



Willow Bank School

'Getting Better Together'

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18th March 2011

Dear all

The Governing Body of Children's Hospital School is thinking about the school:

1. becoming a Trust School, or
2. part of a soft statutory federation,

and the Governing Body has passed a resolution to consult about these two potential changes. This letter is to explain our ideas and proposals as part of our consultation process and to ask for your views.

1. Our proposed Trust

Trust schools are a relatively new kind of school – part of the local authority but supported by a charitable Trust which would appoint some of the Governors. The Governing Body would continue to run the school and be responsible for its performance. The substantive Headteacher would remain in post. We would still maintain our strengths as an outward facing community special school, serving a wide range of children, and remain as part of the local authority family of schools.

We already collaborate closely with other Leicester special schools and are members of both the secondary and special Education Improvement Partnership and City Primary Headteachers. We also work with a large number of other schools and organisations locally, regionally, nationally and sometimes internationally. The proposal is that the special schools consolidate their consortium, some or all of the members adopting Trust status. Trust status would allow the group of schools to share a Trust where some of the trustees are appointed by organisations from the fields of Wellbeing, Enterprise, Leadership and Learning. This idea of The WELL Trust has support from the DfE and has been well received by many mainstream colleagues.

The purposes and potential advantages of the Trust are explained in a set of documents available in the school office and on the website. In essence, we believe the Trust would provide a pooling of resource and expertise leading to better opportunities and outcomes for children and the staff who work with them in our own schools and in mainstream. Building on productive partnerships we have and creating new ones is a necessary and desirable way forward, especially as the learning needs of children and adults change, the central role of LAs diminishes and public finances tighten. We would intend that education, health and social care across the age range of 0-25 are drawn more tightly together and that our schools become a hub of expertise to benefit each other, mainstream schools and adult training providers.



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2. A soft statutory federation

A soft statutory federation would also enable the special schools to consolidate the consortium, but without external partnerships and trustees. We believe that the school would be able to benefit from formal arrangements around collaboration. Outcomes for students would be improved by enabling access to wide range of provision and expertise through our partnership of schools. For staff, there could be valuable professional development opportunities through partnership working.

The effect on partner schools and colleagues

In both the proposed changes mentioned above, each partner school would retain its own Governing Body.

If the school became a Trust school, the Trust would allow us to involve external partners who would bring additional capacity experience and expertise. A soft statutory federation would enable the partner schools to work more closely together but without the skills and input of the external partners.

It is important to appreciate that if the school became a Trust school the Governing Body, not the Trust, would continue to run the School and to be responsible and accountable for its performance. The School budget would continue to be delegated to the Governing Body and each school, by agreement, would pool some resources to offer children and staff opportunities that we cannot offer in isolation and also to achieve economies of scale. If the school became part of a soft statutory federation, there would be no change to the Governing Body.

Staff

The existing rights of staff would be fully protected if the School became a Trust school or joined a soft statutory federation. Staff would continue to be employed by the School Governing Body and we would continue to recognise the same unions. The Trust would not be the employer of existing staff but might in the future look to appoint specialist staff to work in more than one school.

Employees would still be represented on the Governing Body, as elected by their colleagues, as well as there being representatives from parents, the community and the local authority as is the case now. The Governors appointed by the Trust would be a maximum of two and always in a minority on the School Governing Body. The current situation of appointing Community Governors, Local Authority Governors and Staff Governors would be maintained, in either proposal.

The School would expect to have similar referral arrangements and criteria to what we have now, in either proposal.

More information

Further information is available from the school office and on the school website.

Consultation process

This informal consultation process will last four weeks. In that time there will be separate meetings with staff, students and with parents followed by a governors' meeting to review the responses and to decide whether to stop the process, amend the proposals or to proceed with the proposals as they are. If the governors decide to proceed with the proposals, to pursue trust status either amended or as they are, there would be another opportunity for you to express your views in a formal consultation which would take place in the summer term. However, if governors decide to proceed with the proposal to pursue a soft statutory federation, there may not be further opportunity for you to express your views.

Please let us know what you think about the proposal. You can:

- write to the Governors (the office will pass on all messages);
- hand in our consultation questionnaire which is included with this letter or write to us at the School;
- come to the open meeting for Colleagues at the Willow Bank site on Monday 4th April 2011 at 5.30pm.

You can comment until 5.00pm on Friday 15th April 2011.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S Storer". The letters are cursive and somewhat stylized.

Mrs Suzanne Storer
CHAIR OF GOVERNORS