

Cromwell Community College

Academy Status – Consultation

21st July – 27th September 2011

Consultation

The Governing Body of Cromwell Community College wishes to consult with students, parents, staff and the wider community on the proposal that an application should be made to the Department of Education for Academy Status.

The context

The Government introduced legislation immediately after the May election, 2010 to allow schools to convert to Academies. Schools classed as outstanding by Ofsted could do that immediately. From April of this year all schools are now eligible to apply for Academy status. This opening up of the Academy programme has been discussed at length by the Principals of Cromwell, Neale Wade and Sir Harry Smith. All are of the collective opinion that Fenland secondary students would benefit from Academy Status and therefore wish to act collaboratively in seeking to become independent Academies at the same time. Fenland Principals now wish to begin a period of consultation with all stakeholders.

Key questions to consider about Academy Status?

What is an Academy?

- An Academy is a state funded comprehensive school which receives its funding directly from central government through the Young People's Learning Agency (YLPA).
- An Academy is run by an Academy Trust which has charitable status but is exempt from registration with the Charity Commission.
- An Academy is a company limited by guarantee. That company cannot profit from the Academy and its trustees have a legal duty to act in the interests of the Academy.
- The freedoms, rights and responsibilities of the Trust are set out in a Funding Agreement with the Secretary of State. The flexibility of the Academy governance model allows, in most cases, converting schools to replicate their existing governing body if they wish to do so.

How is being an Academy different from being a community school?

- Freedom from National Curriculum, allowing us to innovate in order to raise the quality of education.
- Free to spend the full budget as we wish. We would receive all funds currently given to the Local Authority (LA). We can decide to buy back some

services from the LA or to purchase services from other sources where it is advantageous for the school.

- Freedom to consider appropriate size and skill set of Governing Body. We would always have staff and parent governors.
- Freedom to keep what already works well with less risk of external interference.
- Freedom to depart from national and local agreements about pay and conditions. We would only do this if our employees agreed and it was beneficial to the school.
- Academies are still subject to Ofsted inspections and monitoring.
- Admissions are still set by the Governing Body, as now, subject to strict legislation. Academies are not able to 'select' students in any way.
- All staff would be employed by the Governing Body.

- ***Will being an Academy mean we become isolated?***

We have a Leadership Team and Governor-driven mandate to collaborate and it is our intention to strengthen links with our primary schools, neighbouring secondary schools and external partners. We remain part of the Fenland Behaviour and Attendance Improvement Partnership with other secondary schools and have close links with our feeder primary schools. The Fenland Partnership has a strong record of successful collaborative working and we are committed to building on this for benefit of our students.

- ***What will happen if the Local Authority isn't there to bail out an Academy in trouble?***

We value our relationship with the LA. Its own role is changing rapidly and its resources are much diminished. We will buy back into LA services which are good value for us. Much of the safety net (e.g. legal support; redundancy costs) which it offered is disappearing as its core services are re-defined.

There are many checks upon Academies to ensure that we succeed educationally and financially. Government will scrutinise to give early warning to Governors of any difficulties. Our own internal checks and balances, including a strong Senior Team and Governing Body, with clear responsibilities and professional expertise will ensure that we keep on track.

- ***Will staff pay and conditions change?***

No, pay and conditions are protected. All members of staff transfer to the Academy under the TUPE regulations.

Any change after becoming an Academy would continue to be subject to all of the safeguards and requirements as set out in employment law. No such changes are being proposed. The Department for Education has indicated that the Government may review aspects of pay and conditions nationally at some point in the future. If that were to happen, all schools would need to take any changes into account but the safeguards and requirements set out

above would still apply (unless the Government were to change the legal framework).

This freedom also means you can improve pay and conditions to suit the needs of the school.

- ***Will there be changes to our pension entitlement?***

No. We will all still be part of our existing pension schemes on exactly the same basis as we are now. This applies to ALL pension schemes.

- ***What would this mean for our students?***

Cromwell will continue to provide a broad and balanced curriculum and ensure we meet individual learning needs and offer outstanding opportunities for all our students.

Academy status would give us greater flexibility with the curriculum as we would not be bound by the constraints of the National Curriculum.

- ***What would this mean for parents?***

The school would continue to set its own admissions arrangements in line with the national guidance. We would therefore continue to operate fair and non-selective admission criteria. We would continue to consult parents as necessary.

What are the advantages of conversion?

- We estimate that we would gain a financial incentive loaded at the start of the government conversion programme. We expect that advantage to be maximised by earlier conversion.
- All three Cambridgeshire outstanding schools (Comberton; Parkside; Linton have converted at first opportunity. We know that at least six other schools, rated 'good' by Ofsted, have also decided to convert. Therefore, at least one third of all Cambridgeshire's schools will be Academies by September 2011. The Government will not be able to sustain the financial incentive for all schools in the future.

What changes are actually being proposed at this stage?

- Cromwell would become an Academy Trust and enter into a funding agreement with the Department for Education. There would be no change to our vision or our core values.
- All existing employees would transfer from the old to the 'new' governing body, with no change to pay and conditions. Any future changes can only be made by agreement.

Next steps

We will consult with all staff; the professional associations; students; parents and the wider community. Governors are keen to see how we might use these new freedoms and this opportunity to set a strategic direction for Cromwell for the next decade. We need to listen to concerns about this change of status and seek answers to questions raised. Ultimately the decision to convert is not taken until the final funding settlement is signed right at the end of the process and so, although Governors don't anticipate obstacles, they are free to revoke their decision until that point.

Timeline for the consultation process

The consultation will take place between **Thursday 21st July** and **Tuesday 27th September**.

Consultation Meetings:

All Staff: Tuesday 20th September 2011, 3.30 pm

Parents and wider community: Tuesday 27th September 2011, 7pm South Hall

Students: Via assemblies and the Student Council

The outcome of the consultation will be presented to the Full Governing Body before a final decision is made. A written summary will also be provided for staff, parents and the wider community.

Consultation

Please let us know your views. You can do this in 2 ways:

1. Send in your written comments to college marked Academy Consultation. A box for your comments will be held at reception.
2. Email the school at academy@cromwell.cambs.sch.uk

Written views are requested for consideration by a group of Governors by **Tuesday 27th September 2011**. The outcome of the consultation will be presented to the full Governing Body before a final decision is made. A written summary will also be provided for staff, parents and the wider community.

Mr G J Roberts
Principal

Mr G Smy
Chair of Governors