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Colston's Primary School

Consideration of conversion to Academy status

Briefing for Stakeholders

Issued on behalf of the Governing Body

3rd February 2012

Since June 2011 Colston's Primary School has been considering its future status. The Governors¹ have been consulting stakeholders and researching the benefits and risks of converting to an Academy. As an Academy the school would be self managing, overseen by the Department for Education rather than controlled by the local authority, Bristol City Council.

The Governing Body is responsible for the education and wellbeing of the current and future pupils at the school, and to the staff as its employer. The decision of whether to convert to Academy status will be based on how it judges conversion would affect outcomes for these groups.

This decision will be based on a balance of risk, and because it has future consequences which cannot be predicted with complete certainty, Governors will make a judgement as to the best option for the school after assessing all the facts available, listening to the opinions of stakeholders during the consultation process, and after identifying the risks associated with either deciding to change or to maintain current status.

The decision on conversion will be made by Governors following final consultation with parents and the local community, according to the following timetable:

3 rd February	Briefing Paper issued
3 rd Feb – 2 nd March	Comments invited via email to colstons.p@bristol.gov.uk or by letter to the school office.
20 th - 24 th February	After school drop-in sessions for parents, with staff and governors 3.30 pm in the Library – more details will follow in school newsletters.
Weds 29 th February	An evening meeting at the school for parents and community, at 7.30 pm
Thurs 15 th March	Governors meeting to consider feedback and decide on future status.

You can have your say by emailing colstons.p@bristol.gov.uk, or by attending one of the meetings. This document, and the summary of the school's first round of consultation, can be found on the school website, www.colstonsprimary.co.uk

¹ The Governors are five parents, three members of staff, three local authority appointees, three members of the community and the Headteacher.

Summary

In the past state schools have been overseen and funded by Local Authorities such as Bristol City Council, and managed by a Board of Governors with the Head teacher.

Local Authorities provided services to school for which they retained money.

Many poorly performing schools became Academies overseen by sponsors and funded by central government. They receive the money previously retained by Local Authorities to provide all their own services.

Now outstanding and good schools can become Academies run by their Governing Bodies autonomously from Local Authorities and funded by central government.

As an Academy a school can have more say in how it is run. Although some Academies become controlled by business or faith groups this does not have to be the case, and the Governors at Colston's reject this idea. The Governing Body would remain representative of parents, staff and the community.

After over a decade of increased funding schools are now faced with reduced budgets. Local Authority budgets are also being reduced, which means the scope and quality of the support services they provide to schools is decreasing.

The Local Authority uses a formula to decide on the funding each school gets according to a school's pupils, buildings and location. Colston's does worse than most Bristol schools, but the Governors feel that the low funding does not reflect the needs of our school population.

We are a community school aiming to reflect the diversity and enhance the cohesiveness of our locality and the city of Bristol. Whatever our decision, this will remain at the heart of what we do. As an Academy the school would aim to be a model example of multiculturalism across the socio-economic spectrum.

We would maintain its existing admissions policy and rules and remain as part of the admissions process currently coordinated by the Local Authority. We are committed to being a school serving its local community and the families with children already at the school on a nearest-the-door geographic basis.

We would remain as an active participant in our local family of schools. Although the majority of local primary schools are considering Academy conversion, all have agreed to continue working together.

The school has identified three areas where the 'freedoms' of being an Academy, combined with the additional funding could benefit the pupils:

- The resources to develop an updated, innovative, skills-based curriculum that reflects the world our children will be living in.
- Redevelopment, upgrade and improvement of our school buildings and learning environment
- Management and administration systems to improve value-for-money, reduce the administrative burden and improve communication.

If the school converts to an Academy it will become the legal employer of the staff, rather than Bristol City Council. All existing staff conditions and rights would be legally protected. The Academy could, in future, vary the terms and conditions for new staff, or improve the terms of existing staff.

The school spends most of its budget on Staff (82%) and Buildings (11%) leaving £89k free to spend. As an Academy in the first year an additional £180k currently retained by the Local Authority would be given directly to the school. From this the school would need to fund certain services provided by the council, and meet some other costs incurred by an Academy but not by a school, which would leave £150k of additional funding.

There are risks associated with conversion: there are additional duties for the leadership team and Governors. The school would need to plan for emergencies that the local authority could current help with. There is some uncertainty about future government funding.

