

Parent and carer meeting

Date: 14th March 2023

Invited Attendees: All Parents and Local Community Stakeholders

Present: 4 Parents, CEO – CLLT, Deputy CEO CLLT, Headteacher & Chair - QEGS

After a short presentation from both QEGS and CLLT, questions were invited from attendees at the meeting. A record of the questions and responses can be found below:

- 1. The deficit is a considerable amount of money, and we were wondering where that amount of money is coming from. – Services to children?**

(DM): By being in a MAT we have access to central services e.g., purchasing power, central service contracts and savings can be made here. At the moment QEGS use lots of ad hoc services that can be expensive.

- 2. What happens to the £1.5m debt? What is financial impact on our children? E.g., You talk about buying equipment but where is that money coming from?**

(JJ)z: As with the previous answer, savings made through collective purchasing power as an example. Monitoring budgets by holding regular meetings between governors and trustees on how budgets are being spent, everything is transparent across the MAT. Nothing hidden; easier to be open and transparent.

- 3. You have £500K reserves so how is the debt going to be repaid?**

(JJ): As the previous answer. We also hold reserves and an £2.3 endowment fund.

- 4. Is the 6% top slice to central fund restricted? Or can it be used to pay the debt? Also is the endowment restricted? What about the repayment plan?**

(JJ & DM): Endowment is unrestricted and can, by Trustee approval, be purposed but it will not be, nor will it be used to pay off the debt. The Trust could, in effect, loan QEGS the money so that we support QEGS to pay off the debt without it affecting the children's education nor using any funding for the schools already in the Trust. ESFA still need to confirm the repayment plan. The repayment plan would not be to the detriment of the children.

- 5. Pupils and Parents are highly stressed about the very sad situation, there have been too many bad decisions, will there be more bad decisions?**

(DM): QEGS have some reserves but not enough to pay £1.5M debt. As part of notice to improve by ESFA and DFE, QEGS must find a trust to work with.

- 6. We attended the meeting last year on 12th May and asked JJ the question about the school funds, we were not told about the debt then. Our questions were not**

answered, and we have no respect and feel we were lied to. Everyone should be treated with respect.

(JJ): I was aware at the time of the meeting on 12th May about the financial situation, but it was not my place to make any statement. The MAT discussions started with QEGS before the debt was apparent. We engaged in discussions because of the benefit to the staff and the children especially because of our shared eligibility to be a Teaching School Hub. Our performance meant there was already alignment. When the debt became known, we are not in the habit of turning our back on a problem and so we remain committed to working with the school.

7. You have told of the advantages of joining the MAT, what would be the disadvantages?

(DM): There will always be some loss of autonomy but of those Trusts shortlisted CLLT represents the greatest retention of autonomy aligned to our priorities.

8. What autonomy would this be?

(DM): QEGS would function day to day as normal.

9. You say the trust is all about our children (in slides), what way will this affect them? Don't understand impact on our children if we join this MAT?

(DM): Understand your concerns but key day to day will be as normal, still have a local governing board and will still make strategic decisions in QEGS. However, if DM not addressing issues appropriately then the Trust offers another layer of support by checking on DM.

(JJ): The part loss of QEGS autonomy is as a result of financial decision making that took place in QEGS previously. ESFA notice will mean assured operation under correct regulations. JJ will be the accounting officer, however as multi-layer structure he is not sole decision maker.

With regard to spending impact on children as part of trust we asset tag all equipment and budgets are meticulously planned so that 3 years before the piece of equipment is due to be replaced, we can manage this. This ensures all children have best resources available to them seamlessly.

10. As part of concerned parents' group, we feel traditional MAT is too far away from QEGS to make appropriate decisions, e.g., curriculum. We want to keep it real for the students. What risk is there to the curriculum? QEGS are doing a great job at the moment. Can decisions, e.g., curriculum, be overwritten by CLLT? Who has overall autonomy?

(JJ): QEGS has autonomy of methods used all belong with the school. Curriculum driven by QEGS, it does not stand still though, and the Trust can look at new ideas and reach

out to other parts of the country to look for expertise if needed and bring this information back to the Trust to use. There is no big central team that does curriculum, etc. we don't impose.

