

Dawpool C.E (Aided) Primary Academy Conversion Consultation Questions & Answers

Parent/ Carer Meeting, Monday 24th January 2022, 5.30pm

Attendees at Parent/Carer Meeting:

Neil Dixon (ND) – CEO, CDAT

Jane Evans (JE) – FD, CDAT

David Burrows (DB) – Headteacher

Karen Robson (KR) – Chair of Governors

Kate Reynolds (Vice-Chair)

Revd Jane Turner (Foundation Ex officio)

Rachael Manley (Parent Elected)

Helen Williams (Foundation DBE)

Andy Harford (Foundation DBE)

Liz Ellis (Foundation DBE)

Lynne Young (Staff Governor)

Catherine Mathieson (Foundation DBE)

Helen Wetherall (HW) – MD, AMF (UK) Ltd

Hardip Hayer – Project Manager, AMF (UK) Ltd

22 x Parents

QUESTION: Is there an easy way for us to know what is not currently taught at Dawpool?

ANSWER: DB – Dawpool teach the National Curriculum. If we did make any changes, we would explain any changes made to parents and any changes could be viewed online. At the moment there are no plans to change the curriculum. If we did, it would be advantaging our children.

QUESTION: I would not know what would be different if the curriculum changed

ANSWER: ND – Example of two schools – Little Bollington has a canal within walking distance, so it made sense to include the industrial revolution within the school's curriculum.

Astbury St Mary's in Congleton is less than a 10-minute drive to Little Moreton Hall. The Tudors has been included in their curriculum given that it's on their doorstep and brings history alive.

CDAT allow the schools to take advantage of the freedom to move away from the National Curriculum if it is appropriate for them to do so. 95%+ of what is taught in CDAT schools is the National Curriculum – especially in Maths and English – but it's nice to have some freedom.

QUESTION: What does School Effectiveness mean?

ANSWER: DB – It is looking at school improvement, to move forward and make things better, to make it the very best by working with a variety of partners. Local Authority support is diminishing. We will work alongside schools who support each other.

QUESTION: The proposed date for conversion is 1st October 2022. What changes will parents and children see from earlier on in the year to 1st October if the school becomes an academy? Would it be transparent? Much change?

ANSWER: ND - There would be no 'visible' difference on the day of conversion itself. There will be no massive differences. Staff would see differences on their payslip where the employer would be named as CDAT. Children and the staff will see Neil (CEO at CDAT) in school. Will start to look at school effectiveness but on a day-to-day basis there will not be a massive transformational change. It is a seamless process. If the school decide to proceed with the academy conversion, CDAT would be working with the school through the conversion process. There will be no difference to practicalities – maybe a celebration on opening.

QUESTION: Has a change in curriculum been taken into account?

ANSWER: DB – Dawpool is currently happy with its curriculum. Dawpool teach the National Curriculum. If we did make any changes, we would explain any changes made to parents and any changes could be viewed online. At the moment there are no plans to change the curriculum. If we did, it would be advantaging our children. There will be opportunities to do something different if the school wants to and any changes will be clearly communicated to parents and carers.

QUESTION: CDAT has been going since 2014, now with 11 schools. How many more schools is CDAT going to bring under its MAT? What kind of infrastructure will you need at CDAT? There are currently no outstanding schools under CDAT so how will this benefit Dawpool which is an outstanding school. Has Church House got the capacity?

ANSWER: JE - CDAT take a slow and steady approach to increase the number of schools. CDAT has only taken on one school in the last 12 months. CDAT want to ensure that there is capacity and that the central function is able to provide the support required by schools. CDAT would expand at a rate to ensure that they have the capacity.

ANSWER: DB - There is good practice in all CDAT schools that can be shared across the Trust. Dawpool can use the expertise at the other CDAT schools and vice versa. All schools are striving towards outstanding status in the Trust & locally. This would be an extra layer of support to improve.

ANSWER: ND – Dawpool isn't the only school currently judged 'outstanding' that is interested in joining CDAT, and there is a lot of excellent practice across the trust that all of our schools have benefited from sharing. As Jane said, CDAT has deliberately built steadily to this point to ensure that we can work effectively with all of our schools.

QUESTION: Financially is it a fixed cost that we pay or a percentage cost that we pay? Is it impacting on our school budget? Will there be an impact on the bottom line?

