

Lumen Learning Trust Meeting for Parents

25/01/18

MINUTES

Present:

Mary Ellen McCarthy – Executive Principal, LLT
Sarah Vernon – Headteacher, Echelford primary School
Ray Vango – Chair of Directors, LLT
Stephen Lockyer – Head of Enrichment, LLT
Lisa Cosgrave – Communications Manager, LLT
Mandy Watts – HT, Walton Oak
Lawrence Bentley – Chair of Governors, Walton Oak
Katrina Davis – Vice Chair, Walton Oak
Walton Oak parents and carers

These minutes should be read in conjunction with the slides presented at the meeting by MEM, SV and SL.

Following the meeting, the following questions were raised:

Are we really sure that secondary led MATs are less beneficial to primary schools? (Data was presented that suggested part of Lumen's success is that it is primary led whereas two other local secondary led MATs have less successful progress data in their primary schools)

The data in its raw terms might suggest this but it was recognised this was only a snapshot of two MATs. MW informed parents that this had been one area ("support from secondaries") in which Lumen had scored lower than other MATs considered but it was encouraging to see outcomes were not compromised. MW also assured parents that our relationship with feeder secondaries, especially Three Rivers, would continue as now.

Would underperforming staff be held to account? How might this change?

Yes, as is the current policy of the school. This would remain the responsibility of the leadership team of the school and would therefore not change.

Is it unusual for a Good school to join a MAT?

Currently, more secondary schools are opting to become academies than primaries. Primary schools are more likely to when they have been sponsored to join a MAT because of challenging circumstances. However, the move from the DfE is that all schools will become academies in time.

Does the Trust as a whole get inspected or the academies individually?

At the moment, academies are inspected individually but there is some discussion at Ofsted about the possibility of carrying out MAT inspections. We assume there would be consultation on this.

Sarah Vernon was asked what particular challenges her school experienced in joining the LLT.

SV explained it was a very different set of circumstances as she took over the school when it was in an Ofsted inadequate category and was a very different school to the one she came from (also in the LLT). She found the support was invaluable.

Would our good school be negatively impacted as resources are used to support others within the Trust?

MEM clarified that Walton Oak funding can only be used for Walton Oak – this is a legal requirement which is audited annually to ensure compliance. No staff can be forcibly redeployed in other schools or ‘stolen’ from Walton Oak. Staff terms and conditions will all be protected. We also noted that we can gain from the other schools in supporting our areas for development and in potentially recovering lost resources that Walton Oak cannot afford alone.

How does the top slice of 5% to the Trust compare with the county top slice?

They are broadly equivalent. It is difficult to compare but indications suggest a worse-case scenario may fall slightly short but savings can be made on costs such as shared training and access to external professionals such as Educational Psychologists and Speech and Language Therapists. The schools currently in the Trust have felt the move was basically cost neutral.

Why does the MAT need to grow?

MEM had indicated a possible size of 8-10 schools. There is no particular desire at this point to grow the Trust but the Regional School's Commissioner will likely bring pressure to bear for MATs to grow in order to fulfil the DfE wish for all schools to be academies. At the moment, the Trust is able to grow slowly and be choosy about its partners. The decision to expand will never be taken if it would signify too great a risk to its current schools' success.

How is Trust money divided, especially reserves?

Devolved money can only be used for the designated school. Reserves are held centrally, though internal accounting recognises which schools contributed to which reserves. The Business Committee ultimately decides on use of the reserves but this committee has representatives from each school on it as well as other non-school directors to ensure fairness. All is transparent and all decisions are taken in the interests of pupils under Best Value practice. This includes going out to tender for contracts e.g. the Trust no longer uses Surrey Commercial services for catering but this does not mean Walton Oak would have to leave.

Will our school get lost or lose out?

One of the unique selling points of the LLT is the representation on the Trust Board. This means we would truly have a part to play in the top level strategic decision making in the Trust and a say in how the Trust shapes itself moving forward.

If unsuccessful, can we leave?

No. This is a permanent change. We are insulated against risks by undergoing this detailed due diligence process and by the fact we have representation on the board. We do believe there is a strong ethos match here and little to lose given the eroding opportunities offered by the local authority.

What are timescales/next steps?

Continued process of due diligence, ensuring all questions are answered to our satisfaction. If we decide to move forward, at the beginning of the summer term we will make our application to the RSC with a view to joining the trust in October 2018.

Would our PTA be affected?

Not at all, but there would be opportunities available for idea sharing and collaboration as well.

Would it change our holidays?

Academies do have the right to set their holidays but the Trust has no plans to impose this and this would likely be a school level decision.

Would there be another opportunity to meet the Trust Board?

This could be arranged if requested.

Would our voice on the board remain or could it be terminated?

The RSC has pushed back on the model of each school being represented on the Trust because it could become unwieldy if the Trust became much larger. However, it is the preferred model for LLT at this time and as we would be represented on the board if and when this had to change, we would have a part to play in the decision making process.

Is Lumen currently at this point in conversation with any other schools?

No

How will you monitor the school's work? Will there be Trust inspections of the school?

The school's leadership team will remain responsible for their monitoring cycle as now. MEM and other colleagues would 'piggy back' on that process to support their understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. There would be no additional inspection carried out by the Trust.

Would there be standardisation of assessment processes?

As long as the Walton Oak process is clear and understandable and demonstrates good outcomes, it need not be aligned with that of the other schools.

Does it make any difference being an Elmbridge school when the others are Spelthorne?

No. However, the Trust does wish to remain geographically small.