



5th March 2018

Dear Parent/Carer,

Outcome of Consultation on the Proposal to Convert Barrow Hedges Primary School to Academy Status and Join Cirrus Primary Academy Trust

I wrote to you all back in November 2017 informing you of the governors' intention to consult on converting the school to Academy Status and join the Cirrus Trust. This letter informs you of the outcome of that consultation and the final decision of the Governing Body.

We held two consultation events for parents/carers to enable you to raise any issues and to seek clarification on any points about which you were unclear. These took place across two events held at 9.15am and 7pm on 30th January, there were a little over thirty parents/carers in attendance. We also sent out a briefing pamphlet with a reply slip to enable you to indicate your views on the matter in writing. We received a total of 24 written responses of which 19 were in favour of the change to Academy status, 2 were opposed to the change and three were undecided. The main issues raised and the responses to them are set out below.

The Trust structure, organisation and future direction

The Trust is subject to both company and charity law and all trustees are required to abide by rules regarding the use of public funds. This includes declaration of any interests and not participating in any decision making where they might have an interest. This arrangement mirrors that currently in place for governors. The Trust is entirely focused on the provision of primary education and the Trustees have set a maximum size of 12 schools so that they do not become too large and senior staff can therefore get to know all the schools and their needs in some detail.

Finances

The pamphlet that was sent out emphasised that there are financial benefits to joining the Trust. The impression was given that academies are better funded than local authority maintained schools. Whilst this is true in strict cash terms, it was pointed out that academies also have higher costs since they can no longer access certain services from the local authority that are provided to maintained schools at no cost. The financial benefits are not therefore in strict cash terms but in the power that academies have to share costs across the group for certain back office functions and the fact that all decisions about expenditure are made by the Trustees and the Governors of the individual schools.

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Impact of having failing schools in the Trust

At present the Trust is responsible for two outstanding schools and three that are experiencing some difficulties. The two outstanding schools have a long track record in supporting other schools both in Sutton and across England. Many staff at Barrow Hedges have also helped support other schools so the situation in the Trust is not significantly different from the current situation. The trust is keen to have more good and outstanding schools so that the pool of expertise is widened and Barrow Hedges is part of that widening of the pool of experts. There are many quite significant benefits to staff being able to go out to other schools to provide support and help both in terms of their own professional development and in what they bring back for the children of Barrow Hedges both in terms of knowledge and experience. Similarly our school benefits from the support and help we get from other schools as was the case a couple of years ago when we had a significant number of newly qualified teachers.

Admissions

Cirrus Trust intend to continue with the current arrangements for admissions so there will be no adverse impact on local families especially those who already have children at the school and wish for younger brothers and sisters to be admitted.

Staffing matters

For the past couple of years we have had a fairly settled staff and naturally most parents/carers would like to see this continue. Consequently there have been concerns that staff may be reallocated to other schools in the Trust group. We have assurances from the Cirrus Trust that this will not happen and that staff attached to individual schools will not be moved other than where normal recruitment processes take place. This is no different to the current situation. Indeed the Trust argue that having a wider group of schools means that there are more opportunities for staff so it is more likely that good teachers will be retained benefitting all children in the Trust schools.

The National Curriculum

Although there is freedom for academy schools to teach their own curriculum without reference to the National Curriculum, there is no plan within the Trust to force schools to opt for a revised curriculum to that already taught unless, of course, it is failing children. As a result the curriculum we have been developing and using at Barrow Hedges will remain largely unchanged although as is always the case we will seek to continually improve the provision for your children wherever we can.

Parents/carers who attended the consultation events will also be aware that there is no plan to change the name of the school, the uniform the children wear, the school colours or the overall ethos of Barrow Hedges including our vision and values. As a result the children would continue to enjoy a high quality education and would notice very little change in the event of our becoming an academy.

A consultation event was also held with staff and their concerns mirrored those of the parents/carers. Staff were also reassured by the answers provided and there is broad support across the whole of the school community for the proposal.

The governors met on 20th February to consider the points raised above and the overall views expressed by our stakeholders. **In the light of these outcomes, the Governing Body have confirmed that they will seek to become an Academy and to join the Cirrus Trust.** The necessary legal processes will commence shortly with a view to the transfer occurring during the summer term. We will keep parents/carers informed of the progress of this over the coming months.

The governors would like to thank all those who participated in this consultation exercise. The contributions have been invaluable in helping the Governing Body in arriving at its final decision.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mike Smith', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mike Smith

Chair of Governors