However, there are risks associated with not converting, including the reduction of Local Authority services due to cuts and so many other local schools converting that Colston's is seen as 'second tier' for prospective parents and staff.

Stakeholders are asked to contribute their views and ask questions during the consultation process via scheduled meetings or email.

The Political Background

In the past fifteen years education has been a flagship for political parties looking to establish their ethos and values on a major public service. The running and funding of schools has been subject to many changes over that time period, but against an increasing level of investment most of the changes have been welcomed as leading to raising standards and improving outcomes for pupils.

The initial wave of academies rejuvenated many failing schools with significant investment, new management and major rebuilding programmes, although the introduction of sponsors sat uneasily with many in state school communities.

The current coalition government's policies for successful schools to convert to Academies is, in contrast, set against a funding trend that is (at best) flat for Local Authority schools and, in Bristol, saw a reduction of 1.5% in cash funding for most schools including Colston's, prior to 'pupil premium funding' (which for Colston's, did not quite replace the 1.5% lost).

School funding is facing a significant real terms reduction while public sector spending cuts remain in force (and, given the lack of improvement in the economy, this could be for an extended period). In addition, Local Authorities (LAs) are facing even greater reductions in general terms, which means that, while they may try to pass on as much cash to schools as they can, it is inevitable that significant cuts will be made to LA education support services, as already evidenced in Bristol².

We can predict with some certainty that direct LA services for schools will reduce significantly. In Bristol, schools are already being invited to LA briefing sessions about commissioning their own services. The relationship between the LA and schools is changing, and the future for Colston's Primary within the LA is uncertain. The school is not faced with a simple choice of becoming an Academy or remaining as it is.

² **Draft blueprint –Children & Young People's Services Future State 2014** notes that the Local Authority department responsible for education will "*focus on statutory responsibilities, less direct delivery of services, stronger emphasis on commissioning roles, delivering functions through influence and partnership working, significant savings required*". Annie Hudson, BCC Children & Young People's Service Director's update (2 March 2011).

The financial squeeze on LA support services is being exacerbated by the political squeeze from coalition policy to pass more money directly onto schools, to be spent how schools see fit to raise standards and improve outcomes. At present Bristol City Council retains over £180,000 each year from the money the Government allocates to Colston's (13% of our budget) in order to fund services such as the Behaviour Support Service and the Education Welfare service. On conversion to Academy this money would be passed to the school to buy any necessary services directly.

Historically schools have been funded by a range of formulas, all of which comprise a large core element based on pupil numbers. Additional funding is then allocated according to certain school statistics based on its buildings, location and the categories of pupils attending. If all of these sources are combined, and then divided by the number of pupils, it produces a 'per pupil funding' figure.

In the Schools Budget Statement 2011/12 all Bristol primary schools' core funding was £2,040 per pupil. Colston's additional per pupil funding was £802, (giving a total of £2,842) ranking us a very lowly 97th out of 107 Bristol primary schools. 85 schools received more than £3,000 per pupil.

Part of the reason for the school being poorly funded is due to us having low floor space compared to others (despite the challenging nature of the age and layout of our buildings). Historically, part has been due to additional funding for the deprivation of pupils depending on which group of schools we are in rather than the pupils' home locations. Just over half our pupils live outside the more affluent wards of Cotham and Redland - our school deprivation index calculated on pupils' postcodes is above the national average for schools.

Although previous funding formulas have included money specifically to address the raising of achievement of some pupils from groups such as Black Minority Ethnic groups and children whose first home language is not English, this is no longer the case. Nearly one third of pupils at Colston's are from Black Minority Ethnic groups, which puts us in the top 20% of schools nationally. We recognise the diversity of our school as a strength, bringing huge benefits and significant challenges. However, our funding is more suited to the needs of the less diverse population of the immediate local area than the needs of children and families at the school.

The 'fairness' of previous funding formulas and the 'fairness' of future funding allocations to Academies is hotly debated. It is thought by some people that moving Academies from LA control is part of the coalition Government's intention to create competition between schools in which there will be winners and losers, depending on;

- a) How much use of central services (and thereby the centrally retained funding) a school makes, and
- b) How effectively a school can manage itself, improve educational standards, and be self-governing.