ANSWER: JE - CDAT work on a percentage. The money is taken from the GAG. CDAT take 5% from a small school which is quite low compared to other schools and the LA.

ANSWER: KR - It would be an advantage as we would have a live picture of finances. There is a lag with LA at the moment. From a planning point of view, it will make it easier as the money will be in the school's bank account.

QUESTION: What affect will it have in terms of workload of staff?

ANSWER: ND – CDAT has no special demands in terms of extra assessments or data, planning or reports that it expects of staff, and I'd expect the opportunity to share ideas, resources and planning to have a positive effect on workload. At a leadership/governance level, CDAT takes over the writing of a lot of policies etc. that the headteacher and governors would normally have to write, and I'm confident that our current schools would all agree that access to support is good. There would obviously be changes to finance systems that some staff would have to get used to, but support is provided for this and the system we use is a good one.

QUESTIONS: The presentation provides a high-level snapshot of CDAT. An academy I am aware of is now underperforming on literacy.

What level of information do you have on the performance of CDAT schools?

What evidence is there of what has gone wrong/ complaints received/ actions taken?

What can be perceived as inadequate?

What mitigations are in place?

Is there an independent source that can be used for this information?

Any who wants the nitty gritty – especially the information you don't want us to see. Make this information available.

Will the Information be made available to everyone?

ANSWER: ND – All CDAT schools have the same information published about them as any other school – Ofsted reports, outcomes in School Performance Tables and so on – none of this is hidden and is accessible in the same way that parents can access information about Dawpool now.

As well as this published information, the trust carries out annual reviews with all of its schools and has an 'annual conversation' with the headteacher and governors – considering the school's internal tracking data and monitoring as well as the outcome of the annual review and other school visits throughout the year. The Governing Body will continue to play a significant role in monitoring standards and the quality of education provided – as they do now. CDAT has an Education Effectiveness Committee that oversees the performance of all schools in the trust.

QUESTION: During the presentation Neil said that savings are made. Need examples of significant savings. What happens in order to achieve savings? How are these savings redistributed? Are there any redundancies made? For school's that join CDAT does it mean a cut in resources?

ANSWER: DB – We had this discussion earlier in the staff meeting. There will be no staffing cuts and staffing resources will remain as they are. Savings have not been made from cutting staff or making redundancies.

ANSWER: JE – CDAT can take advantage of economies of scale. There are better prices that can be negotiated for 11 schools. CDAT has currently procured energy. CDAT have taken seven of its schools through one energy contract. There are schools which did not have the correct rates of VAT. Going through the energy procurement process identified which schools were paying the wrong VAT rates.

There is the Government support package. Software licences have been negotiated at a good discount. SIMS was used with the LA whereas now CDAT are with Capita.

QUESTION: Does it benefit staff?

ANSWER: Each school has its own budget and bank account

QUESTION: When the school becomes an academy will the reserves be ring fenced or redistributed?

ANSWER: JE - The LA take up to 16 weeks to refund the reserves. The LA will ensure that all liabilities have been met. After which point the reserves will transfer across to the school's bank account and not CDAT's bank account.

QUESTION: Are there going to be changes to the Governing Body?

ANSWER: KR - The school would see this as a positive step. The Governing Body are currently responsible for all decision making and are accountable. There is no umbrella of support which can make the job challenging. The LA support barely exists. The school would welcome CDAT being there as an umbrella above the current Governing Body. The current school Governing Body would be accountable to the Trustees at CDAT. It will be advantageous to have access to the skills and knowledge at CDAT. The Local Governing Body would remain unchanged.

QUESTION: Picking the right Trust, doing the due diligence. Are you picking a Trust that is comfortable? What comparisons have been made with other MATs?

ANSWER: KR - The school have been looking at this for a long time. Six years ago, academisation came into sharp focus on the government's agenda. The school looked at every option. Looked at it geographically and non-geographically. Only now do we feel comfortable with what CDAT can offer us. CDAT has developed and has a great team. So now after 8 years of deliberating we feel it's the right time to join CDAT.

QUESTION: How many different MATs did the Governing approach?

ANSWER: KR - It has not always been approved MATs the school has approached; the school considered the option of forming a new Trust with other schools.

QUESTION: Has the school explored other MATs to ensure that CDAT is the right MAT?

