

Parents Consultation Meeting with CST

Parent Questions

This document summarises the questions parents asked to CST

Q. How do you pay for your central team? It's a big team which equates to a lot of salaries.

Schools pay a top slice of their budget to CST in the same way they do the Local Authority. The central team's job is to make sure schools are well equipped by replacing the services supplied by the Local Authority. Schools have been finding a stripped back service from Local Authorities, therefore by joining CST this should improve. Education is at the heart of CST and is all we do, we aim to get best value for money for the schools, children and parents. We are able to purchase things like software for example for the whole trust and therefore able to use economies of scale.

Q. You mentioned capital funding, where does this come from?

This comes direct from the DfE. CST is a not for profit organisation, all funding is spent on schools.

Q. As part of the process did AG look into how the top slice payment compares to your current payment or that of other academies?

Yes, it was something that we went into in great depth and held several meetings to discuss. Finance and curriculum were the 2 biggest things we went into.

Q. Will the current curriculum be dropped?

Again, there has been a lot of discussion around curriculum, what we feel we are doing well will stay. AG felt that the CST curriculum was the best fit and where we adapt the CST curriculum would broaden and enhance children's learning. Taking part in concerts, sports days, etc.

Q. How does the size of AG compare to other schools within CST.

Should AG join it will be the largest primary school with CST. It is almost double the size of the current largest primary school in the trust.

Q. Does the senior team within CST know the SLT in all schools?

Yes, along with many other school staff too. CST explained that primary Heads meet once a fortnight, this is valuable for Heads to come together and share experiences. All schools learn from each other. CST want to keep within the wider Bristol area St Katherine's is on the border with North Somerset yet still within a few miles of another school. This means that should any school need urgent support a member of the central team can be at a school within 20 minutes. This is really important for CST.

Q. What is the biggest lesson you have learnt as schools join CST?

That all schools are different. AG have time and the due diligence that is now taking place is really important to fully investigate everything. CST explained that they always ask schools 'Is it better now'

once the process is over. The answer so far has always been yes. CST are reflective, creative and want to work collaboratively with all schools. Another important question is 'what can we do better'

Q. How do the other schools perform?

Schools are generally doing better now than before they joined CST. With schools going from 'requires improvement' to 'good'. All schools are making good progress and going in the right direction.

Q. Have all schools joined CST voluntary?

Yes.

Q. What day to day effects will parents/children see?

Parents/children generally shouldn't see any difference. There will be no change of logo, uniform, etc.

Q. Will the staff team stay the same?

Yes, all staff will be transferred to CST through the TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment)) process. Staff have had a meeting with CST and chance to ask questions.

Q. Will the TUPE process protect staff?

Yes.

Q. It is important to provide clarity around the curriculum.

Any changes to the curriculum will be gradual and only if they are needed. The curriculum evolves all the time and tweaks/changes are made where needed. The advantage of having the same curriculum is that everyone is talking the same language, when staff meet, they all have the same common thing to discuss. It is important to emphasize it won't be changed if it doesn't need changing and only for it to become better.

Q. How do you define better?

Making the whole school better, budgets, curriculum, Ofsted, staff wellbeing, etc. CST send staff a survey every year which is analysed to see if there are things we could do better. It's a hard time for Headteachers at the moment, and having fortnightly meetings help them a lot.

Q. Will the PTA be affected?

No. Fundraising for schools will always stay with the school and money spent on the school. The central team often put in bids for specific equipment/events, etc.

Q. How big is CST likely to grow?

The next phase of growth will see the number of primary schools potentially doubling but the aim is to stay within Bristol.

Q. As CST grow will resources grow or get pulled?

The benefit of being part of a trust is economies of scale. Being able to buy equipment for the trust as opposed to a single school helps reduce costs.

Q. Currently how does Gareth Jones get support?

The Chair of Governors is a huge support for Gareth, especially as she has a primary background, which really helps. Within Bristol CC there has been 4 school improvement officers in the last 5 years, who visit 3 times a year, one visit being for an appraisal. This means there is never a personal relationship.

Q. What % will AG pay CST for its services?

5% of the budget pays for services. This is a similar amount being paid currently to Bristol CC.

Q. If a school has a surplus budget, will it be expected to help out schools in deficit?

Schools manage their own budgets. However, this could potentially happen, however it would be seen as a 'loan'. This has not yet happened within the trust and the finance team would do everything they could to help a school stay within a surplus budget.