The Governing Body at Colston's is concerned that there is a risk that some schools remaining with the Local Authority will be less well funded than Academies; and there is a concern that cuts to Local Authority services will have a significant impact on schools less well managed than our own. Governors recognise and acknowledge a moral and social responsibility to help other schools and to share best practice across Bristol schools and will not only maintain but seek to extend Colston's collaborative working with schools that could benefit from our knowledge and experience. However, the Governors' primary concern is for the maintenance and improvement of outcomes for current and future pupils at Colston's within the changing educational landscape. This should be balanced against the potential impact on other schools of a reduction in funding of central services resulting from less funding being retained by the LA from schools. Conversion to Academy status would reduce the risk to Colston's of LA support services being greatly reduced or inadequate.

The School's Place In The Community

An outcome of the early Academies programme was the potential for increased influence from business, individuals or organisations such as faith groups over schools. This is an outcome that the Governors at Colston's Primary completely reject for this school. The composition of our Governing Body will not change, maintaining the representation of parents, staff and the community. All fifteen existing Governors will become governors of the Academy. More importantly, all of the Governors will automatically also become Trustees, the body which in some Academies is used to introduce external ownership or organisational control. In controlled Academies there are usually only three trustees; by making all fifteen of our Governors trustees we will replicate the stakeholder control model that currently governs the school.

Colston's has a different flavour to many schools, exemplified by our strong ethos of "celebrating diversity, learning together", (recognised by OFSTED in its November 2010 report as *"Pupils' individuality and uniqueness are celebrated and they are given an outstandingly effective spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. This means that the community is harmonious and cohesive and its diversity is seen as a cause for celebration"*).

We are a community school aiming to reflect the diversity and enhance the cohesiveness of our locality and the city of Bristol. Whatever our decision, this will remain at the heart of what we do. As an Academy the school would aim to be a model example of multiculturalism across the socio-economic spectrum.

We would maintain its existing admissions policy and rules and remain as part of the admissions process currently coordinated by the Local Authority. We are committed to being a school serving its local community and the families with children already at the school on a nearest-the-door geographic basis, just as Cotham School has as an Academy and not by a self-engineered catchment area such as the new Colston's Girls primary Academy.

In the past twelve months the Headteacher and Business Manager have both become active participants and leaders of our geographical cluster of schools. Although historically the school has taken a backseat in developing links with neighbouring schools, the present management believes that these strong links benefit all schools involved and would continue as proactive partners in these unions, developing shared good practice in the classroom and as school managers. The business managers and bursars from several schools in the cluster have been working together to interview potential service providers for Academies, so that we can pool opinions, agree likely costs and negotiate joint terms for any future provision required. Our local cluster of schools³ has agreed that, irrelevant of LA or Academy status, we would maintain and develop our partnership working.

If the school becomes an Academy many things will stay the same. Our Governing Body will stay the same. Our admissions policy will stay the same. Our position in our local community

³ The Local Authority groups schools together in geographically based 'clusters'. Primary schools in our cluster are: Bishop Road, Christchurch, Elmlea Infant & Junior, Henleaze Infant & Junior, Hotwells, St. John's, St Michael on the Mount, St Bonaventures, St Peter and St Paul, Stoke Bishop and Westbury Park. This is known as the North 3 cluster.

will be the same. Our active participation with other local schools will stay the same. Our school ethos will stay the same.

Innovation and Change

As an Academy there is considerable scope for innovation and change. Schools that have converted have reported three drivers for change;

- Additional money enables projects to be accelerated or more expensive projects to be considered
- The strict value-for-money led appraisal of existing LA and potential external suppliers encourages innovative thinking
- Managing change generates a heightened awareness of possibilities

We have identified three areas where significant change can benefit the school, enabled by the finance and freedom of Academy status:

- 1) OFSTED identified the richness of the school curriculum and the school aims to continue its development, particularly to refresh some of the more dated parts to create a truly innovative, skills based curriculum that reflects the world that our children will be living in. Becoming an Academy guarantees our freedom to plan our curriculum (with external guidance but not political direction) and give us the resources to implement changes, train staff and buy educational materials across a range of curriculum areas from Music and Art to Science and ICT.
- 2) The learning environment in the school continues to present significant challenges. The internal fabric of the building including classrooms, cloakrooms, toilets and communal areas and the external fabric of the building including roof, walls and pipes all need regular attention. The access between classroom and playground for our very youngest children in Reception is difficult, hampering the freeflow of learning between the two environments. We have a small amount of undeveloped space in our loft areas. We are at the early stages of planning a radical redevelopment, upgrade and improvement of the learning environment which will be done in full consultation with the staff and children. All of this requires funds beyond that which the school has, or is likely to have in the near future as an LA school. The capital budget the school is given by the LA for this work has been reduced from £46k to £8k this financial year due to the coalition government's cuts. Having additional budget available would greatly accelerate these developments.