ANSWER: DB - The school currently receives excellent support from the Chester Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) and CDAT is the Trust of the Diocese of Chester. The school cannot just join any MAT. It has to join a MAT on majority church papers (this means the school can only join a MAT where the majority of trustees are appointed by the Diocese, much like the majority of Dawpool's governors at the moment are foundation governors appointed by the church). There are other Trusts on majority church papers, for example the Liverpool Diocesan Schools Trust (LDST), but Dawpool would want to join a Trust within its own Diocese which already provides excellent support for our school. The school would wish to join a Trust where a strong church ethos exists; an ethos that we can share and where it brings a wide variety of expertise.

QUESTION: Need reassurance that we looked at other Trusts, Is CDAT going to move us forward?

RESPONSE: DB asked that this question be submitted via consultation survey.

QUESTION: Why is CDAT a good option? Have you spoken with other CofE schools on where they are with this issue (academy conversion)?

ANSWER: DB – The school work closely with all Church schools on Wirral and more widely across the Diocese. Academy conversions are on all school agendas. Recently the Diocese has spoken with all Headteachers in Wirral regarding the need to further consider options for academisation. The Headteacher is not in a position to divulge details or intentions regarding specific schools.

QUESTION: 'Light touch school' performing very well. Where do you see Dawpool? There has been no inspection done for a number of years?

ANSWER: ND – CDAT would look at education and conduct due diligence on the school. It's a mini school review which includes observation and collecting internal data. CDAT would put a plan together for school effectiveness. This is done for all our schools in CDAT. With the LA a school might get one or two visits a year. CDAT conduct half a dozen school effectiveness visits which includes monitoring of educational quality and looking at the work that staff do. There will be appropriate training and CPD opportunities for staff within CDAT. A vast amount of support and challenge is provided for CDAT schools. CDAT representatives will be more visible in schools. CDAT would work with David (Headteacher) and the senior staff to look at what support needs to be put in place if the academy conversion happens.

To date CDAT have done some due diligence, reviewed school data, and spoken with Governors about what the school is up to. CDAT would look at resources and undertake more detailed work if a decision is made to convert to academy status.

QUESTION: Are all questions and answers raised during the consultation going to be visible? When the Governing Body make a decision on whether they should convert or not, is the decision going to be based on a unanimous decision or majority view?

ANSWER: DB - All the information will form part of the consultation report which will be submitted to the Governing Body when the consultation period concludes. This is not a done deal. There will be lots of consideration and discussion. All the feedback and input received during the consultation phase will be taken into account. All Governing Body Members will each put their views forward on whether to convert or not.

ANSWER: ND – CDAT have seen other Governing Bodies go through the decision-making process. The outcome of the consultation is important. The Governing Body need to consider what the wider views are. The Governing Body should speak to other Governors within CDAT, and staff should speak to other staff within CDAT. When the Governing Body have all the information that they need they have to make the final decision.

QUESTION: Will we get the opportunity to view all questions and responses in the consultation report especially those parents/carers who were unable to attend the meeting today?

ANSWER: Yes, all the questions and responses raised at the consultation meeting will be put up on the consultation website during the consultation period. Parents/ carers who were unable to attend the meeting can also provide any comments on the consultation survey.

QUESTION: You mentioned a broadening range of opportunities for pupils, such as Trust Festivals. Could you tell us something about that?

ANSWER: ND - There were plans back in 2020 to run an event which would allow children from different CDAT schools to get together, however we were unable to run this due to the pandemic restrictions. CDAT are very keen to start planning these types of events again for children in the near future to bring everyone together.

QUESTION: It sounds as though there will be increased scrutiny from many angles - 6 inspections per year, increased audit (annual not 4 yearly) - plus collaboration with a wider range of schools - what pressures will this put on staff in terms of admin requirements vs teaching? Would there be an increased staffing need?

ANSWER: DB - The school currently works with the Diocese of Chester who provide significant scrutiny, challenge and support. The school would not see a significant change. CDAT would be able to come in and continue the school improvement work currently provided by the Diocese. Our staff are used to this level of scrutiny. We always look at ways of reducing the workload on staff.

ANSWER: ND – CDAT take a pragmatic approach to data gathering. I wouldn't describe it as 6 'inspections' - CDAT would be conducting supportive visits as opposed to something that the staff have to fear. It's not a checking up exercise. The scrutiny falls on David Burrows as Headteacher. The visits are to help the school move forward. It is more informative and helpful.

