

## Transcript of parents meeting at QEGS

A slide show was presented by QEGS' Chair of Governors, Tine Boving-Foster, QEGS Headteacher, Paul Buckland, and CEO of West Lakes Multi-Academy Trust, Jonathan Johnson.

### 1. What is an academy trust?

Academies receive funding directly from the Government and are different to Local Authority maintained schools where funding is top sliced to pay for a range of Local Authority services. There is more freedom for an academy such as with curriculum, term dates and procedures. Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) are formed when two or more academies work together to share benefits. This can be a mix of primary, secondary, specialist, PRU or from one sector. There are a range of size of MATs across the country ranging from 2 schools up to large MATs containing 40 schools.

### 2. Context

QEGs are a stand-alone academy that academised in 2011. We are not sponsored.

In 2021 79% of secondary schools were academies and of those 87% were in MATs to work collaboratively and for support. A change in Government is unlikely to change the educational landscape around MATs.

### 3. Trustees Views

#### Options for QEGS

- Do nothing – just wait and see.
- Consideration was given to setting up own MAT but was not viable. It is unlikely that QEGs would be allowed to do this now.
- Consider joining an established MAT with the caveat that the best match would need to be found, one with which we can work together for the best outcomes.

Trustees decided to be proactive and are looking at joining an established MAT.

### 4. Guarantees for QEGs

- Stay a grammar school
- Keep conditions for staff
- Keep control of land and estates
- Want to keep the ethos of QEGs. It is important to go with someone who celebrates differences and does not work in 'our way or no way.' Keep QEGs uniqueness.

### 5. Why West Lakes?

Conversations have been ongoing for 2 years. QEGS Senior Leaders explored alternatives, presented their findings to the Trustees and conclusions were reached. West Lakes was matched as SLT and Governors felt they had lots of things in common as two schools in Cumbria. Both schools are outstanding with a percentage of high prior attainers joining the school, exceptional staff who are highly skilled at getting the best out of our young people and large sixth forms that are successful. This is a firm footing with which to work further. One Cumbria – West Lakes MAT has the DfE remit for delivering CPD across the County to the teaching workforce including 150 Early Career Teachers and a similar number of professional undertaking National Professional Qualifications. This makes a concrete difference to the outcomes of children. However, there are also

differences to embrace; West Lakes has 46% high prior attainers compared to QEGS having 86%. This difference in breadth at West Lakes and refinement at QEGS means that there is an opportunity to learn from each other.

Continuing Professional Development is offered at all levels including support staff and Governors. An Early Career Framework, the first of its kind in the country, is being developed for Teaching Assistants as coherent career progression for all support staff is important.

Working together with our similarities is helpful and maintaining differences is important for a richer, deeper, profound collaboration.

Schools within the MAT are equal and the work is collective and collaborative. A centralised curriculum is not dictated but we may work together on founding principles for successful curriculum design. Bouncing ideas to evolve and adapt.

Research on collaboration demonstrated 70% of professional indicating that teaching practice improves and 61% state improvements to workload. Joining with another outstanding secondary school will enable our staff to benefit from this collaboration.

The top reason for joining the MAT is for the benefit of the children, there is no reason otherwise. The challenge is that our cohorts may be different but our performance is the same and both schools do better with the progress of middle attainers than high prior attainers so with the same areas for development we can work together.

A MAT's size can be beneficial in the negotiation of contracts and savings can be reinvested in resources for pupils. One example is both schools using Edulink.

Mr Johnson explained he generates his own entire salary from external work for example with the DfE to ensure he is cost neutral to the MAT. Every penny is squeezed for the education of the children.

The nearest Grammar School geographically is one and a quarter hours away, whereas West Lakes is one hour away. One Cumbria is everywhere, dotted all over the County, working collaboratively in and with many schools and QEGs can be part of this vehicle to support professional development.

There are five schools in the trust – 4 primaries and 1 secondary and also the Teaching School Hub remit too.

There is no conflict of interest with WLMAT due to the geography on issues such as admissions and catchment.

West Lakes MAT are undergoing a change of name and have consulted on this, to become more inclusive. A paper has been compiled to the trust board with recommendations. It will no longer be called a MAT nor will it be geographically linked.

