

Holland Park School Zoom Meeting GB and ULT 17th March 2022 19:15hrs

Dr Vanessa Ogden (Chair Mulberry School Trust, HPS Trustee)

Dame Sally Coates, National Director of Secondary Academies, United Learning Trust

Mr Yasser El Gabry, HPS Trustee

In the background, selecting questions for the panel: **Euan Graham** (ULT)

VO:

Condition no 6 of the Notice to Improve whether HPS should join a MAT?

- Drew up a list, presentations and interviews, spoke to Regional Schools' commissioner
- Criteria for finding a home for HPS in a MAT
 - o history and character preserved,
 - o remaining a local school,
 - o quality of education, pastoral care and safe-guarding,
 - o Governance incl community stakeholders, accountability structures
 - o Financial arrangements
 - o Become a National key player in education: best and biggest version of itself
- Our mission as Trustees: having great schools at the hearts of their communities, a national and regional role for HPS in education system, this has been an incredibly important factor in our discussions.

SC:

ULT was founded in the 1980s, initially for charitable education for girls, then church schools, then failing academies. We now take not just schools in difficulty, and HPS and Orpington Girl's Grammar Schools being good.

SAT can only do so much to support a school,

MAT has a big team for school improvement and line management,

- we do not change the names, uniforms etc, we believe in the headship of a school
- our philosophy is to keep each school unique
- cluster schools together for regional and national collaboration

Responding to Questions from the Chat:

VO:

Headmaster post has been advertised for September 2022.

Colin Hall announced that he was retiring early at the end of January and we had an interim Headteacher within the school within 36 hrs.

SC:

ULT was established as a C of E Education Trust. However, we run our schools as secular schools unless they are already a Faith school.

VO:

Re Rushed process:

- EFSA asked to consider a MAT and have a list by the 15th Dec 2021, negotiated an extension with D of E, we had other matters to address and investigate.
- Took time to consider
- Now offer an opportunity to the school community to talk about one of the many options that we have looked at.
- Now in process of consideration and due-diligence – looking and exploring each other (HPS and ULT)

VO:

Re Teachers' Feelings:

- there is a mixture of feelings, quite a lot of difference
- it is a difficult time for the school community having received both complaints, which were widely reported in the media, and a Ntl

VO:

Re what do you mean by once matters are resolved?

- needed to investigate a number of serious complaints
- have received an interim report (wrote to parents stating that this had been received in January) and waiting for the conclusion of the investigation
- there are still a few other points in the Ntl around compliance, e.g. senior staff salaries and executive pay

SC:

- Teachers can talk to SC and colleagues to feel reassured

VO:

Re is the decision to enter a MAT linked to the keenness of the D of E to ensure all schools highly educate.

- No not on that basis, the consideration was this decision the right decision for HPS for the next few years.
- Labour Party White paper: set the direction of travel for schools to become independent of local authorities and towards MATs, is where the government is aiming for.
- HPS to be a leader in education system, be a big player, exciting opportunity for staff and students
- I see no disadvantages to joining ULT

YeG:

- Cannot deny there is a drive towards MAT
- But this decision is based on the Ntl, MAT can offer infrastructure to meet that

VO:

Re conditions in Ntl that the Governors feel that they cannot meet

- we must meet all the conditions in the Ntl
- takes time to address issues incl MAT and executive pay

VO:

Re What other options were considered? What evidence was considered to exclude them?

- Only two options considered SAT vs MAT was considered
- Board decided that HPS could not remain a SAT

SC:

Re what differences would children see from joining a MAT

- Children continue to attend school; we occasionally hold competitions, performances etc across our schools
- Rigorous academic curriculum: every lesson is resourced for every year group; teachers have more time to consider how they are going to teach rather than have to find resources.

VO:

Re why not wait until the investigation is completed before considering joining a MAT and why did you not consult parents and students before the decision to join a MAT?

- D of E asked us to consider the MAT decision and have a list by the 15th Dec, which we negotiated to defer beyond the 15th December, to this with a clear process. We have been open with the Local authority, which has seen these documents.
- Since December we have conducted a process to consider different possible MATs.
- Independent investigation considered many allegations and needed an extension to the end of March to assess these fully.
- We cannot negotiate a further extension regarding the MAT decision with the EFSA and hence we need to undertake this now.
- The second question? – EG: let me come back to that.

VO:

Re Local authority would prefer a MAT with KAA, and why was this rejected?

- VO confirmed the desire by RBKC to set up a MAT between KAA and HPS, but this does not as yet exist.
- D of E did give permission to put this option on the list of options.
- As this MAT does not currently exist, it does not have the legal entity and structures of a MAT needed for putting in leadership and central services support, especially with Colin Hall retiring early.
- We moved to looking at medium and large academy trusts.