QUESTION: What will the changes be in funding for children with additional needs? Both in income and how it is spent?

ANSWER: Funding for pupils with additional needs comes directly from the LA. If we join CDAT, there will be no change to these arrangements, or to the level of funding provided.

QUESTION: I have been a Headteacher at an LA school and am now headteacher of a school which is part of a MAT. I am very happy that Dawpool are considering this proposal to convert as there are many advantages to academisation. There are capacity issues within the LA. From a teaching & learning perspective will there be a chance for teachers to come out to different CDAT schools? They can learn from each other. Will there be the opportunity for teaching together and experiencing different cohorts of children?

ANSWER: ND - Schools within CDAT are geographically spread. There is a cluster model in place. It would be a nice opportunity for Dawpool to be onboard. Biggest privilege is for staff to visit other schools. Genuine shared learning is encouraged.

QUESTION: My situation is different to others. I have a foster care child. How will this proposal affect funding for her?

ANSWER: DB - The child will continue to receive the same level of support from the school and this proposal would not affect funding, which would continue to be provided by the Local Authority.

Parent/ Carer Responses to Online Survey

QUESTION: How would quality be reviewed as the school hasn't been inspected in some time- the change to academy status would effectively reset the clock for inspection again

ANSWER: ND - The school can still be inspected any time up until conversion, so the likelihood is that Ofsted will visit this year, prior to the planned conversion date. However, even if this is not the case, the trust has the responsibility to oversee the quality of education in all of its schools anyway. We do this through an annual review process, half-termly school visits from our school improvement team, analysis of termly data and so on. Locally, CDAT and other trusts are supporting each other through some cross-moderation – someone from one trust supporting school visits in another trust to provide an external view. In terms of the Ofsted 'clock', schools that become academies are inspected within 3 years of conversion – it's typically in the 7th term post-conversion (although covid has pushed inspection timings back a bit).

QUESTION: Do CDAT schools pay teaching staff at the national standard rate (main scale/UPS etc)? Will you pay staff recruited in the future on this scale?

ANSWER: ND – Yes. We use the national pay and conditions for teachers (STPCD) and support staff (NJC).

QUESTION: You spoke in the meeting this evening about considering becoming an academy for the previous 8-9 years but didn't really give any detail as to why you did not follow this through. What were the reasons then? How have these changed or been overcome?

ANSWER: Dawpool have looked at options for academies for a long time and discussed at length what the school's future may look like within the academisation parameters set out for church schools.

Dawpool cannot just join any MAT. It has to join a MAT on majority church papers (this means the school can only join a MAT where the majority of trustees are appointed by the Diocese, much like the majority of Dawpool's governors are foundation governors appointed by the church). There are other local Trusts on majority church papers, for example the Liverpool Diocesan Schools Trust (LDST), and the Rural Church Schools Academies Trust (RCSAT), but Dawpool would want to join a Trust within its own Diocese that is the best match in terms of size, locality, vision, values, ethos and strategy. Having carefully considered all the options available to Dawpool over many years, we believe that CDAT is the best match for our school.

Six years ago, academisation came into sharp focus on the government's agenda. At that time, governors looked at every option available to Dawpool give its Church Aided status, including geographically, non-geographically and establishing a new Trust with local Church schools. We are aware, however, that the Department for Education (DfE) is looking to expand current MATs rather than creating new ones and the DBE similarly is wishing to consolidate its academies. Having watched CDAT's development over the last few years, we now feel confident with the expertise that CDAT can offer us. CDAT has developed significantly over the last few years and has a strong team of personnel working closely with the DBE. CDAT will continue to grow and develop over the next few years. After 8 years of deliberating we feel it's the right time to join CDAT.

QUESTION: Have CDAT ever been through a consultation process with a school that has not resulted in Academisation?

ANSWER: ND - We have been through the process with one school a couple of years ago who, after consultation and further deliberation, decided that the timing was not right for them and not to proceed with conversion at that time.

QUESTION: At the meeting today you presented all of the reasons why this is a positive move. What are the drawbacks of becoming an academy? How will these be mitigated?

ANSWER: As an academy, there are a number of additional responsibilities placed on the school in terms of financial management and reporting. It is expected that on a day-to-day basis the pupils and their parents and carers, teachers and staff will not notice the difference if we become an academy. There will however be additional workloads for members of staff in the school office. CDAT recognise the additional pressures and will provide the school with a significant amount of support from specialists who will be able to pick up the majority of this additional work.

