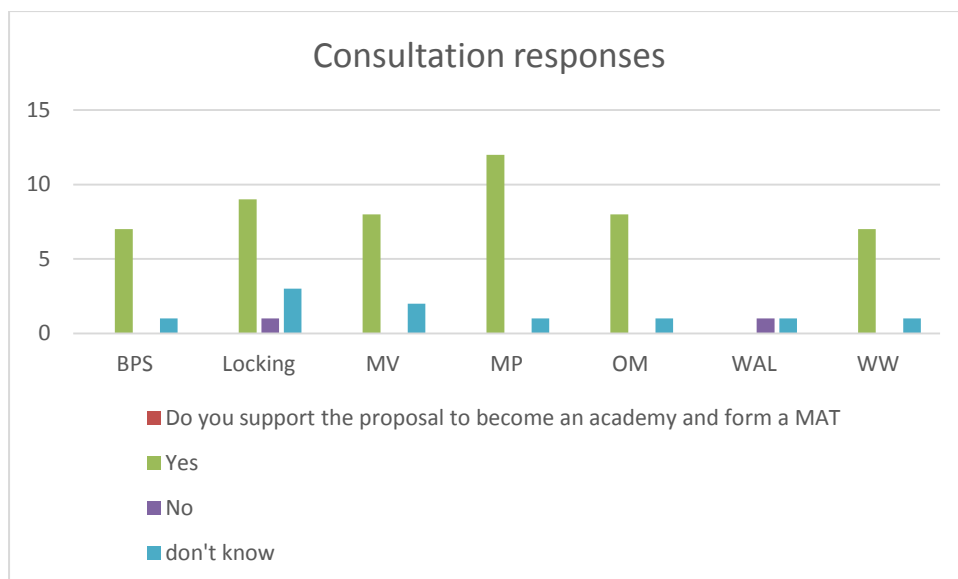


MAT consultation meetings March 2017 Responses to questions raised



63 responses received in total
19 staff, 44 parents

Additional questions raised by staff and Parents

- General
- Pay and Conditions
- Pensions
- Curriculum
- Budgets and funding
- Governance
- Assets
- Service Contracts
- IT strategy
- Locking specific

General

1. Why did you choose a Primary Only MAT?

We are a group of schools that have already been working closely together for a number of years. We believe that a primary focused pedagogy ensures that children have a balance between preparation for statutory tests and preparation for the next stage of learning, whilst remembering that they are young children and need fun and friendship to support other aspects of learning.

We are however very happy to consider a secondary school joining the MAT in the future

2. What are the options if we don't become a MAT?

We can remain maintained schools with the LA but there will be no LA central services to support us. We could join another MAT- but would not be in at the beginning to have input into the structure

3. Would the MAT consider a secondary school joining?

The MAT would consider any school joining that had the same ethos and values.

4. When will the decision be made?

Subject to the consultation the RSC are expected to notify the school if they will grant an academy order in April.

5. Will the MAT set different school holidays?

There have been no discussions or plans to set different school holidays

6. If, for example, Priory has the set up to deliver already and proven leadership why not join that existing successful Academy?

Until recently Priory was a successful single academy, we do not know if it will be a successful MAT. Schools and leaders within our proposed MAT are, at least, as successful as Priory. By joining Priory our schools would have to adhere to their articles, we are not convinced that these are in line with our ethos or if they will support our schools. Priory may well have, for example, a different view on selective schools.

7. Are there any other arguments apart from a secondary school will prioritise themselves first?

Every school in the proposed MAT sends children to at least 5 secondary schools within the area, we do not believe the best interests of our communities would be served by joining up with just one secondary school. We are committed to working with all of them in partnership.

We are not convinced that secondary schools understand primary education or have the necessary skills and knowledge to support it. We do not believe that a secondary school can or would support or encourage our highly developed pedagogy, practice and research. This would have a detrimental effect on outcomes for children.

Pay and Conditions

8. Can the MAT alter staff pay and conditions? How long will Tupe arrangements last?

When a school becomes an academy staff are legally protected to transfer under the same employment terms and conditions. Like any employer, the Trust could propose to change terms and conditions in the future. As now, there are clear policies on consultation with staff on any proposed changes and rules on salary protection. Because the staff will transfer under TUPE they have the protection that their terms and conditions may never be changed to their detriment, whilst in the same job/role, if the main reason for the change is the TUPE transfer itself.