SC:

Re why cannot HPS remain a SAT?

- ULT would provide support immediately and robust oversight and monitoring. Educational, HR, finance support.

SC:

Re abuse allegations against ULT:

- There is a lot of inaccurate information on social media. We do not have the right to reply and people can put what they like on twitter/facebook.
- Behaviours systems are all done in the best interest of children. We ask for disruption free learning. Children aren't sent into darkened rooms. Children are sent out of class but do continue to learn, but just in a different area.
- Where it did go wrong in a particular school, which perhaps started off the allegation, the behaviour definitely needed to change in that school. Children were talking over teachers. The head brought in a behaviour policy. The mistake she made is that she did not communicate clearly enough with children or parents to make clear what and why the policy was being brought in.
- We brought in an executive principal from another school, as soon as we learnt parents were not happy, who continues to work with her.
- A lot of that reporting was inaccurate. Everyone is completely happy. Things are not always brought about the right way when you have perhaps an inexperienced head. We want parents and children to be happy.

VO:

Re So, is ULT acting as a corporation?

- MATs are charitable companies that have the responsibility and oversight over HR, finance, legal structures as well as education.
- Individual schools have individual GB.
- MATs have the freedom to be innovative and creative unlike local authorities in how they function.
- SATs are very independent and do not have the same accountability as local authority schools or MATs.

VO:

Re Why does an outstanding school need support?

- It is easy for schools to run into difficulty, especially without support structures.
- Support is not necessarily in education, it is around other things: the pastoral care infrastructure in HPS is very little. There are changes to put in that should be there.

VO:

Re How was the list drawn up and by how many governors?

- The decisions around process involve all governors. A working party was tasked to consider a number of MATs possibilities. The Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) gave us a list to start with. We decided to add the KAA-HPS-LA as a possibility and some others. The Board approved this list as did the RSC.

- We then moved into research and investigation and interviews, and subsequent written submissions, and then presentations and looking around the school. This process was clearly agreed by the Board, by us all.

VO:

Re was the option of recruiting a strong new governing body considered?

- Yes, but we felt the school did not have the capacity that comes from being in a family of schools brings.

VO:

Re did you consider going back to being a local authority school?

- I do not even know that this is possible.
- The RSC makes the decisions around becoming an academy and this is not an option that we can consider.

VO and then SC:

Re are there financial implications to students and parents from joining the ULT?

- There are benefits: if something goes wrong, MATs can support one another financially. It works both ways.
- Assets and reserves of 3 million of HPS will remain with HPS. The reserves are ring-fenced for families. That is not the case for all MATs.

SC:

- ULT has reserves that we can use to bail them out but we do not take money from any school's reserves.
- This is not the same for all MAT
- Because we are a large MAT we can centralise procurement and make economies of scale.
- Locally we have Paddington and Hurlingham Academy, and these three schools can share resources, working together as a cluster.
- HPS would not lose its resources.

SC:

Re Will ULT implement discipline policies to other local schools? Will parents have any input in changes to policies in HPS?

- please do not worry – what you hear on social media is not the truth
- We have guidelines but schools do not have to adopt them. We suggest things that can be done but head and senior staff will decide.

VO:

- Let's be very clear: we will not have any more shouting in this school as we have been reading about in social media: allegations of shouting and humiliation that are being investigated. If they are true we really will not have this here at HPS.
- In terms of admissions, we will have an inclusive admissions policy, which is for ULT to determine.

SC:

Re community links?

- We have appointed someone to overlook community links for all our schools.

VO:

Re What are the KPI for the decisions that you are making?

- We have clear KPIs that are set out in the criteria used to determine what kind of Mat for us to join.
- The clear criteria are about the school's character and identity to be celebrated. Things to be put in place so that HPS can be even more outstanding, for social cohesion in the community. We are hearing from people that this has not been the case.

VO:

Re what will the school do to ensure more teachers do not leave?

- In MATs we can bring support and training to where it is needed. We are thinking about the working conditions and expectations on staff.
- It is time for staff to explore the opportunities with ULT.

SC:

- HPS admits 240 children in Yr 7 and only 70 in Y12. Why were others not able to come to the Sixth Form and we would look to make the Sixth Form more inclusive.

SC:

Re double standards regarding posts on social media: why are those of HPS to be believed but not those about ULT?

- there is some truths in what was said by Warwick Mansell but a lot of it is inaccurate.

VO:

- there is a lot in the public domain which have to take into account and we have an interim report that sets out allegations that have been made. They have not been tested and we are waiting for the final report. They are yet to be reported and we have not drawn any firm conclusions. However, there is a significant amount of chat.
- As a Trustee, it is clear that we need to be objective and hence commissioned an independent investigation.

