conversion would facilitate.

Next steps

* The process for conversion to MAT status is prescribed by the DfE and commences with an application to the Independent Head Teacher’s Board (HTB). The role of the HTB is to provide advice, scrutiny and challenge to the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC), who acts on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education in assessing applications from local authority-maintained schools to convert to academy status. The HTB meets monthly and will either accept or reject the application.

* If the application is rejected, Penns School will continue as a local authority community maintained school and all activity relating to a possible MAT conversion will cease.

If the application is approved, then this will progress our application to the next stage of the process. For the sake of clarity, the HTB’s decision to accept this application triggers a comprehensive process of formal due diligence and not the conversion itself.

* Approval will give the school access to the MAT conversion grant funding. The conversion grant funding is used to appoint an independent and appropriate legal team who will lead on the due diligence process, including a legally required statutory consultation with parents/guardians and stakeholders. This consultation will be an essential element of fulfilling our statutory duties and the views and outcomes will be reported back to the governing board of each school.

The appointed legal team will ensure due diligence is being carried out effectively. This will provide essential MAT Risk Assessment information, including (but not limited to):

- o Finance appraisal
- o Premises and land appraisal
- o External stakeholder consultation
- o Educational standards appraisal

* This process takes on average two to six months.

Final decision

* Upon completion of the due diligence, the independent legal team will present the findings (including the result of the formal parent/carer/stakeholder consultation) and a detailed report to the governing board for Penns School. The governors will then use this information to vote on whether to proceed with conversion or not.

* The governing boards of each of the six schools will meet separately and vote in isolation, and will be doing so in the interests of their respective schools only.

* If at this point the governing board decides that the due diligence indicates that it would not be in the best interests of our school to convert, we remain as we are.

It is important to note that the DfE clearly state that if a school applies to become an academy but then changes its mind after the findings of the due diligence - which includes parent/carer consultation - it can still pull out of the process, providing the final funding agreement has not been signed.

If a school withdraws from MAT conversion it will have to pay back any conversion grant funding remaining, but will not have to reimburse any monies spent on the process to that point providing the correct evidence is available.

* Accessing this conversion grant funding is therefore essential to ensure that independent due diligence is undertaken by experts that specialise in consultation and ensuring the process is fair to all. This is why the application to proceed has been agreed by the governing board.

* If, at the end of this process, the vote is in favour of the conversion across all six schools, the conversion will go ahead. If any of the six schools withdraw from or vote against the process, the decision will revert to the remaining governing boards to take appropriate advice and review next steps.

We are fully aware that the conversion process is a complex one. We are also aware of the number of negative, indeed alarming, articles and information that can be found on MATs and that the concept is not universally welcomed. We would encourage all parents/guardians to seek a balanced view and hold that view in context of the current and predicted education landscape. We would also like to reiterate that it is a decision subject to significant due diligence and scrutiny and one

also subject to a final vote by the governing board. It is their responsibility to assess the full breadth of information available and reach consensus about what is right for Penns School.

We sincerely hope that this correspondence and the additional information we will add to the school website over the coming weeks helps to address many of the concerns raised to date and reassures you about the thoroughness of the decision-making process from here on. Your feedback is welcome but we would also request that it is respected that a formal opportunity to contribute to the consultation will be established in due course. We are sure you will agree that the smooth and effective day-to-day running of the schools and the wellbeing and academic achievement of our children remains an absolute priority.

Finally, we would like to take this opportunity to thank all our parents/guardians for their engagement to date and wish you all a happy half term break.

Yours sincerely

M Jones

Headteacher