

ELT and St Giles' school parent / carer consultation evening
21st March 2023 - 6pm and 7pm.

Those present were 6 parents / carers, Mike Boddington CEO and Executive Head ELT), Anthony Marsh (Director of Primary, ELT), Nicky Angus (Head Teacher St Giles') and Karen Nash from the school and representatives of Governing Body (Harriet Trendell O'Keefe, Dominic Pioli, Daniel Beck, David Arnold).

Mike and Anthony presented an informative slide deck outlining ELT vision, values, objectives and strategic goals. They gave examples of how the existing informal partnership was working, the diligence process that had to be conducted to ensure 'best fit', and how the trust was children focussed, preparing them for success in the next stage of their journey.

The meeting then opened to the floor with the following Q&A's.

Q – ELT was re-branded two years ago having been running for 10 years. What was the trigger for that?

A – In early 2014 Esher High School - the founding school in the trust - became a single academy and was named Esher Learning Trust. As the trust grew and developed into a multi academy trust it was appropriate to remove the geographical reference, so the MAT became known as Enlightened Learning Trust.

Q – Are all the schools in the trust Faith Schools.

A – Yes, the articles of all schools contain secular characteristics, but we will not limit to just faith schools if the future proposition fits with our values and vision and brings opportunities or strengths.

Q – St Giles' is an intimate setting with a very community 'feel'. Will that remain or does it get absorbed into the broader look and feel of the trust?

A – The character absolutely stays; the roots, history, culture, and community of the school is to be celebrated. Some things may change, for example, a policy may become more corporate for ease of the revision and review process or the HR function for staff may move to a permanent solution rather than a hired-in one, but this is collaboration through choice and the culture belongs to the school Governors and staff.

Q – My recent experience of London schools is that they are well supported by the local authority. Is that the same in Surrey and what will it look like if the school moves to a trust?

A – There are a lot of hired-in services in Surrey. The school will benefit from support from the Trust.

Q – If we move away from the local authority, where does the money come from?

A – It still comes from the LA but the change means that the money is given to the trust to distribute. The trust, in collaboration, shapes the strategic direction of the financial spend

and this brings many benefits for example, central costs can be shared, pro rata. (SEND funding still comes from the LA)

Q – Will the school remain CofE aided?

A – Yes, it will be voluntary aided (there is a legal implication to the use of that term). The diocese and PCC partnership remains, as does the SIAMS inspection process and accountability regime.

Q – How do parent's input to / test the accountability of the trust?

A – 'Members' (Trust Board of Directors) check on Governance of the trust and its structure. They are informed by the 'Board of trustees', membership of which includes Ofsted officials, representatives of the church, and others with suitable skills) and are subject to DfE Regional Directors checks and balances. In turn, the Board work with the local governing bodies who have the appropriate links to schools and parents to ensure a local voice is heard.

Q – Joining a trust may be a lifeline for an individual school, but are they better off? How have you measured your successes? What metrics are available to evaluate the impact of joining a trust?

A – Metrics across many different levels, eg Maths outcomes at KS1. Another is the recruitment and retention of staff, staff happiness, children's behaviour, complaints.

Q – (To Anthony) – Objectively, in hindsight, what is good for you as a head teacher in joining a trust

A – Why lead alone? A downside of being a Head is the isolation, St Giles' already has a good network, but they are voluntary arrangements. Joining a trust brings more vigour and tie-in to those collaborations.

Q – Will the curriculum change?

A – No, we will not be prescriptive and any change that may come (for example, a different maths resource) will be at least as good as what is in place, if not better. The curriculum will be at least the National one, if not more, and remains bespoke to the needs of the setting.

Q – On the face of it, this sounds like a 'happy marriage'. You present as if this is a quickly growing trust so what are your long-term plans? (And will you accept failing schools if pushed to do so)?

A – We are a Diocese of Guildford, Surrey based MAT. We would like to be bigger because there are scales of economy, but the ultimate size is difficult to predict. Our objective is giving the children the best education and we will have a keen eye on that vision as we grow. If asked to 'sponsor' a weak school we would look carefully at the prospect, but weak school is only like that because they are weaker, we could bring strengths to develop them. Blend this with democracy, the Government policy and foreseeable mile-stones in any scale-up operation, as well as an accountability to the RD (DfE) where the trust needs to perform and I think we can be confident that the plans will be well considered and supervised.

Q – As all teachers are employed by the trust, is there a risk of them all migrating to a particular place?

A – No one has or will move unless they want to. It has happened, following a placement and career development, but this was consensual. A larger trust is an employee's place of choice; St Giles has three classes but if it joins the trust there is broader opportunity and complimentary experiences to be had.