

The meeting was attended by eight parents.

Mrs Holditch welcomed the parents to the meeting and introduced Mrs Therésa Jaggard (Deputy Headteacher), Fr Matthew Buchan (Chair of Governors), Mrs Sue Forsey (Vice Chair of Governors) and Mr Ian Bauckham (CEO Tenax Schools Trust).

Mrs Forsey outlined the discussions of the Governing Body and Senior Leadership Team that had led to this proposal. The strategic direction of the school over the next three to five years was the key focus of many discussions, especially given the changing educational landscape and the implications for Local Authorities. The role of Local Authorities will change dramatically over the next few years, impacting directly on the ways in which schools are managed and supported.

As a Voluntary Aided School, our ethos is underpinned by strong Christian values. When we decided to look to join a Multi Academy Trust, it was important to us all to find a Trust that would actively share and support those values. We already have strong links with Bennett Memorial Diocesan School (the secondary school which initially set up the Tenax Schools Trust), with a number of pupils transferring from Leybourne to Bennett each year. The values of the Tenax Schools Trust marry well with ours.

Mr Bauckham made a brief presentation to parents, before opening the floor for questions. Mr Bauckham explained the history of the Tenax Schools Trust, placing its creation and expansion within the wider political and educational landscape. He also explained the policy of the Rochester Diocesan Board of Education with regard to Academy Conversion and briefly outlined the advantages to the school should we join the Trust. (A copy of the presentation slides are attached for reference).

### **Questions and Answers**

#### ***Are we going to lose our best staff to support other schools within the Trust?***

No. The Trust would look to build capacity within other schools in the Trust but have no wish to weaken an existing Outstanding school. The CEO of the Trust is accountable to the Department of Education for standards across the Trust and wont jeopardise a strong school going into decline. We may be asked to support staff from other schools by acting as role models to them, or by appointing additional staff who would be trained here before moving into another school within the Trust.

Existing staff will transfer on the same terms and conditions of employment and will continue to be employed at Leybourne SS Peter & Paul. Tenax will not force staff to work in another school.

#### ***How do the standards in other schools within the Trust compare to Leybourne?***

Bennett Memorial is graded as outstanding in all areas. Brenchley and Matfield CE Primary School was graded as Good three years ago, although the Trust consider practice there to be outstanding now. Sir Henry Furham is currently graded as requiring improvement, although a new Headteacher and Governing body have been appointed with a view to achieving an outstanding grading in the future. We are graded Outstanding. Of the other three schools who are looking to join Tenax at this

time, one is outstanding and the other two are good. The school looking to join in June 2017 is good, with a possible further outstanding school joining later.

It is obviously not possible to speculate beyond this point!

***Will the Trust hold the overall budget for all schools within it? Would having one school in financial difficulties within the Trust impact on the others?***

Trusts are legally not allowed to use funding to support one school at the expense of others. The Tenax Schools Trust is operated in such a way that the funding that is received from central government to individual academies goes directly to the academy itself. The Trust then takes an agreed charge from each individual school to pay for central services.

As part of the due diligence process that is undertaken by the Trust before a school joins them, school budgets are scrutinised. No school is allowed to join if they are in debt or deficit as a Trust cannot take on the financial liability. Schools must demonstrate good financial management prior to joining a Trust.

The due diligence process also looks at the condition of school buildings. As an academy, we could apply for funding for building programmes. Currently as a Voluntary Aided school we are required to contribute 10% towards the cost of any building work that takes place. This requirement does not apply to academies.

***Would we receive less money as an Academy?***

Schools receive a certain amount of funding per pupil from the Government. Currently the Local Authority top slice money before it reaches schools, in order to support the running of the Authority. In the case of Academies, schools receive the same amount of funding per pupil and would then pay the Trust for certain services. Other services that we would historically receive “for free” from the Local Authority (having already paid for them through top slicing) we would either pay for, or look to purchase elsewhere.

In reality, the costs are likely to be comparable, although we would have more freedom as to where we were to purchase support and services from.

***Is Tenax the only option for us?***

No – but as a Voluntary Aided school we need to join a MAT that would be approved by the Diocese of Rochester. It is important to us that we join a Trust with values in line with our own. There are other academy trusts in the area, but not Church of England based and with a shared ethos. The geography, values and ethos of the Tenax Trust all fit well with us.