3) The LA management and administration systems used by the school for finance and personnel are long-standing and, due to their development for whole council use, often unwieldy. Becoming an Academy gives the school the freedom to choose its own management systems, allowing more effective control over vital functions and the implementation of systems to improve school/parent communication and payment systems for school dinners, trips, music tuition and the like. Last year's centralisation of council purchasing, whereby schools can only use approved, in many cases non-competitive suppliers, is widely thought by schools to be overly restrictive. In some cases it means that schools cannot gain best value by using local or specialist suppliers, and is costly in terms of administration time taken. Business Managers in the N3 cluster are already working together to arrange cooperative review and appropriate recruitment of specialist appropriate suppliers and service providers for use post conversion (or when the LA change their current purchasing arrangements). With good management Academies can they can achieve greater value for money. As an Academy the school would also look to renegotiate its current catering and cleaning contracts to provide better services and value.

Our School Staff

Our school staff are at the forefront of our learning opportunities. OFSTED commented that *“Staff know pupils very well and are highly committed to promoting equal opportunities in an outstanding way”*, and the Governing Body are committed to recruiting, retaining, training and rewarding outstanding staff. If the school becomes an Academy, it will become the employer of all staff, rather than the LA as at present. The terms of employment of all transferring staff are legally protected under TUPE⁴ law, and there will be no detriment to any staff conditions. The Governing Body will adopt an Employment Charter to enshrine a high standard for staff remuneration and welfare and help to effect continuing high standards in teaching and school management. The school would also continue full trade union recognition. This year the school has invested greater resources to training its staff than previously, to encourage staff development and innovative teaching practice, and is committed to continue this level of investment in the future.

⁴ The Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) legislation

The Financial Picture

In the financial year 2011/12 the school will receive £1.36 million from the Local Authority. This year it budgeted to spend it as shown in the summary table below.

STAFF	£ (k)	% of total
Teaching Staff	808.9	61.3%
Class Support Staff	163.3	12.4%
Admin & SMSAs	116.6	8.8%
Total Staff	1,088.8	82.5%
BUILDINGS		
Council Tax	19.8	1.5%
Utilities	40.4	3.1%
Building Maintenance	47.3	3.6%
Cleaning	35.5	2.7%
Total Buildings	143.0	10.8%
OTHER EXPENDITURE		
General Admin	7.3	0.5%
Subscriptions & Insurance	17.7	1.3%
Educational Materials	28.5	2.2%
Trips & Sport	6.0	0.5%
LA Services (Finance/Legal/HR)	9.8	0.7%
ICT Support	19.2	1.5%
Total Other Expenditure	88.5	6.7%
Total Expenditure	1,320.3	100.0%

The school has budgeted for a contingency of £35k which will be carried forward to next year if unspent.

Before it passes on this money from central government to the school the Local Authority retains just over £180,000 to fund certain central services. These are:

- behaviour support services
- museum and library services
- education welfare services
- music services
- visual and performing arts services
- outdoor education services
- costs of LA statutory/regulatory duties regarding health & safety

If Colston's becomes an Academy it will receive this £180k retained funding and will need to use some of it to fund its required provision of the above. It can buy back exactly what it needs, or find alternative providers. In the past the school has accessed few of these services regularly. The school has researched the costs of buying back these services, and although some depend on the level of future demand, largely driven by the number of pupils requiring intervention, a budget of £20k would cover a significant increase in demand.

The following services will continue to be provided to Academies by the LA at no cost:

- home to school transport (including SEN)
- education psychology, SEN statementing and assessment
- monitoring of SEN provision
- prosecution of parents for non-attendance
- individually assigned SEN resources for pupils with statemented conditions needing additional tailored provision
- provision of pupil referral units or education otherwise for a pupil who is no longer registered at an academy.

There are other costs currently met from the LA retention for some licences, including software, which the school can purchase for £5k per year. As the employer of the staff, the school would also become responsible for certain redundancy, employment termination, early retirement, maternity, and long term sickness costs, should they arise. Insuring against most of these risks would cost in the region of £5k.

Given these likely costs, the school would then have £150,000 of additional funds available in the first year. Compared to our current disposable income (discounting staff salaries and fixed costs) of about £35k, this is highly significant.