(DM): A lot of schools fit into existing MATs with big curriculum structures and templates for how to teach students. Changing Lives does not have this structure – it simply does not exist and therefore this is how QEGS cements its autonomy- by joining a trust that is not set up to direct curriculum. It is also clear from the Changing Lives vision (of having different types of school) that no single set of curriculum planning would be appropriate and therefore this potential loss of autonomy is low risk as we cannot see how a centralised system would be of benefit under the Changing Lives model.

11. Would like to have seen the full scheme of delegation?

(JJ): This is available on our website. It can read as cold and appear centralised but that is not how it works in practice and the pre-amble sets that out.

12. No issue with scheme of delegation but need to see it?

(JJ): Trust makes final decision as it also has legal responsibilities, local governing body make decisions which are presented to Trustees to ratify. The Trust board could not manage a large number of schools without LGB role. Happy to chat with anyone about the scheme of delegation.

(JJ): QEGS drive e.g., curriculum, Trust will advise and only step in if needed.

13. Does MAT reserve this right when special measures or can they do it any time? Teachers at QEGS are great and very steady compared to WL, It is not the same as QEGS 450-year-old school that is consistently good, we have full confidence in QEGS, need reassurance that this will not change?

(DM): financial controls are in place to protect this from ever happening again.

14. Totally understand this and with the current academic standards of the school we need assurances that it will not be trifled with. Not reassured that MAT scheme is the right thing for QEGS.

(DM): There is no MAT scheme to impose, and our standards academically may become even better. Our Notice to Improve clearly states we join a MAT.

15. Please present the disadvantages to parents please.

If part of curriculum not up to standard QEGS would speak to Trust for help and then if still no improvement, then QEGS would expect the Trust to step in.

16. We want you to understand our views and concerns about joining a MAT.

(DM): Understand concerns, but ultimate responsibility of school will be with a Trust (rather than 1 person). (JJ) The trust is driven to get best out of students, Trust won't hold QEGS back.

17. Is there a way QEGS will substantiate its view on the MAT? Are we trusting JJ and is that it? The disadvantage of this is one day in future may have new CEO and then what happens will results fail? We need positives and negatives to be made clear. This consultation seems to be all about benefits, we feel we are forced into it and it's not really a consultation?

(DM): It's not a positive or negatives exercise.

Ultimately decision to join is made by the QEGS' Trust Board and in the MAT, we will have a member on the Trust Board that feed information in. Decisions are made on information from the day-to-day people on the ground all the way through to the board.

(JJ): There are 9 strands of governance where local governors meet directly with Trustees. Curriculum, Learning and Teaching, Outcomes, Finance etc. In 2016 when I was appointed it was my vision, but it very quickly became the Trust's vision and therefore the Trustees are the custodians of their vision, and I am held accountable for achieving it. It will remain the same no matter who the CEO is.

18. Back to scheme of delegation again it seems very centralised?

(DM): I saw a different version when applying for HT role and it has not changed substantively since then but the way of being presented has been which can appear centralised.

19. What happens if Trust overextends, and another MAT takes us over?

(JJ): The DfE and ESFA consider us to be a strong MAT and capable of growth. However, our 3- and 5-year budget planning indicates to us where the risks are and if we were ever vulnerable there are multiple layers of intervention before we get to the final position of another MAT. Very low risk.

20. What responses were there to the research stage and why were other MATs ruled out?

(DM): Trustees considered all MATs during the research thoroughly and are happy that all questions had been asked and nothing has been missed.

21. Who were the other trusts?

(DM): One condition from other MATS during the research process was that MATs remain anonymous. This therefore cannot be shared.

22. Is this decision irreversible?

(DM): The decision to join a MAT is irreversible.

23. With the Notice to improve is there any alternative? QEGS should issue a statement to say there is no alternative.

(DM): To join a MAT is part of our Notice to Improve.

24. Frustrated with consultation as said before, please do everything you can to avoid the MAT.

(DM): Asked parents to submit any formal questions via email. The Trust Board are compelled to consider them.