9. How will future pay awards be decided?

The Trust cannot automatically adopt future national collective agreements on pay and conditions because it will not be represented at those national negotiations. However, the Trust will seek to adopt the national and local agreements for annual pay awards agreed between unions and employers for teachers and support staff respectively, and will continue to recognise and consult with Trade Unions on pay and conditions.

10. Will the MAT recognise continuity of service?

TUPE protects continuity of Employment. Currently, there is no legal obligation for a Local Authority or another academy trust to recognise continuity of service for all aspects of employment. Importantly, however, your previous service will be recognised by any local authority or academy trust for the purposes of pensions and redundancy payments.

11. What happens if I move to another Local Authority maintained school or a different academy?

If you take a job with a school outside the Trust your continuity of service may be broken. Your new employer may treat you as a new starter for the purposes of enhanced sickness and maternity or paternity benefits, unless you negotiate an alternative agreement with them. So, before accepting any future offer of employment you should check that the new employer would recognise your continuity of service

12. Do you foresee any staff reductions or redundancies?

Given the current stresses on school budgets and the need for efficiencies it is possible depending on funding streams and grants. The same considerations would be taken whether we become a MAT or not. It is possible that some realignment of services may be necessary as responsibilities and funding arrangements differ considerably from the current LA distributive model. Should this be the case the MAT will do its best to utilise and redeploy existing school staff that have the required skill set. This would be done in accordance with Tupe agreement and current HR employment policies.

13. Will teachers be moved around schools in the academy?

Will new members of staff join on different contracts?

Could existing contracts change in the future?

Will contracts be harmonised in the future?

Would our staff be expected to cover long term sickness in other schools?

Staff will normally have a contract of employment to work in their current school and this is protected through the transfer of employment, therefore staff will continue to work in their existing school. However, there are three circumstances where staff may work in another school.

1. When a job at another Trust school is advertised and an employee applies for and is appointed to that role.
2. When a staff member voluntarily agrees to a secondment or temporary placement.

3. There may be new posts created in the future that are Trust-wide and any staff member appointed to such a post would be expected to work across schools.

Pensions

14. With budgets being cut and the pension burden becoming unsustainable will the MAT continue with current teaching staff / support staff pensions with the current defined benefits? Although the Government has no plans to change pensions the liability will sit with the MAT.

Teacher's Pension scheme is a government scheme and all teachers are entitled to be part of this scheme. We intend to continue our current arrangement with the local authority Avon Pension scheme for our non-teaching staff.

15. If the school becomes a multi-academy trust, who takes responsibility for the pension arrangements of teachers?

The legal agreement that the Trust would have with the Secretary of State makes it a requirement that we offer participation in the Teachers Pension Scheme (TPS) to all teaching staff. So, as teachers working in an academy, you are eligible for membership of the TPS, just as if you were employed in a Local Authority maintained school.

The TPS runs teachers pensions on behalf of the Department for Education. As your employer, the Trust would be responsible for collecting and paying employer and employee contributions to the TPS and for all other administrative responsibilities set out in the Teachers' Pensions Regulations.

The TPS determine the employer and employee pension contributions and we cannot vary or change these. Any future changes will be decided by the TPS not the Trust. Benefits paid to teachers on retirement are not affected by academy status.

16. If the school becomes a multi-academy trust, who takes responsibility for the pension arrangements of support staff?

Will support staff still be paying into the Avon Pension Scheme?

The legal agreement that the Trust would have with the Secretary of State makes it a requirement that we offer participation in the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS/Avon Pension scheme) to all support staff. So, as support staff working in an academy, you are eligible for the LGPS, just as if you were employed in a Local Authority maintained school.

The LGPS determine the employer and employee pension contributions and we cannot vary or change these. Any future changes will be decided by the LGPS not the Trust. Benefits paid to support staff on retirement are not affected by academy status.

Curriculum

17. How can I be assured there will be consistency for my child's class teacher if they are called away as a specialist teacher?

Schools will always put their pupils' education first. The MAT has no plans to deploy class teachers in this way. From time to time class teachers may be out of the classroom for odd days, as they are now, to take part in professional development and occasional meetings. It will be the responsibility of the individual school to ensure classes are covered effectively.

18. Can the curriculum be changed under the academy just because it can?

Academies are not required to follow the national curriculum, although in practice many follow it at least in part. Academies are required, however, to participate in the national curriculum assessments, often referred to as SATs.

