

Consultation on the proposal for The Hive Federation to join Clarion Corvus Trust

Summary from the open meeting (for families and the community) held at St William's Primary School on Tuesday, 8th October 2024 at 6pm

Present from The Hive Federation Sarah Shirras, Executive Headteacher
Hilary Anderson, Chair of Governors
Sophie Mitchell, Vice Chair of Governors
Lauren Mayhew, Governor

Present from Clarion Corvus Trust (CCT) Jim Adams, CEO
Peter Fraser, Chair of Trustees

Sarah spoke first, outlining the situations the schools find themselves in and why joining a Trust has been considered by the Governors. These included:

- The different but equally difficult financial situation both schools find themselves in
- The lack of clarity about what will happen as an LA school if this financial situation remains so unclear
- The reduction in resource to support LA schools, and many support services being traded
- The sudden reduction in SEN money at the end of the last academic year

In looking for a potential solutions to these issues, **the Governors** had set up a working group of four governors, the two Heads of Schools (Julie and Vicky) and Sarah. This group was formed in January 2024 and initially felt it had to work very quickly as budgets have to be set in March for three years ahead. However, finding any solution was going to take more time than this. The group spent their meetings looking at the risks and benefits of all options: staying as we are, defederating or of joining a MAT. It identified some Trusts to meet with based on their location or their desire to grow.

As their exploration went on, they began to identify additional opportunities from being in a MAT other than just potential financial security. These included collaboration and peer support as well as specialist services, such as HR and finance. Many of these benefits have been reduced for LA schools.

The Governors were clear that, if they were to join a MAT, that it must preserve the character of each of our schools, retain their current ethos and culture, remain with a local governing board representation and accountability, allow autonomy for school leaders to make decisions around their curriculum and wider school offer and maintain the terms and conditions of all staff. They were also looking for a MAT where the experience of their school leaders could contribute to the central team's work.

Jim spoke on behalf of CCT. He explained that Clarion Trust had started by Hobart High becoming an academy and then expanded to include another high school and a primary school. Clarion Trust had then merged with Corvus Trust to form CCT as they are today. Their schools retained their autonomy and have local governing boards which are responsible for safeguarding, the curriculum and school policies such as behaviour. Their main purpose in growing the Trust was to develop collaboration between schools and to offer mutual support. They have central services that include HR, finance, IT support and site management. They have a performance team to support outcomes for children across their schools.

Sarah then addressed a few issues that had been brought up through the consultation email accounts.

- She acknowledged that this was a point of principle for some people, an ideological objection to academies per se. In a perfect world, we would not have considered this but we are not living in a perfect world.
- Staff terms and conditions – these would remain as they are now with the ‘Burgandy Book’ for teachers and the ‘Green Book’ for other staff.
- Financial Impact – Academy schools and LA schools are funded by the same formula across Norfolk. There are, however, other monies that are available to MATs but not to LA schools. This includes some capital money (for building development) and some support for schools in difficulty and they can have economies of scale across their schools (eg for procurement). One aspect of academy finance that can be controversial is the the amount a MAT ‘top slices’ from a school’s budget for central services. This was something the Governors had taken in to consideration; our schools need to be better off financially, not worse off. The schools had calculated how much they spend on the services that a MAT would provide and were looking for a MAT that charged approximately the same or less.
- The New Government might have a different approach – There is no evidence to suggest this yet. In fact, forced academisation has continued since the election. There are some huge issues to be dealt with in education right now, including funding for schools, the SEN system, the state of buildings – these will all need big changes that will doubtless take some time.

People who had come to the meeting were then invited to make comment or ask questions. These included:

- There are things about this school that we like and are worried they might change.
- Will Shining Stars (pre and after school club) be run by an outside provider and become more expensive? No, that is not in our plan. We really value Shining Stars and so do our families. This will not change.
- Will there still be a wide range of after school clubs? Yes, as long as we have the staff willing to run them, these will continue.
- If the schools joined CCT, how would parents and the community be able to hold them accountable? The present Governors will become the local governing board, meaning parents, staff and the local community are all represented on it. Sarah explained that we had planned to have routine parent forums at both schools but this hadn’t happened yet; whatever the future holds, this would be a good way forward to keep everyone informed and to listen to their views.
- Have they had a lot of parental complaints at their schools? Jim answered that they do have some complaints but so do more schools now than used to. He said their intake numbers remain strong which implies parental support.
- There was a technical financial question relating to the Trust. Jim was not sure he had all the information needed to answer it so asked that the question be emailed in so he could get his Finance Officer to address it.

- Jim explained that the Trust has a mechanism for pooling reserves. This means there is money available if a school needs it. This can be particularly useful for primary schools as secondary schools have tended to be better funded.
- If the federation did academise, when would it happen? After the consultation process, the Governors will review the information they have received and make a decision. There is also a Department of Education process that would need to be gone through. The earliest is probably 1st April 2025.

The meeting closed at 7.10pm.