***As an Academy would we have more control over the curriculum?***

Academies are exempt from the requirement to teach the National Curriculum – but they are not exempt from the end of Key Stages tests which are based on it! Therefore academies generally do still follow the National Curriculum in order to prepare for the phonics screening test and SATs, although they are not necessarily constrained by it in the same way. Therefore academies can supplement or reduce aspects of the National Curriculum if they choose.

With regard to the views of the Trust, if a school is good or outstanding, the Trust will not micro-manage it. Headteachers will be held to account with regard to standards and outcomes, but the curriculum and means of delivering it are left to the individual schools to decide.

Some Trusts do not operate in this way, insisting that all schools within the Trust follow the same curriculum and schemes of work. We did not wish to join a highly prescriptive Trust, and agree with the Tenax philosophy that if we have a system that works, we should be allowed to continue with it.

***What would be taken out of our hands?***

“Nothing” is the short answer! Currently we are supported and held to account by the Local Authority. Should we join Tenax, it would be them fulfilling this role.

We would gain more opportunities to work alongside other schools.

***Why not give members of the Tenax Schools Trust priority with regards to joining Bennett Memorial?***

In the experience of the Trust so far, parents wish to retain an element of free choice at age 11, and not feel coerced into choosing a particular school by virtue of being members of the same Academy Trust. Bennett is difficult to get into, there are a limited number of places and not all feeder schools for Bennett are Church schools. Giving priority to members of the Tenax Schools Trust may lead to a skewed admissions situation and would not be sustainable, as currently all of the Tenax schools are Church schools. The Trust regularly discusses the issue of preferential admissions for Bennett but cannot impose it on them.

***Did Tenax approach us, or did we approach them? Have we looked at other Trusts?***

Yes, we approached Tenax and we have looked at other Trusts, although we have not had discussions with anyone else. We searched the other Trusts in the area but did not find any that have the same fit as Tenax with our aims and ethos. Having looked into others, and realised that they did not fit on a basic level, there was little point in exploring them further. Some Trusts focus on supporting schools in difficulty; others are not Church based, which would mean that the Diocese would not give their consent to the conversion.

Also, schools convert to academy status for a number of reasons. One local Church school became an academy as a result of being proactive following analysis of their data and realising that they were likely to have to convert in the future.

Another benefit for us of joining Tenax is their designation as a Teaching School, which would give us the opportunity to share good practice and be involved in research and the development of new staff.

***Could we become a stand alone Academy?***

Theoretically yes, in reality, no. The infrastructure required to convert to, or set up, an academy is huge. For a one form entry primary school it is simply not feasible that we could manage the huge amount of administration involved.

Also, the view of the Government is that schools should be looking to work in partnership, rather than isolation. Being part of a MAT is one way to achieve this aim, and it gives staff at all levels opportunities to network and to share ideas.

There are also potential savings for us as a small school in terms of shared resources and economy of scale should we join a larger Trust.

***What are the costs involved in Academy conversion? Who meets them?***

The Tenax Schools Trust employs a project manager on a contract basis to oversee the conversion process. The costs of the project manager, and the other conversion costs, are covered by a grant of £25000 from the Department of Education.

***What happens to our school staff?***

Staff on existing contracts are covered by TUPE.

Staff appointed after conversion to Academy status are then employed by the Tenax Schools Trust, with comparable terms and conditions. Teaching staff are employed under the School Teachers' National Pay and Conditions; support staff continue to follow the Kent Scheme for Support Staff.

***What is the turnover of staff like in the Trust?***

This varies from school to school and their own individual situation and need.

Filling teaching posts nationally is a challenge. The number of children in education is rising and will continue to rise. The number of 21-22 year olds is falling until 2022, meaning there are fewer graduates looking to enter the profession. In addition, teachers' pay has fallen behind that of other graduates. As an academy we cannot necessarily offer additional pay to be attractive to potential staff- but we can offer other incentives, such as career development and progression within the Trust, or projects working across the Trust for aspiring senior leaders.

***How long has the Tenax Schools Trust been operating?***

Two years.

***Will the children / parents see Tenax around the school?***

Occasionally Ian Bauckham as CEO of the Trust may be around the school, but this will not be the norm. This would be in regard to a particular issue or on a rolling basis to cover all of the schools in the Trust. The day to day running of the school, and the Leadership Team, will continue as before.

***Who decides if this will happen? What is the timescale involved?***

The decision will be made by the Governing Body. They voted unanimously to proceed with the consultation process and will carefully consider all questions and comments raised by all stakeholders before making a final decision whether to join the Tenax Schools Trust. We would be looking to convert towards the end of 2016 if we go ahead.