Academies must ensure they offer a broad and balanced curriculum, which includes English, mathematics, sciences, and religious education (RE). Requirements for RE in academies broadly reflect the provisions that apply to local authorities and schools in the maintained sector.

19. What do you envisage the curriculum to be?

Discussion would not take place until we know the outcome of the decision to convert. No discussions have taken place so far.

20. Can we have a detailed plan of what all the seven schools are bringing to the MAT?

All seven schools bring a depth and breadth of skills, expertise and resources in a wide range of areas for example:

- 5 Good and an Outstanding school, as judged by Ofsted
- A National Teaching School
- National leader of Education
- 24 Specialist leaders of Education – providing expertise and support for all curricular areas

- Outstanding and good Pre-schools and Nurseries
- Specialist EAL support
- Significant experience of effective school improvement
- Experience of implementing change for children, parents and staff,
- Nationally recognised high quality teaching and learning
- A track record of outstanding progress for all children and groups
- Highly developed collaborative working practices
- Curriculums designed to meet the needs of the communities served by individual schools
- Secure and well managed budgets in all schools, supported by substantial reserves
- Developed international links
- Breakfast, afterschool and holiday child care provision
- Extensive Developed sports activity and networking, including competition and specialist coaching
- Highly developed pedagogy, which provides income via commissioned work with other authorities and schools
- School physical resource, such as: Forest School areas, all weather sports pitches, Sports halls, theatre stages, large halls, meeting spaces, that can be used to support curricular and extra-curricular activity
- Specialist pastoral, curricular and pedagogical development networks that support practitioners
- XTND charity, providing opportunity outside of the school day for children and communities
- Specialist Media services
- Established STEM science network
- Established and funded Research and development programs
- Close working relationships with every secondary institution within North Somerset and many in Somerset
- Established partnership with Sidcot independent school
- Established practice of providing multi-school days, 2,000 children in one place

Pupil Selection (new intake)

21. Milton Park has traditionally been a very inclusive school that welcomes children from all walks of life. On what basis will the new MAT select new children and can we have reassurances that the policy will be consistent across all schools in the MAT?

Will the admissions processes change when we are part of the MAT?

The ethos and values of the MAT are, by design, inclusive. Current admission policy amongst all the schools is uniform; we cannot for see any reason why we would change that position.

The DfE's model funding agreement for mainstream single academies and free schools requires academies to comply in full with the current DfE School Admissions Code and the law relating to admissions. The Secretary of State has the power to vary this requirement where there is "demonstrable need".

The Code makes clear that, under an academy's funding agreement, the Secretary of State for Education has the power to direct an academy to admit a particular child.

22. Are there any plans to select children on ability or make arrangements to move children across the schools to improve standards? I.e. the best children all attend certain classes at one of the schools.

No, there is no legitimate educational or pedagogical reason for this, what is a "best child?"

Governance in the MAT

23. Has anyone spoken to other schools that have gone through the conversion process before to find the pitfalls?

Conversations, visits and extensive research have been undertaken and shared. The conversion process is different for each school depending on a number of factors but useful advice has been gained and is ongoing.

24. How big do you envisage the MAT getting?

The RSC would like MATs to grow, although current thinking is not in favour of 'large' MATs. We would consider like minded schools that wish to join with the same ethos and values and if it is beneficial to the MAT as a whole.

25. Can you describe more about what you hope this 'research and innovation' to be in your vision statement?

Working with The Beach teaching school gives opportunity to research how to improve learning for our children and to share good practice amongst staff; Encouraging leaders to be at the cutting edge of educational development and trialling new ideas in the classroom. Specifically looking at the science of teaching and how children learn best; Research on what works where and how teachers can innovate to make their own; Research on the demographic of our communities and how to tailor the offer to meet the needs identified e.g. Pedagogy, STEM, Pupil premium

26. Are you sure that RSC and other political agenda's are not going to squash or undermine your vision and values?

We are a group of schools that have a strong history of collaboration. We will continue to have high expectations of and for all.

27. Strategically will the MAT consider creation of a Free School and has the impact be thought through on the existing set of schools?

If it is deemed beneficial to the communities and the children we serve, the area in which we operate and if there is a perceived need for a free school, this could include a specialist school, the MAT Board would give consideration to this.

28. In larger businesses the CEO and Board are accountable to the shareholders. They are primarily judged on financial performance. I am unclear on who the CEO is accountable to and ultimately the performance metrics both educational standards and business that the MAT will be judged? In the event that performance isn't as good as we all hope how will this be dealt with?