EG acknowledged the request to address questions posed but not answered during the zoom and confirmed that this would happen. All the questions will be collated.

VO:

Re What is plan B if a suitable head cannot be found?

- We will not appoint a head if they are not suitable for the school.
- This is a benefit of belonging to a MAT, in that it can bring in leadership.
- Staff in MATs see the opportunity to become a head in associated school. We have seen that at Mulberry.

SC: - we would be able to help

- we aim to find a great person to lead this school come September.

VO:

Re salaries?

- HPS has extremely high salaries for running a single academy compared to leadership of a MAT of many schools. Differentials should exist. Everyone would think this fair.
- We still need to address this still at HPS.

VO:

Re Headteacher

- It is my experience that a transparent set of rules of conduct and a fair method to help children adhere to that code of conduct is an effective way of running a school.
- Spoke of her personal experience as a headteacher in London.
- Also need pastoral care alongside this. Need pastoral care structure. As trustees, we feel that HPS needs change here and we looked to MAT...

SC

- the leader of the school sets the tone and expectations for the school and staff.
- working together with HPS governors we will find the right person.

YeG

- this process is open recruitment process and is open to existing members of staff.
- It is independent of the MAT selection.

VO:

Re can we publish the interim report?

- We cannot publish information for employee protection and respect their employee rights.
- We will await the outcome of the final report and will need to assess what is made public. This information can damage peoples reputations. We need to be sure to act in the interests of all parties. We will take appropriate actions as required.

SC:

Re will teachers be taken out of this school to teach at other ULT schools?

- No.

VO:

Re which independent organisation has been brought in to provide due diligence on ULT?

- there is a process now (desktop exercises, interviews, visits), which governs how partnerships are settled.
- Then there is a confidentiality agreement.
- This is not for the benefit of Trustees. It is for the benefit for the students.
- The independence comes from lawyers and financial advisers.

VO:

Re what are the drawbacks of joining a MAT?

- I can see drawbacks to joining a MAT that is not very good but I cannot see any drawbacks to joining ULT.
- The board is of that view. It is not one or two persons' decisions.
- If we find things that are a disadvantage then we will consider these.

SC:

- We do not brand schools.
- We can give Yr 11 students the same Mock exams across all our schools.
- ULT would be proud to work with HPS. We would learn a lot from HPS and we have a lot to give. We would be excited for your teachers to collaborate with other teachers in the Trust.
- Two parent representatives are on the Local Governing Board.
- We take a £230 flat fee for each child to the central budget.
- We do not move teachers from one school to another. Teachers can apply for posts at other ULT schools.

VO:

- What is great about MATs also: I have seconded an assistant headteacher to another school as deputy principal. It is a great opportunity for her.
- There are career opportunities for teachers and support staff in a MAT.

VO:

Re will parent and student views be considered in any final decisions?

- There is a process which we will publish.
- This is not a democratic process. There is no vote. The requirement is for the Board to make the recommendation and the RSC will make the decision, having heard the views.

SC:

Re Banding

- This is a decision for the Head and the leadership team.

VO:

Re how many applications have been received for the Head?

- I do not know this. I do know of one person who is very good and who will apply.
- Other trustees are involved in the appointment of the headteacher.
- I have been involved in the creation of the Mat and the advert but I will not be involved in the appointment process.
- I do not know how many applicants there will be. Many heads progress within MATs nowadays.

VO:

Re: How can a temporary governing body make the best decisions for the school?

- D of E asked us to step forward, after local authority said that they were worried about HPS school.
- None of expected to be in the position that we find ourselves now. However, we have a responsibility as Trustees to do the things we are required to do.

VO:

Re timescale/roadmap of the process ahead?

- Decision announced this last Monday.
- Planning process is being laid out. We will be public and clear. We will publish the timeline

VO:

Re engagement of future yr 7 student engagement:

- we will do as much as we can.

VO:

Re sounds like the decision is already made. What can the consulting exactly change?

- The decision has been made to consider ULT as the MAT home, and that is what we are now doing.

VO:

- I cannot answer the question regarding SAT and MAT. That is a question for the D of E to resolve for you.

SC:

- Annual surveys of staff, students and parents.
- Next year, we will have a really good head in charge. Some of the things that will have come out from the investigation will have been put to bed and we can move on.

VO:

- every piece of communication that we have received has been answered to the best of my knowledge.

SC:

- Teachers can stay with the current terms and conditions.
- On a ULT contract, teachers pay goes up as we have better pay and conditions.

VO:

- We have entered a process of consultation and that is how parents' views will be considered.
- We will shortly hold parent governor elections.
- It is unfortunate that one of our great governors stepped down last week.
- I recognise that there will be different views and please bring these to the engagement process.

Please write to the chair with any further questions.

chair@hollandparkschool.co.uk