

## Notes of Parent Meeting held at Downsbrook School - Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2018

Present – Patrick Cummings (PC)– Chair of the IEB  
Chris Seaton (CS) – CEO Schoolsworks  
Stella Turner (ST)– IEB Member  
2 members of staff  
24 parents

PC opened with introductions and explained the purpose of the meeting was to talk about the process of converting to an academy, as well as answering any general questions about what has happened since the IEB has been in place.

### PC gave a brief overview and key points were:

- The IEB has been in place since just before Christmas.
- There are 5 members of the IEB and the Terms of Reference, with information about the IEB members, are on the school website.
- There have been several meetings already, including the first Academy Start-up meeting, with the IEB and members from West Sussex County Council (WSCC). The Local Authority (LA) is working very closely with Schoolsworks with the expected conversion date being April 1<sup>st</sup> 2018. The process involves ensuring that all the buildings, land and staff are handed over from WSCC to Schoolsworks by this date on a 125 year lease. It is normal to have some issues that require attention but the IEB is confident at this stage they are all resolvable. If this was to change for any reason then parents would be advised accordingly.
- Half termly meetings will be held for parents/carers to attend, in order to keep them up to date with progress on the academy conversion. In addition half termly meetings have been arranged with Mrs Lawson and Mr White for parents to receive feedback against the Local Authority Action Plan and progress across the school.
- Safeguarding was an issue in the OFSTED report, but the latest visit by WSCC Safeguarding team at the end of last term identified significant progress. The school is secure and safe for children. However, the IEB and Senior Leaders are still prioritising this area and there will be an additional inspection from the LA Safeguarding Lead at the beginning of March.
- Following this meeting the minutes in the form of a Q&A paper will be sent to parents/cares and uploaded to the school website.

### CS gave a brief overview of Academies in general and Schoolsworks specifically:

- Multi Academy Trusts (MAT) have been around since 2010. A MAT is a single body established to undertake a strategic collaboration to improve and maintain high educational standards across a number of schools. The MAT is accountable for the performance of each school in the group. They are a combination of a charity and a company and work on a non-profit basis and are a very transparent organisation. The Directors of a Trust are similar to the Governing Body of a LA school and hold the same accountabilities.
- Information about the Directors of Schoolsworks can be found on their website <http://www.schoolsworks.org/>
- Schoolsworks' is a multi-academy trust formed in 2012, currently working with six schools in West Sussex. Their aim to create small hubs of schools which work closely together to collaborate, share best practice and improve outcomes for children. The schools in the Trust are Medmerry Primary School in Selsey, Rose Green Junior and Edward Bryant Schools in Bognor Regis, River Beach Primary and Rustington Community Primary Schools in Littlehampton and East Preston Junior School in Angmering. Four of the Trust's six schools

have been inspected since they became academies and all were judged to be 'good with outstanding features'. In 2016, Schoolsworks was awarded permission to open a new free school in Littlehampton, and we are currently awaiting confirmation from the Department for Education about an opening date. Downsbrook continues the local coastal map which is adds to the commonality across the trust enabling the Directors to understand the challenges presented to coastal schools.

- Schoolsworks feel privileged to be able to work with Downsbrook and CS thanked the parents for coming along to the meeting. He said that the school belongs to the community and parents are the stakeholders so it is essential we hear their voice. Improving the school will be an organic process as Schoolsworks get to know the school better and the individual challenges applicable to Downsbrook.
- Mr Nick White who is on the Board of Directors for Schoolsworks and a Head Teacher in the trust is now working at Downsbrook 3 days a week at no cost to the school This is secure consistency across the conversion process and to ease the transition from LA School to Academy.
- The vast majority of staff will remain the same at the point of transition on the 1<sup>st</sup> April.

**Q Current leadership arrangements and specifically will Mrs Lawson be here in April?**

CS Mrs Lawson was brought in from WSCC as an Acting Head Teacher in December 2017 until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018. Schoolsworks and the LA are working closely to put in place the leadership arrangements for April 1<sup>st</sup> and securing continuity is a key factor in this decision making process. We certainly hope that negotiations with the LA, Mrs Lawson and her substantive school can secure a positive outcome and the continuity the school requires. Schoolsworks are looking to have a permanent full time Head Teacher in place for September 2018. Of course if Mrs Lawson wishes to apply for the post that will be entirely up to her.