Q. Will the school still be responsible for their own budget?

Yes, it is their budget to manage, as long as everything is ok there is no need for the central team to get involved. The central team will help with monitoring the budget and supporting schools where there are issues or concerns.

Q. Do CST schools have School Business Managers?

Yes, CST schools have their own School Business Managers.

Q. We have heard why AG like CST, why does CST want to partner with AG?

AG has a lovely local feeling, it aligns in the same way with other schools in the trust. AG has a lot of strengths and will give a lot to the trust.

Q. What strengths have you witnessed at AG?

Great teaching, expertise of SLT, there are lots of mutual benefits, with some ideas from AG already being shared with other schools in the trust.

Q. As schools have joined, have you done a cost benefit analysis and analysed the benefit for pupils?

We always look at school performance and want to see progression. We want collaboration to lead to better outcomes and we can measure this also with Ofsted outcomes. We often ask staff 'Is it better'? It has to feel better for staff, pupils and parents.

Q. There is a worry around cultural values and diversity. To what extent for example will values from Cathedral Primary come through to Ashton Gate?

2 of the 9 primary schools are church schools. The trust now looks very different to where it started and is aware of some of the old perceptions and therefore considering its' identify going forward. Each school has their own identity and all CST schools are very different and unique, no values from other schools will come through to Ashton Gate.

Q Will children from Ashton Gate, get entry into Cathedral School?

No.

Q Are teachers and staff happy working for CST?

Recruitment and retention is really important to the trust and there is generally very little movement and staff generally want to stay within the trust. Nationally there are a lot of teachers leaving the profession unfortunately. Feedback from Ashton Gate staff so far is that they are excited for the opportunity to work alongside other teachers in the trust, share ideas, etc.

Q. One of the great things about Ashton Gate is that all staff seem to know all children giving them consistency. If staff are out a lot at meetings won't that be lost?

A lot of meetings for staff will be outside of the school day. When setting up training, etc. the trust along with school staff always consider the impact on the classroom.

Q. Should there be a change in Government will the MAT system stay the same?

This is hard to answer, however it would be unlikely any government would change this.

Q. Given the uncertainty with Government, would it be wise to wait?

A lot of conversations were had with the governing body about waiting to see what happens. However the situation the school is dealing with now with diminishing LA services is not good. There is not enough support from the LA. Should a change happen and schools were forced into a MAT, Ashton Gate may not have a choice of what MAT to join with and it potentially would not align to the Ashton Gate values.

Q. Is there an extra workload impact for teachers?

There is a commitment to attend some meetings, but what they get back from those meetings should ultimately save them time going forward. Teachers attend staff meetings currently at the end of the working day, so there should be very little extra impact.

Q. How often are these meetings?

This depends on the subject, some subjects have 3 meetings a year, whilst others have 6 meetings.

Q. How is the trust responsible for recruitment in the schools?

Individual schools are responsible for their own recruitment and can be supported by the central team if they ask for support.

Q. Will the admission process change?

No.

Q. How is the final decision made?

The process has started and the initial action is to let the DFE and LA know that this is being considered. The consultation process then begins with staff, unions have been invited to attend meetings.

There is a period of due diligence, where everything is scrutinised from finance, buildings, curriculum. This is as much for the school to check CST is a good partner and CST to check Ashton Gate is a good partner.

The final decision goes to the South West Advisory Board at the Department for Education. It then gets agreed in principal.

Q. Is this a consultation? What if parents say no? Is there a vote?

This is a consultation, there is no vote. The governing body acts on behalf of the school to make decisions.

Q. How are you gauging parent reactions?

Angela has been taking notes from all meetings and will create a document of all question and answers for the full governing body to look at.

Q. Will there be more meetings?

No, this is the last of 3 meetings, however if you have more questions, please send them by email to Gareth or Sue Waller, the Chair of Governors.

Q. There are lots of other academies joining together to make a big trust, would CST ever consider this?

CST has made it clear they do not want to grow too big, therefore wouldn't see this happening in the future.

Q. Have governors spoken with other governors of CST schools?

This is in the process of happening, some governors are meeting other CST governors soon.

Q. Will the relationship with Ashton Park School be effected?

No, the work Ashton Gate does currently with Ashton Park will not change at all.

The governing body reassured parents that the process along the way has entailed many detailed conversations talking through everything that has been raised in these questions. The governing body all agree the process has been rigourous and feel positive and confident with the partner they have chosen.