There are current services and functions provided by the LA for which the school pays about £29,000 per year, including Personnel administration and payroll, HR advice when needed, Financial management systems, ICT systems management and Internet access and legal and contract management. In conjunction with Christchurch and Stoke Bishop schools (who are also considering conversion) we have met with a wide range of alternative providers and with LA departments offering to continue selling these services to Academies and are confident that, by using a combination of buy back and new provision, improvements in value can be made for at most these prices, and in some cases for significant savings.

In the future, if Government policy continues to devolve an increasing percentage of funding direct to all schools rather than via LAs, it is likely that the advantage of this 'additional' funding to Academies will decrease, as all schools are given the money to buy their own services. It is impossible to say with certainty how much money will be made available to LAs or direct to schools in the future, and therefore what a net benefit to being an Academy would be. However, it will remain important that all schools manage their funding to achieve best value and maximum educational outcomes for children. The school intends to use the skills and knowledge gained by this process, and as an Academy should conversion occur, to help other less developed schools looking to achieve best value and to share good practice.

The Risks

The decision to convert or not is not straightforward; there is a balance of risk, as future events which could influence the decision are unknown. Examples of risk are that;

LA services may decrease through lack of funding so that they are not fit for purpose, particularly if the majority of schools opt for Academy status and do not buy back services. In our N3 cluster of schools Elmlea Junior, and Henleaze Junior have already converted. Bishop Road, Christchurch, Elmlea Infants, Henleaze Infants, Hotwells St. John's, Stoke Bishop and Westbury Park are all consulting about conversion. Only St. Michael on the Mount and the two Catholic schools, St. Bonaventures and St. Peter and St. Paul have decided to not pursue Academy status at present. A full list of all schools approved for conversion can be found at the Department for education website www.education.gov.uk

There already is a significant duty on the Leadership Team and Governors to lead the school according to the law, but should leadership and governance fail, there are established procedures involving LA intervention that have been used in Bristol schools in the past. For failing Academies the Department for Education or Secretary of State would intervene.

In the event of a major incident such as fire, serious accident or crime, the LA has a support system that is, in the main, effective in maintaining continuity of provision. As an Academy we would need plans to deal with such contingencies, either by arrangement with the LA or with another authority or provider.

There is an undefined process for Academies that wish to become LA controlled again, other than a stated minimum period in the funding agreement of seven years.

The school, rather than the LA, becomes the legal employer of the staff, and therefore has the risk inherent to any employer regarding their legal responsibilities under employment law. If these legal responsibilities are not undertaken, there is a risk of financial penalty or compensation to employees.

For some schools the new responsibility of building management on conversion can pose a risk. We opted out of having the LA manage our buildings ten years ago, as we felt that we could better identify and meet the needs of our unique premises than the council and are already experienced in managing the associated risks.

Conclusion

Education and local government policy are changing dramatically at the same time. Funding for schools and local authorities is decreasing, and the availability of local government services is declining. Having more direct control of change, as an Academy, would make easier to implement and focus the change to meet our school's needs.

Not all Academies are the same; there is an opportunity to embed the Colston's ethos of "celebrating diversity, learning together" at the heart of an Academy serving its local community, run by its stakeholders. By converting on our own terms, with our Governance model continuing, an Employment Charter for staff, maintaining strong links with other schools and being part of the present city-wide admissions process Colston's could, via the short term financial key that unlocks curriculum and learning environment developments, improve the outcomes for our pupils in the long term.

The Future Status of Colston's Primary School

Q1 Please use the space below to tell us what you think about the possibility of Colston's Primary School adopting Academy status. (Please continue on the reverse or separate sheet if needed)

Q2 What is your relationship with Colston's Primary School (Please put an X next to all that apply)

Parent or carer

Parent/Carer of a pupil at Colston's Primary

Parent/Carer of a pupil thinking of applying to Colston's Primary

Parent/Carer of a pupil that has left Colston's Primary

Parent/Carer of a pupil at another primary school

Member of staff

Student

Pupil currently at Colston's Primary

Pupil who has left Colston's Primary

Local Resident

Local Business

Other (Please write in)

Thank you for taking the time to put forward your views.
Please email your reply online to colstons.p@bristol.gov.uk or return as a hard copy to Academy Consultation, Colston's Primary School, 18 Cotham Grove, Bristol BS6 6AL or drop into the School Office. Please return by **Friday 2nd March 2012**