PC Many schools in Special Measures find themselves in similar situations to Downsbrook, where the leadership is not always secure and changes have taken place, so our situation is not unusual. It is the nature of schools in this kind of situation. Last term was difficult with regards to continuity of leadership and the IEB wanted to ensure Schoolsworks were fully involved in the leadership arrangements this term. This would enable a smooth transition to leadership under the trust rather than a definitive point where everything changed again when the school converted. What is most important is that we have exceptional leaders doing exceptional work, which is what is in place at Downsbrook. There is clear leadership across the school and we are beginning to get a picture of what the future leadership of the school will look like.

**Q In September will there be another secondment of Head Teacher?**

CS The aim is to have a permanent Head of School at Downsbrook in September but Nick White will remain in an executive HT role and therefore be part of the continuity that is essential to a school like Downsbrook. Schoolsworks offer a good career progression and they have been successful in recent recruitment rounds in appointing outstanding leaders across other schools in the trust. The recruitment process for a Downsbrook Head of School for September 2018 has already started. Parents will be updated when the IEB and Schoolsworks have confirmed any leadership arrangements post conversion. The aim is to establish as soon as possible the new culture, so all stakeholders will know the expectations of the school. A good school develops good staff that are supported and challenged in equal measure driving standards and performance upwards. Strong leaders are essential to this process so it is a top priority for the trust to get the medium and long term arrangements in

secured as soon as possible. However, it should not be rushed as it is more important to get the right people in place for the school.

**Q The school has lost a huge number of children and staff over the last 18 months and some year groups have had many staff changes. Can you confirm there will be some stability, or will there be more changes? The teachers here are amazing.**

CS/PC It is important for any successful school to ensure that that teaching is good or better consistently. A key role for the current leaders is to assess this across the school and then put in place the necessary support, training and challenge to move things forward if required. Teachers are very resilient and initial assessment paint a very positive picture of teaching across the school. We want to create an environment that staff want to work in so we can secure their services going forward. We want to develop a healthy turnover that all good schools have because good teachers take up career progression elsewhere, not an unstable one. The priority is ensuring the best people are in the best environment, so they can give their best. This is a priority for all schools to secure a strong education for the children and would be happening anyway, not because of the academy conversion. The IEB and Schoolsworks Trust strongly believe investing in people and securing outstanding teachers and leaders is a key element to secure success.

The school has a managed deficit budget due to a result of declining numbers and we will definitely need to reduce the school by one class next September but the trust will not inherit the deficit budget. Any future staff restructuring is not related to Schoolsworks but is because of the deficit budget and the need to plan for a secure affordable future. We need to ensure we get it right in view of the situation that has previously occurred. Managing and planning financial security is a priority for all schools across the country and it is those schools that do not have the challenging conversations and address the issues they face that put their school at the most risk. Any proposals the IEB develop will be tested as part of the normal Management of Change processes which all staff would be fully involved in. We would of course update parents as soon as we are able to.

**Q Will there be a full Governing Body in April 2018?**

CS The arrangements for governance has a different structure across Schoolsworks Academy Trust than are currently in place. There is a Board of Directors and then each school has a Schools Community Council (SCC) made up of a minimum of 2 parents, a member of staff, community member and a member of the Trust. The SCC operates slightly differently from a Governing Body but is a representative of the school community overseeing a number of elements that you would expect a governing body to accountable for.

PC It maybe a different structure of governance but the same accountabilities remain with the Trust as with any other school.

**Q From April can you explain how teaching might change?**

CS Teaching standards are good and safeguarding is secure, although we are not complacent and there are additional LA monitoring visits arranged to assess our progress. There will not be huge changes on April 1<sup>st</sup> when conversion takes place. We are already modifying and developing the culture that will exist in the future as it is not productive to change everything in one go. Downsbrook teachers are already visiting the Schoolsworks school improvement meetings and we are concentrating on building a more supportive

environment for teachers over the next 2 years. As already outlined the current and future staffing structures are currently being reviewed by the IEB and LA in consultation with Schoolsworks.

Uniform and School Name:

CS There is currently no consideration being given to a change of school uniform or school name and we haven't heard this suggested from any stakeholders. We will continue to refer to the school as Downsbrook Primary – the word 'academy' is not added to any Schoolsworks schools. Children shouldn't notice anything different in April directly related to the conversion they should only be noticing the day to day improvements that are being secured. However, there is already a change in culture of leadership where standards are high and consistent, and everyone knows what is ok and what is not ok. In September, though, it will be different as there will be a permanent Head Teacher and a different class structure, which could include split year groups. What we are aiming to do is secure the quality of education for your children and whilst we have to consider and take into account the financial position of the school, children are our priority.