This was the end of the presentation.

Parents were advised that they would receive a link at 6pm to submit questions and comments as part of the consultation and the deadline for return on this was the 24<sup>th</sup> May. It would be sent to staff, students, parents and the wider community and the Trustees would consider all the responses. A decision would then be made whether to continue with the process. Following this an application is made to the Regional Schools Commissioner (North West) to ask for support and approval to continue in the process. It isn't a done deal and the timeline takes us up to January for a final decision.

The floor was then opened up for questions.

- a. *We have heard a lot about how children at West Lakes will benefit and West Lakes learning from QEGS – what learning will QEGs get?*

The staff will benefit through learning from other practitioners and this will impact on student learning. They can work together on similar areas for development and react to situations by using each other's expertise. Cross pollination of resources like schemes of work, plans etc. will have impact on outcomes.

- b. *Why has the situation changed so quickly and drastically, why the sudden change?*

Discussions have been ongoing since 2019. A tight budget prompted a thought process regarding starting our own MAT but this was not felt to be the best way forward. The landscape has changed over time with MATs and the benefits are clear in terms of teaching, collaboration, support and the teaching hub is an incredible opportunity. The reputation of QEGs could really benefit. The speed with which parents have been informed is normal, the first step is the consultation at the beginning of the process so now is the time to inform and make decisions as to whether to take things further.

- c. *Is the school financially sound going forward if you go forward with this?*

Yes.

- d. *What has happened, does QEGs need to move into a MAT and it feels like it is being rushed through.*

We are exploring / progressing the potential for joining so apologies if this impression has been given.

We looked at other MATs before making the decision. The senior leadership team thoroughly investigated all options and presented this information to The Trustees. West Lakes MAT was the best option.

- e. *Is there a parent representative sitting within the decision making process?*

Yes, there are parent governors (more than normal) on the Governing Board of QEGS and so the decision to join WLMAT is being made with them as a full and active part of the process.

- f. *There is a fear that the non-negotiables will change and it is very important to reassure parents that this will not be the case. I do feel that much groundwork has been completed and if I felt the ethos did not fit I would not support it, it does not seem like a knee jerk reaction. Parents however, need reassurance as they may understand what MATs can be like and how an ethos may not match and joining may not be of benefit. How many MATs are there in Cumbria?*

13 and QEGs looked at all of them.

- g. *Will the RSC water down the non-negotiables, are there examples of where a grammar school has joined a MAT and the selective nature has not been interfered with?*

A funding agreement will be in place and items such as the selective nature will be written into this and will not change. There was a speech in parliament yesterday that detailed the selective nature can only change if parents vote for it, this is part of the White paper. Ahead of this discussion the non-negotiables have been discussed and the selective status is one of those.

- h. William Howard is a school in the North of Cumbria and 'money talks.' They have seconded very good staff out and consequently standards have slipped and they have become less than good. Is this likely to happen?*

West Lakes MAT do not move people around in that way. Opportunities are offered for the benefit of individual professional development but it's up to staff if they want to take advantage of those opportunities. We don't make people work in different sites unless they want to.

- i. What happens if you as CEO move on?*

It would not matter, this is a golden thread of how we operate.

- j. Who is in charge of the MAT?*

Jonathan Johnson, CEO. Each school has its own Head teacher and they have responsibility for their school.

- k. Will the new head of QEGs be part of the process and will West Lakes change the appointment?*

The new head will be part of the process and no West Lakes will not change the appointment.

- l. Under a MAT do we lose control?*

The trust is the employer and the Trust board signs off appointments of local governance. This is different to actively appointing them.

- m. Can you guarantee the status of WLMAT won't change if you are changing things like the name?*

The history of the setup is that in 2008 two failing schools were brought together and sponsored. They wanted an overview of the improvement agenda. The governance structure is that the LGB is a committee of the trust board but it has its own powers to recruit its own governors. This is signed off at trust board level. The LGB has its own delegated powers. The LGB have a skill set to govern in their locality.

Everyone was thanked for their attendance and parents were invited to stay behind and ask specific questions of those presenting.