The CEO is accountable to the Board of Trustees, the Regional Schools commissioner and the Education Funding Agency (EFA) as accounting officer.

Performance criteria would be agreed by the Trust Board and judged based on the 'Characteristics of successful multi-academy trusts' (A tool developed by the Schools Commissioner for use by multi-academy trusts, their boards and senior leaders)

The Education Funding Agency (EFA) monitors their finances and governance.

All academies are required to abide by the current version of the EFA's Academies Financial Handbook.

Regional Schools Commissioners (DfE appointees) oversee academy performance and approve some strategic and management decisions – e.g., about school expansion.

Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) is responsible for inspecting the quality of education in all state-funded academies and uses the same inspection framework as for maintained schools.

29. It is important that a Board has appropriate skills to support/challenge/deliver so I'd like to understand what is proposed to ensure a good mix of skills and backgrounds so that the Board has business/financial background as well as Educational? If the body that the board is accountable to is also formed it should be independent of the individual schools to a certain extent so decisions are taken with the whole MAT in mind not just individual schools.

Why was the Interim Board unelected?

The Trust Board will have a balance of both business and educational backgrounds.

All nominees for positions on the Members Group and Trustee Board were put forward by the 7 governing bodies, Headteachers and other members of the schools. Guidance from our DfE Broker, Deputy Director RSC South West and a member of the Headteacher Academy Appointment Panel is that Trustees should be selected for their specific high level skill sets that support the MAT.

Good practice dictates that School employees, those contracted by schools/local authorities, partners/family of employees and those who have potential conflicts of interest should not be represented on the interim board. Members must not be employees of the MAT.

The selection of proposed nominees was informed by the criteria laid out in the Academy Ambassadors Guide to Recruiting (p4). Headteachers were fully involved and aware of how this was carried out. School governors elected to the board will be asked to stand down from their LGB to concentrate fully on representing the whole MAT. The Interim Board will need to expand to between 9 and 11. More trustees will need recruiting to fill the skills gap once needs analysis has been carried out by the interim board. Expressions of interest are still welcome to the Board.

30. When can we know the name of the members and trustees of the board?

The details of the Members and Interim Board of trustees will be included alongside these consultation responses.

31. Have you considered a temporary role for CEO to bring in existing CEO experience before promoting with the existing structure?

Yes. However we feel the MAT would benefit by recruiting someone who will take a longer-term position. During our consultation with the DFE they made it clear that the CEO of the MAT should have considerable experience of school development and improvement; have a successful track record of school leadership and collaboration; have experience of effective strategic planning; we believe there is significant experience at senior level within our schools. The board will put in place a rigorous selection process to ensure it meets those requirements.

32. Can I have written assurances that Board level bonuses will not be paid at excessive levels so that it will be to the detriment of the children? Are we able to propose maximum levels before agreeing to join the MAT?

The MAT is an exempt charity and Directors are also Charity Trustees who are bound by company law and also charity law. The law does not allow a profit to be made by a Director/Trustee for simply completing their duties; Trustees will not be paid bonuses.

33. With all the recent issues around Brexit I'm assuming a school once in cannot leave the MAT? If parents felt the MAT was not delivering could they take any action to split from the MAT?

This lies at the hand of the DFE, if they deem a school to be failing they can remove it from a MAT, or remove all schools from a MAT. This has happened in quite a few well publicised cases over the past years.

There is no mechanism for an academy to return to local authority control. Academies that are deemed failing or underperforming may be transferred to another MAT or sponsor (known as re-brokering) or subject to other intervention from the relevant Regional Schools Commissioner.

There is currently no mechanism for a school that is part of a MAT to unilaterally decide to leave or transfer to another MAT. Schools may however be able to negotiate an exit or transfer. Schools with concerns about their position in a MAT should seek professional guidance - e.g., from a teaching or school leaders' union or other body.

34. I feel that limited value has been achieved from the Educational Co-operative Trust some of the schools are part of primarily because things were rushed. Have we pulled together a "Lessons Learnt Log" from that experience?

Within an already full school calendar the Cooperative trust has provided many additional benefits for the schools involved. This year's annual report gives a succinct overview of the work of the Trust over the past twelve months. It highlights many of the diverse activities that have taken place and the impact that the Trust is having on the education of the young people in our schools. The lessons learnt can only add to the benefits of the MAT

35. What will happen to the Cooperative trust?

The Coop Trust holds the land for the 5 schools, this would be transferred to the MAT upon conversion. All of the Coop schools agree they will continue to uphold the Coop values.

