

# Stephenson Memorial Primary School – Stakeholder Information Session 20.10.2023

## Comments, Questions and Answers

**Where similar questions were raised during the meeting, via email or by utilising the online feedback form, both before and after the meeting, these have been summarised in to one reply below**

How can you work closely together when the schools in Smart are so far away?

We are a local Multi Academy Trust (MAT) with no ambition to grow as other MATs have done into a national organisation. We want to grow locally and sustainably. It might feel like a long way but travel time between the Smart MAT schools and Stephenson is no more than 20-30 minutes. This is no more than that between our existing furthest away schools. Distance is no real barrier to collaboration and there will be a limited number of occasions that staff would be asked to travel anywhere.

Is it a bad Ofsted that are making us explore academisation?

No, this is not something that has been driven by Ofsted. Stephenson Memorial Primary School (SMPS) was judged to be a 'good' school in its last inspection (2018) and is fully expected to remain so at its next inspection.

I am concerned that we will lose the identity of the school by joining Smart MAT.

Smart MAT is a Trust which champions the unique identify of all of our schools. We deliberately leave it up to our individual schools to decide on names, uniforms, logos and any changes that are made will always be a result of positive consultation. We are very excited to welcome schools in North Tyneside into our Trust we aim to work with each Local Authority (LA) partner we have schools in and support the work they do to make the education of all pupils the best that it can be.

Will the uniform remain the same?

Yes, see answer to question above.

Is it not a conflict of interest that your Finance Director was a governor of this school previously

We encourage all of our central team staff to become governors in schools outside of our MAT. In this way we can learn from others and extend support beyond our Trust. Alison Robinson wanted experience outside of the academy sector as part of her own professional development. As soon as the governing body made their decision to explore joining a MAT she was rightly excluded from discussions and resigned when it became clear governors

were voting on joining Smart, all of which is formally documented in Governor meeting minutes. The school and governors explored a wide range of different MATs before pursuing a closer relationship with Smart.

### How or will SEND be impacted?

SMPS has significant experience and expertise in supporting children with SEND and their parents. So too are the Smart schools many of which have alternative provision attached to them. One of the benefits of our trust is that we can pool that expertise together, so all professionals are well trained and have the best resources available to them.

### What happens if Smart becomes too big?

Our growth strategy is to respond positively to any school who thinks Smart could add value to their pupils' education. We are excited to grow a little larger as this brings with it some important financial benefits to the Trust as a whole. We also want to learn from schools like SMPS with their Apple Distinguished accreditation as this will benefit all SMART schools. Trustees have said we should grow slowly and sustainably as a primary only Trust.

### How long has Colin Lofthouse (CEO) been in charge at Smart?

Colin Lofthouse joined Smart as the CEO in 2019 following a long career as a headteacher in three different maintained schools in three different local authorities and has been both a lead inspector for Ofsted and a school improvement advisor for many years. This is important for Smart and leaders at SMPS as we know he knows what quality education looks like.

Comment – I have done my research on Smart and can see all Smart schools are good. I have spoken to some parents too who are also complimentary about the work of Smart.

### What will you offer SMPS in terms of SEND or Alternative Provision?

Smart has a great deal of experience of provision of SEND. We have four Alternative Resource Provisions for Early Years, Physical Disability and Autism. We aim to provide a supportive network for all professionals in our schools so that we can share what works and ensure all staff are well trained and supported.

### Will you lose anything from the Local Authority?

SMPS has a number of contracts for service provision with North Tyneside some of these will have to change as the school becomes an academy which are mainly to do with staff (payroll, HR and employee services). The school will continue to purchase services and support from NTS.

## What happens if we convert and it all goes wrong?

Leaders and governors at SMPS are working with Smart now to complete due diligence. This is an exhaustive process that ensures no stone is unturned before conversion happens. In this way both parties enter into conversion only when everyone is satisfied that it will be a positive and successful process for everyone into the future.

