

Frequently Asked Questions - The Aylsham Cluster

'If it ain't broke, why fix it?'

The current partnership between the schools has been built up over a number of years, gradually becoming more and more complex and providing increased benefits for staff and pupils. It would be possible to continue this collaboration on an informal basis but it is very much dependant on the philosophy of individual heads / schools. The schools have begun to discuss a greater degree of involvement and can see much potential in the future, however, in order to reduce the risk of some schools 'opting out' in the future and to continue to build long term strategies, a means of formalisation is essential. For schools to increase their commitment, build further networks and commit head teacher / staff time to something that might not come to fruition as head teachers move or would seem very short-sighted. There is also a limit to the kind of partnerships / strategies that can be achieved for the benefit of children across all schools without a formal agreement being in place.

Can't the educational aims be achieved without changing to FT status? Do the perceived benefits outweigh the potential disadvantages?

Yes, but the proposed Trust will unite the external organisations and schools in a sustainable partnership and will signify a longer term commitment to work together – regardless of changes in personnel. It should also allow us to achieve our aims more quickly, to re-set out aims even higher and to deepen relationships with schools and partners

The Trust will also create the opportunity for a range of organisations to come together as partners to support the schools in a specific way. This collective approach will create new innovation and energy that will have a much greater impact than schools working with partners individually. It is the view of the HTs and GBs, therefore, that the potential benefits do outweigh the new responsibilities.

Will the same level and extent of collaboration be available to cluster schools whether in the trust or not?

One of the many benefits of the Trust model is that not ALL schools have to become full members at the same time and that some Governors may wish to see how things develop before making that commitment. All of the schools in the cluster have been involved in the exploration. Some were able to commit at an early stage and were included in an initial expression of Interest. One school, which did not feel ready to make the decision to explore at that stage decided to put in an expression of interest at the next opportunity and another is considering consultation during the coming term. There are a large number of Cluster Trusts in existence throughout the country and very few are established with every single schools being founder members. It sometimes takes a little while for all schools to be ready to take the step to becoming a Trust school.

Why were all the cluster schools not included in the proposals?

The 2 church schools already have foundations and so cannot become trust schools. However, the 2010 Education Act allows them to become full members of a shared trust if their governing bodies so wish. Both have expressed an interest in doing so. They do not have to go through the statutory process of changing status and acquiring a trust. One of the community schools has only just re-established its GB, following a period when it had an Interim Executive Board. The new GB has resolved to join the exploration of trust status with its stakeholders in the Autumn term 2010. The other community school has yet to commit to the exploration of trust status. In the meanwhile, it is possible for the school to be a full member of the trust without changing status.