36. Will policies and procedures be harmonised in the future?

Yes, although school specific policies and procedures will always remain to suit the needs of their own community

Budget & Funding

37. When you are choosing a finance officer, what are going to do to ensure that it remains outcomes for children and not profit?

The new MAT would be a charitable company and as such is not allowed to make a profit. It will also be regulated by the Education funding Agency with very strict regulations to adhere to.

38. How much % 'top slice' is being taken by the MAT?

No decisions can be made until the outcomes of the new budgets are known.

39. With changes to the school funding formula due to hit school budgets soon do the schools have an agreed strategy of how this will be managed so we can ensure minimal disruption to children and staff. Assuming we have a strategy document can this be shared with all existing school governors?

At present the new funding formula is at consultation stage and we are unsure how this will affect the schools in the MAT. Any cut in funding will have some effect, if this is the case the MAT will

endeavour to use innovative practice and collaborative strategies to negate these effects to the best of our ability.

40. It may be too early to offer reassurances about protecting the recently approved budgets (that individual schools have just agreed) but can we have an explanation of how the schools might transition away from individual budgets to a centralised structure?

Upon conversion to academy status all budgets will be paid centrally to the MAT. Budgets will be allocated to individual schools using the same DFE/Local formula. This is the same formula that the schools have set their 17-18 budgets against less the centralised factor. These moneys will be offset by bringing some current outsourced elements "in house" and other organisational realignments.

Assets

41. Will existing school assets be shared more widely across all schools if practicable to do so?

Can you give an example of where assets might be shared? (i.e. facilities)

I am a big advocate of sports in schools. Some of the schools may have land that could be sold off to generate funds. If this was to happen can we ensure that facilities (either new or existing) will be used for the benefit of all?

Will we lose our grounds?

The MAT has no intention of selling off any of its assets. Should this be considered in the future, all monies received would be held centrally for the good of all schools within the MAT.

There are controls on the disposal of academy (and maintained school) publicly-funded land. The Secretary of State's permission is required for the disposal of publicly-funded school land or school land that was originally private but which has been enhanced at public expense.

Supporting contracts

42. What are the plans for integrating contracts for support services into one? How quickly will this be achieved to deliver financial benefit for the school? I'm assuming this will only commence once the legal entity is created.

The vast majority of service contracts held by all schools run until September 2017, these will be reviewed once we have been informed that academy status will be awarded. Renegotiation and in house provision will result in savings for all schools.

IT strategy

43. Are there plans to set up a centralised IT/telephone network with consistent approaches and technologies across the MAT? What timescales would you give for such a project?

Yes, this is dependent on longevity of current school systems, practicality of implementation (for example, band width and connectivity) and any cost implications. It is worth noting that we intend our schools to remain bespoke for the communities they serve, therefore, any cross-MAT system will have to have the capability to support all applications and deliver individual requirement for every school.

Locking

44. Why did Locking not choose to go to with Churchill school?

Locking, in the same way that all other schools within this group did, spent a considerable amount of time researching very best options for us. We looked at models involving a small group of schools, large group of schools, church schools and those being secondary lead. Over a period of time the Head Teacher and Chair of Governors investigated, researched and attended meetings, the outcomes of which were disseminated with all Governors and minuted. Churchill was one of the options considered. We firmly believe that if Locking is to convert to an Academy, we would very much like to do it on our own terms and conditions, setting our values / ethos / aims / delegations etc. At this point it is unlikely that Churchill will convert as a separate MAT but will form a hub of an existing MAT which already has terms and conditions agreed.

Pupils from Locking School transfer to any one of 5 or 6 KS3 providers. We would prefer not to affiliate ourselves initially with just one of these secondary schools, but work with all KS3 providers in partnership.

45. Are parents aware that they have a better chance of their child getting into Churchill School in year 7 if we are part of Churchill's MAT?

Response from School Admissions, Pupil Places and Planning Team, North Somerset Council
Currently, in North Somerset, none of the secondary schools give priority to any children attending a particular primary/junior school, whether this is inclusive of their MAT or not.

It is possible for secondary school's to have a feeder link to certain primary/junior school's if they wanted, but this would need to be set out in their published admission arrangements oversubscription criteria. As above, there is no school in North Somerset with this arrangement currently.

References in italics: Department for Education Gov.uk (January 2017)