## Are there any drawbacks for the school?

The decision to embark upon this journey was because the Governors, alongside the Head Teacher, recognised that the best school improvement comes through a strong and committed collaboration of schools, that work together to share good practice. The Governors and Head Teacher are convinced that this is the right next step for the school to take. With any changes, nerves can show in all stakeholders, but the school and Smart are working very closely together to ensure that relationships are built quickly and effectively in order to support this process.

## Will staffing levels change? Will there be more or less?

The conversion process from an LA maintained school to that of an academy will not in itself change staffing levels because staffing levels are determined by the funding that is available from the Department of Education, due to the number of pupils that are on roll in a school. All schools have a responsibility to set sustainable budgets whether they are academy or LA maintained schools.

**Comment – We can definitely see some positives of the school joining Smart.**

**The following questions have been received by email, via the paper reply slips or on the online feedback form and are not covered above.**

## Could we have more information about Smart and why this Trust was chosen?

More information about Smart Trust is available publicly on the trust website [Home | Smart Multi Academy Trust \(smartacademies.net\)](https://www.smartacademies.net). The governors at Stephenson Memorial carried out extensive research before reaching a decision including discussions with Trust leaders. In reaching their decision governors prioritised a trust that held the same values and vision for education and was keen to support leaders at the school maintain and celebrate what makes the school unique in its community and the successful ethos it has build well over the years.

## Why is a North Tyneside school joining with Newcastle schools when it is a different LA?

Smart are a local MAT who want to grow locally and sustainably. LA boundaries are not a barrier when it comes to schools joining MATs and travel time between the Smart schools and SMPS is no more than 20-30 minutes. This is no more than that between existing

furthest away Smart schools. Distance is no real barrier to collaboration and there will be a limited number of occasions that staff would be asked to travel anywhere.

### Are all the teaching staff at Stephenson happy with the decision?

School staff participated in the consultation, where they could ask questions and express concerns, just like other stakeholders. All questions raised were addressed in a staff meeting on October 18, 2023. Since then, no additional questions or comments have been received. The leaders and governors at SMPS are confident that staff are broadly in favour of the proposal to convert to academy status and join SMART. They will continue to engage in conversations with the staff to ensure they stay fully informed throughout the process.

### Not sure if the school is forced to do this due to Ofsted status as I believe can be the case or if it's due to school chasing funding?

Whilst it is true that schools can receive a Directed Academy Order due to continuing poor Ofsted outcomes this is not the case with SMPS – the decision has been made by the governors of the school to explore joining a MAT as they believe it would be of benefit to the school and that is why the consultation was held.

In maintained schools, all revenue funding (building funding is slightly different) goes directly to the LA. The LA takes a proportion of the money from the school budget to provide essential services to the school and the rest is delegated under the Local Management of Schools. Schools can, and do, buy additional services from the LA and other providers. As a result schools currently depend upon the LA for many services such as school improvement, HR, finance, etc.

Academies receive the same level of per-pupil funding as maintained schools, plus additional funding such as pupil premium, sport premium and SEND. They also receive funding to meet additional responsibilities that are no longer provided for them by the LA. A MAT does retain some of the budget in order to provide services to the academy (sometimes referred to as a top slice), in a similar way to how LAs fund their core services. Often there are efficiencies to be had when joining a MAT in terms of bulk buying power meaning that schools find that they are in a better financial position than they were as a maintained school.

### Denbigh School is joining with Battle Hill and 2 other schools, Why didn't Stephenson join with them?

The school and governors explored a wide range of different options before pursuing a closer relationship with Smart.

### Is the funding distributed fairly?

Yes, funding is distributed fairly. Parity across our schools is really important to us as a Trust, ie every child in our Trust schools should have access to the same good quality of education, resources and best possible environment to learn in. Being part of a Trust enables us to facilitate that across our schools by careful use and direction of funds.

Will the holidays stay the same?

Yes – there are no plans to change any of the published school holidays.

Comment – I'm not sure (regarding the conversion) but I trust the teachers at Stephenson to be doing what's best for the children.