**Q A parent raised a comment about not being happy with split classes as they had moved their child from a school where this happened as it wasn't working for their child.**

CS We will be communicate and explain to parents the rational behind any decision to have split classes and will be putting in the required support to ensure they are as successful as any other class. There is the possibility of split classes, we can't afford to run 4 classes if we have 2 year groups with only 40 children in each. However, all decisions will put the education of the children first. The school didn't fail OFSTED due to weak teaching; it was about Leadership and safeguarding. We are therefore confident the quality of teaching will be successful in any class structure.

PC We have the Senior Area Advisor visiting school in the next couple of weeks and they will look at the progress and changes that have happened since their last visit. We have already started to have discussions with staff about progress required, we're not waiting for the conversion to happen, we are doing this now.

**Q What is the average class size in other schools?**

CS Nationally and in West Sussex there are budget constraints. Schools across Worthing are operating at 89% capacity. I am passionate about Downsbrook and want to increase capacity. There have been a number of families who have left the school, but most of these are due to re-location. We need to make Downsbrook attractive again and an increase in numbers will be a natural consequence of making the school successful and then getting that message out the community.

**Q What are the plans regarding the actual location of the Year 4 class?**

CS Year 4 and 5 are key year groups in terms of Schoolsworks assessments and we will be able to update parents when we are clear about the best way forward.

**Q When will Teaching and Learning be scrutinised? Why are we waiting until September, particularly with Year 4? My child is in Year 4; if it is going to be a 2 year journey, will the teaching and progress be poor for my child?**

- CS As already outlined we are not waiting until September, things are already happening. Schoolworks is bringing a robust and frequent accountability model that previously was in place. Schoolworks already have key officers in every day, assessing and discussing the best way forward.
- PC A school can't get 'good' from an OFSTED inspection unless they have been good for a while. Since the Inspection at the end of September things have already happened and there have been big changes. Somethings that need doing can be done quickly and others take a bit more time as they will form the foundations for a successful school in the community for many years to come. Central to successful schools is a strong culture of high expectations and we believe this can now be seen across the whole school.
- Q Why have pupil targets not been forthcoming so parents and grandparents can support their children at home?**
- CS The school is bringing in, this term, a new assessment programme that is used by Schoolworks. This enables teachers and leaders to track pupil progress every 6 weeks and should generate better information to share with parents. There a programme of training being put in place currently to support teachers will in the use of this new programme.
- Q In the aim to attract people into the school what maintenance plans are in place to repair the broken bits of the school and smarten it up?**
- CS Schoolworks is acquiring a £4million asset in Downsbrook and they are in conversation with WSCC to do any essential work before they hand over the school. Academies attract 'Condition Improvement Funding' from the DfE and over the last 5 years, Schoolworks has been able to benefit from £5-6 million used over their 6 schools. They will work from day 1 on how to improve the school using this potential fund, if appropriate.
- CS It is clear from the type of questions raised today that there is a need to improve communication and we will look at how we can do this going forward so parents have a clear understanding of both their children's progress but all elements of the school.
- Q There is an issue with the Pastoral Care element of the school being missing. How will this be addressed?**
- CS Through the new structure, the pastoral element will be part of the discussions and possible solutions considered.
- Q It is difficult to know who to address general questions to. Mrs Reid is on the gate, but not always able to talk as lots of parents want to speak with her.**
- CS It is important that you talk to Wendy Lawson about any day to day operational queries. It was accepted that communication channels need to be improved and any feedback from parents/carers is very welcome. The school website will be central to ensuring parents receive the information they require. .
- ST Any concerns or questions should be addressed in the first instance through the class teacher at the beginning or end of the day and while they might not be able to answer the query at that time due to time constraints, you will be able to make an appointment to speak with them at greater length.

Staff members added the following: 'you can also call into the front office to make an appointment with Wendy or Class Teacher or email to office@downsbrook.eu. Class Teachers see children out of class at the end of the day, so you can catch them then, or first thing in the morning and even if you can't see your child's teacher there will be a TA with a clipboard who can make a note of your query/concern and pass on to the appropriate person.'

PC No question is unimportant, so please keep asking them. The IEB will ensure that the issue of parents discussing their child with the school is discussed at the next meeting and a clear pathway is sent out to parents.

PC ended the meeting by saying that if anyone had individual questions he and CS would be around for a while. He also reminded parents of the next meeting on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> February 2018 when Nick White and Wendy Lawson would answer questions on the what has been happening in school with regard to Teaching and Learning and day to day operations.

**Q (Raised after the meeting) Could the timing of the parents meetings be alternated so those who work in the morning/afternoon are able to attend. Suggestion that there is a meeting at 1:45/14:00 before children are collected.**

**The IEB will consider this when planning next ½ terms meeting**

ST This was reported back to Wendy and Nick and they will also consider offering two sessions on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> February. This will be confirmed in due course.