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November 2015

Dear Parent/ Carer and other Stakeholders

We are holding a Parents Forum on Thursday, 19 November at 6.00pm in the school hall where you will have an opportunity to meet and talk to both the management and Governors of the school. In particular the Governors will be available to discuss their plans for the future direction of the school. We have been reflecting on the success of the partnership with Hellesdon High School which has been in place since September 2014.

The partnership was originally formed for a period of 2 years, but given how well it has performed we are now actively considering making it a permanent arrangement. As the High School is already an Academy the only option open to Firside is to also become a sponsored Academy within a Multi Academy Trust which the High School are already forming at the request of the Department of Education. There is an appendix included which gives more detail about the Academy Trust.

We believe that this is the best way of securing the future success of Firside Junior School and will enable the school to continue providing a quality education to the children of Hellesdon and the surrounding area.

We look forward to meeting with you at the Parents' Forum.

Yours faithfully

Edwin Pearson
Chair of Firside Governors

Gerard Batty
Executive Headteacher



Information regarding proposed conversion of Firside Junior School to an academy and joining a Multi Academy Trust:

As you are aware, Firside Junior School is currently in partnership with Hellesdon High School (Academy). The Hellesdon High School Academy Trust is in the process of converting to a Multi Academy Trust (MAT), meaning that it can support more than one academy school. The proposed name of the new multi academy trust is "Wensum Academies Trust". The trust in its first year has had from the Department for Education (DfE) an initial allocation of:

- Hellesdon High School
- 1 Primary Phase school
- 1 High School

It is envisaged that if the trust is successful with the initial allocation then the final configuration will be:

- Hellesdon High School
- 2 High Schools
- 7 Primary Phase Schools

Within this allocation of schools the trust will seek to add good and outstanding schools so that there is a capacity to support schools in need of improvement.

As part of our commitment to high quality education in our community the leaders and staff of Firside and Hellesdon High School have worked together over the last year which has resulted in Firside having improving outcomes for pupils and a "good" judgement from Ofsted in June 2015. The Governors of both schools meet on a termly basis to monitor and evaluate the performance of both schools in the partnership and there are half termly meetings between the subject leaders in English, mathematics, ICT and now humanities. Although the partnership was initially planned for two years and then to be evaluated as to whether it should be extended or indeed finished, politics has overtaken this process, inasmuch as it is clear that the Government will expand the academies programme and it seems that the preferred option is for schools to join a MAT rather than become a stand-alone academy, which brings us to the here and now.

It is proposed that Firside Junior School enter into a joint governance arrangement in the Wensum Academy Trust. This is a partnership between academies that have made a commitment to support each other and raise educational standards across the partnership. We are excited by the opportunity this offers to work together more formally to continue to provide high quality education across both our schools for all the age ranges from 7-19. We also see this as a way to further improve all our schools by working with, and learning from each other. It is envisaged that schools with EYFS and KS1 will join the MAT so that there is continuity from 3 -19.

The proposed governance arrangements are attached. We believe that the proposed structure respects each school's autonomy whilst satisfying the national agenda regarding accountability. It is intended that each school will have its Local Advisory Group responsible for the schools performance, although, should a school's standards appear to be dropping or an individual school need support then the MAT would step in to facilitate improvements.

The MAT would become the employer of the staff in our schools and owner of the estate (land and buildings). The Hellesdon High School Academy Trust made no changes to the pay and conditions of its employees who transferred from Norfolk County Council on 1 April 2012 at the time of conversion to academy status.

Likewise, there is no suggestion that the Multi Academy Trust would make any changes to pay and conditions. We do not intend to change anything else about the day to day operation of Firside Junior School as a result of conversion to a MAT.

We believe we also have to consider the risks of failing to take this opportunity as well as the advantages we believe it will bring.



These advantages are considerable and include the following three areas:

Standards

- Ability to challenge each other to further improve standards in all the schools
- Continuity of provision from 3-19 years
- Bespoke support for learning in our schools from each other and professionals of our choice
- The ability to access expertise from subject specialists and from all key stages to allow provision for all learners

Staff development

- Increased collaboration and sharing of good practice
- Collaborative work with support staff from other schools in the group
- Joint continuing professional development, including leadership development for our staff across the schools

Support, procurement and estate issues

- Support staff such as bursars and business managers able to work together and access local support
- Greater capacity to meet the requirements of company and charity law and audit
- The ability to develop our own buildings, with usual consents
- ICT expertise, support and procurement
- The ability to choose key services from a range of providers and to target those more specifically to our needs (e.g., behaviour support, educational psychologist)
- To be better able to obtain value for money for services and resources purchased for a larger group of schools
- We have already achieved some economies of scale, but believe there is greater potential
- Ability to commission services once provided by the local authority that we believe will no longer be directly available

Disadvantages include

- Some loss of autonomy in our individual schools but the ability to influence a larger organisation
- Increased liabilities for the existing trust, some functions of which will be on a greater scale, such as human resources, estate, ICT, and financial responsibility
- Potential transfer of pension deficit for support staff from the Local Authority (assurances and information on liability required)
- We would need to consider how we service new business responsibilities and this may require change in roles or additional staff

When we are considering significant changes it is our practice to take into account the views of our stake holders and this is what we are now doing. Having considered all the evidence we believe that this change is an exciting opportunity that will allow us to meet the challenge to continue to raise standards in Firside Junior School You will find further information regarding academies and academy chains on the Department for Education website.

You can respond to this consultation in writing or by emailing: matconsultation@firside.norfolk.sch.uk. The consultation process will run from 6 November to 27 November 2015 after which the Firside Junior School Governors will decide on a way forward. You will be informed of their decision as soon as possible after this date.



Wensum Academies Trust

Governance Structure

Wensum Academies Trust Members

Wensum Academies Trust Board of Directors

Local
Management
Group of
Hellesdon High
School

Local
Management
Group of
Another Primary
School

Local
Management
Group of
Another Secondary
School

Local
Management
Groups – further
schools to follow