

SOUTH CUMBRIA MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST

VICKERSTOWN SCHOOL PROPOSAL TO JOIN SCMAT



RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED TO PUBLIC CONSULTATION MEETING 2/3/22

Below are questions that were submitted as part of the consultation process and responded to by Vickerstown Headteacher David Holmes and SCMAT CEO & Executive Headteacher Andrew Wren as part of the public meeting on March 2nd 2022.

Q: Will Friends of Vickerstown be impacted by the change? With it being a charity, will the money raised be purely spent on Vickerstown pupils?

A: It is in the constitution of Friends of Vickerstown that money raised will be for pupils at Vickerstown School. This will not change. Friends of Chetwynde has not changed since they joined.

Q: Will there be a uniform change?

A: There are no plans to change the uniform. Any change would come from the governing body of the school if they wished to do so, not the Trust.

Q: Will joining help develop school facilities and equipment?

A: Joining SCMAT will mean investment will continue as usual in the school in line with its plan and school facilities will continue to be improved. If a specific need is identified this is addressed by the Trust at a local level, with the aim of being swift and responsive. Being part of a MAT also opens up the possibility to bid into other pots of funding, particularly around more substantial maintenance and energy efficiency of schools. The school will also benefit from access to other member schools' facilities including the state-of-the-art facilities at the Channelside campus.

Q: Recruitment for teaching staff appears difficult in South Cumbria due to location and opportunity. There seems to be more drive to recruit senco or supporting teacher roles. Will the formation of an academy trust seek to ensure there is enough incentive for qualified teachers to move into South Cumbria and what will the Trust do to improve the opportunities for existing staff to progress and stay?

A: Recruitment is challenging and that is not only in South Cumbria but at a national level. It is hoped that advertising vacancies more widely as part of a larger organisation will be more attractive to potential applicants from and beyond the local area. The Trust will provide opportunities for staff to upskill and progress in their careers Trust-wide with internal vacancies and additional CPD, with a focus on growing the talent pool for our Trust and for the benefit of our young people.

Q: Will this mean larger classes as opposed to then smaller number of children in classes now? In addition, will this change the small community, "Village like" feel of the school?

A: Classes are fixed at a maximum of 30 to ensure that teaching, learning and support for pupils is as good as it can be. Being part of the Trust will not change this. The ethos of the school did not change when it moved to its new building and is down to the staff and pupils. A number of recent arrivals to the school from another local school have settled in with no change to the community feel of the school and are also enjoying the learning environment. These new arrivals have taken the average class size nearer to 30 which also provides further funding for the school which can be reinvested in facilities for pupils.

Q: What effect, if any, will joining the multi-academy have on SEN provision within the school, including but not limited to; staffing, activities, obligation to meet provision as specified in section F of the EHCP?

A: There will be no changes and no impact to funding, staffing etc.

Q: I would like to know if the school are planning to run a full-time before and after school club to support working families who need childcare up to 5/6pm.

A: This is something that the school has been looking at and that the Headteacher supports and perhaps now is a good time to revisit it. Additional pupils that have recently joined from other schools means there will eventually be more funding coming into Vickerstown and this means it can be invested in various ways, including looking at the possibility of wraparound care to support working parents/carers.

Q: Will a new curriculum be taken up in place of the national curriculum. What safeguards will the Trust put in place to ensure that extreme doctrines are kept away from teaching?

A: As an academy, the school must adhere to the national curriculum. It is only free or independent schools which can move away from this. Any changes to the curriculum will be driven by the team at Vickerstown School, with any substantial changes recommended for approval to the Board by the Local Governing Body. No changes are planned and all will adhere to the requirements of the national curriculum which will be tested by Ofsted during the school's next inspection.

Q: Under a new leadership system, how will the trustees be held accountable for a drop in either educational standards or support for the wellbeing of the children and community the school serves?

A: The Trustees and members come from a range of background and are either educationalists or have a passion for education who act in the best interests of the schools. The SCMAT is currently admitting only schools that are rated good by Ofsted and have sound finances to provide a strong base. From this, the Trust can grow over time to include other schools which will benefit from the support of the Trust. Regardless of whether a school is local authority or part of a MAT, the ultimate responsibility for assuring high standards of education in schools sits with the local authority and the Department for Education.

Q: What will the trustees and SCMAT do to protect the school's ethos of wellbeing over results? Will it focus more on academic performance?

A: The ethos will stay the same. The SCMAT prides itself on assuring the educational character and ethos of its member schools, with any changes coming from the Local Governing Body. It is important for the Trust to have a wide variety of schools with different characters as this diversity helps to build a strong and resilient Trust. Core educational values run through all the Trust's schools in order to maintain the highest standards and to ensure pupils achieve their full potential. The well-being of pupils is of the utmost importance and will remain one of the key areas that the Trust focuses on.

Q: What assurances can the Trust give parents that hard working staff will be protected before, during and after TUPE transfer, will their terms and conditions remain the same and will unions be recognised?

A: Staff are protected under TUPE, there are no plans to make changes to their terms and conditions and the existing unions will continue to be recognised and involved in the TUPE process.

Q: How many more schools does the Trust need to sign up to ensure that support services like financial, pay roll and legal services are affordable and have sufficient "economies of scale"? What will happen if the trust fails to recruit further schools?

A: With three schools in the SCMAT – Chetwynde, Vickerstown and Ormsgill – this is more than sufficient to benefit from economies of scale. Any future growth will be measured and sustainable, with all member schools working together to agree on potential new schools. The Trust already has several interested schools which are looking to join in future years. Other than the two schools above which are scheduled to join in September 2022, no further schools will join in the 2021-22 academic year.

Q: Much of Barrow-in-Furness is reliant on support from BAE Systems, how will the development of the new university affect Furness College as a business? Once apprenticeship opportunities are taken from Furness College and BAE evolve will the college be stable enough to support a whole trust of schools?

A: Furness College and the SCMAT are separate legal entities and the financial situation of the college has no bearing on the SCMAT. Furness College is a partner of the proposal to create a university under the Barrow Learning Quarter. The college is working with the University of Cumbria to broaden the higher education offer in a complementary way to the college's current university education offer. There will be no change to apprenticeship training with the Level 2 and Level 3 continuing to train at the Channelside campus and higher and degree apprentices in the dedicated Advanced Manufacturing and Technology Centre, also at the Channelside campus. In addition, the college trains apprentices from a vast variety of employers, from very large, to very small, together with its mainstream provision for 16-18 year olds and adults.