***Will anything stop the conversion?***

We don't expect the due diligence process to raise any issues that might affect the conversion. The staff have had an informal consultation meeting, with a formal TUPE meeting to follow further down the line, should the Academy Order be granted.

Occasionally things may arise during the consultation process that mean that the Governing Body would decide not to proceed with conversion.

At this stage, the Governing Body are consulting to ensure that parents, staff and other stakeholders are clear as to the process involved and are able to ask any questions they may have.

***Will there be another meeting for parents?***

There isn't one planned. Parents are welcome to send questions or comments for consideration to the Governing Body. They will be responded to and published on the school website.

***What are the implications or changes for dealing with pupils with Special Educational Needs?***

Nothing will change. The Local Authority retains responsibility for pupils with SEND.

***Will there be changes to the current structure of the Tenax schools Trust? (Five years hence, could Tenax want more control of the schools within the Trust?)***

Theoretically there could be changes, just like within the Local Authority. However, why would they want to? In addition, as a form of protection for schools joining MATs, the current White Paper includes provision for individual schools to remove themselves from MATs. This means that MATs are unlikely to become static bodies, and should maintain the dynamism that is attractive to schools right now. Schools are not locked in for life, and the Regional Schools Commissioner also has the power to break up Trusts if concerns are raised around performance.

***What are the views of staff?***

Staff have had an informal consultation meeting and the feeling was positive. Terms and conditions will be unaffected. Bennett enjoys an excellent reputation locally and staff are comfortable with its ethos and values, feeling they are in line with our own.

***Would the Trust replace the School's ICT resources?***

This forms part of the due diligence process. We would retain responsibility for resourcing according to our budget, although the Trust may be able to help in terms of expertise or purchasing in larger numbers.

***Are there any plans for cross Trust activities (like the Harris Trust art competition)?***

This is exactly the kind of thing the Trust would like to encourage as it grows.

***In addition to the questions raised at the meeting, the following questions were submitted prior to it:***

- ***Will there be a vote?*** No – the decision will be made by the Governing Body.
- ***If there were to be a vote what would be the required percentage to pass the motion?*** Please see previous question.
- ***Who are the other groups being consulted and does it include the senior schools our children may move to after Leybourne?*** Other local groups, such as groups who hire the school grounds and facilities, and other local schools are being consulted with.

***We are assured the governors consider this a positive change that should be taken forward, however, as a year 1 parent, I have never had the opportunity to vote for the governing body or seen any bios of them in relation to their roles. Perhaps these could be published with particular focus to the current matter:***

- ***Do they have professional experience of academy schools***
- ***Do they have any relationships with the proposed academy board that should be declared***
- ***Do they work within the education field in another guise (those that are not teachers at Leybourne)***
- ***Do they perhaps have professional experience of organisational change and change management***
- ***Which role do they occupy in the governing body / which areas are their focus?***

The Governing Body have a wide range of professional experience. Elections are held as vacancies arise, usually when Governors reach the end of their Terms of Office. Details of their roles and responsibilities on the Governing Body can be found on the school website. None of the Governing Body have any links with the Tenax Schools Trust.

***With regard to the proposal itself, I would be keen to understand the evidence packs / analysis undertaken and whether this included:***

- ***What needs have been identified within the school that academy status would address?***
  - ***Specifically in relation to the children / school facilities / opportunities***
- ***Have other academies / options been explored for comparison purposes- perhaps the group lead by Invicta Grammar School?***
- ***How are the other schools within this academy group performing and how does that compare with Leybourne's performance?***
- ***Have other means to address school needs been explored outside of joining forces with other schools e.g. the letter mentioned 'Professional Development of the Governors' perhaps this could***

***be address by training courses / memberships of bodies other than academies or indeed election of governors who are already professionals.***

These issues were addressed at the meeting and have been referred to earlier in these notes.

***I should like to hear the opinions of current staff regarding the proposal since this affects their contracts / pensions / curriculum.***

This point has been answered previously.

***What are the costs involved in the change and who will bear them?***

This point has been answered previously.

***With regard to the stimulus for making this change, I wonder if you could answer what this is since this current government is no longer pursuing academy status for all schools and no other political party supports that move?***

This point was answered earlier in the meeting, by both Mrs Forsey and Mr Bauckham.