QUESTION: Whilst assurances have been made to continue the current Dawpool Curriculum (in line with the NC), staffing structure or policies at present what is there to safeguard future changes? Could a future change of headteacher/chair of governors/CEO of CDAT result in shifts away from the current position on these matters?

ANSWER: ND - I would say that this is less likely within a MAT than it is for a stand-alone school. CDAT was set up by the Diocesan Board of Education and has a well-established set of principles developed over the last 8 or 9 years. The CDAT Board (trustees), who are only appointed with the agreement of the Board of Education, set policy and strategy – therefore, for there to be any major change of direction it'd need a change of direction from the Diocesan Board of Education and CDAT's trustees, rather than just from an individual new head, CEO or Chair of Governors.

QUESTIONS: What is the amount of schools that are needed for the MAT to be self sufficient? What is the total that is being looked at?

What infrastructure will be needed for this figure and is there a plan in place? Bearing in mind there seems to have been a lot of staff turnover in the main positions over the last few years. What is the time scale for this recruitment of schools?

How is the pension deficit issue going to be addressed? (£6.5m at present will be worse as schools are added)

Are any individual schools positive reserves going to be used to plug the £1.7m negative at present?

ANSWER: ND -The Trust's Auditor's have stated the following:

“When a school converts to an academy, a new employer is created for LGPS purposes and the new academy inherits a deficit. The Administering Authority has the power to collect employer contributions from the academy at whatever rate is deemed necessary. As I understand it the contribution rates are set based on the outcome of triennial valuations. The Administering Authority also has the power to impose a deficit reduction plan on participating

employers if deemed necessary. This would effectively create an additional employer contribution over a set period of time.

The ability to finance ongoing employer contributions is the key factor for academies rather than the notional liability as determined by financial reporting standards. The annual accounts may show a deficit of £X million but no academy is going to be presented with a bill for that amount as the liability does not crystallise until the academy either leaves the scheme or is closed down.

The mechanism for dealing with the pension deficit is via employee and employer contribution rates as determined by the Administering Authority. As I understand it, a few years ago, some academies experienced much higher employer contribution rates than when they were a local authority maintained school. This is because academies are not funded through the local authority which previously gave assurance to the Administering Authority that LGPS costs would be met in the long term.

In 2013, the DfE provided a guarantee to LGPS Administering Authorities that in the event of the closure of an academy trust, any outstanding LGPS liabilities will not revert to the fund. This gave Administering Authorities the confidence to treat academies more equitably and not impose significantly higher contribution rates. This effectively puts academies back on the same footing as when they were a local authority maintained school in terms of their pension obligations.

So although the pension liability is included on the balance sheet and clearly has an adverse impact on the apparent financial position of the academy trust, it is not really the critical factor for going concern. It is the employer contribution rate going forward and the academy trust's ability to finance these payments that is of prime importance."

I can confirm that there are no problems meeting the employer contributions and no change to the way this is done: the school currently (while an LA maintained school) finances its employer pension contributions through the normal payroll process and this continues to be the case when a school becomes an academy.

On the broader question of school reserves – unlike many trusts, CDAT does not 'pool' school reserves and so any reserves that a school has built up remain with that school for use on school projects. In our current schools, schools are using their reserves at the moment to help develop Early Years provision, improve outdoor play provision and refurbish the school library.

In terms of staff turnover: I have been CEO for almost 3 years (since May 2019) – the trust did not have a full-time CEO before then (the role was covered by the Diocesan Director of Education and his deputy); similarly, Jane Evans has been Director of Finance and Operations since November 2020 – prior to that, this role was outsourced. Sue Riley (Education Effectiveness Officer) has been in post since 2018, when the role was created. I think the changes referred to may be typical of a small trust that has grown in size and been able to take on more of the key central operations that had previously been outsourced.

QUESTION: Have any of the present schools moved up a level in Ofsted and if so how was this achieved and also if they have gone down Why?

ANSWER: St Matthew's joined the trust as an inadequate school and is now good. St Paul's (Spring 2020) and Wybunbury Delves (Autumn 2021) have also been recently inspected and have both retained their 'good' grade – Wybunbury's report in particular reflected some exceptionally strong practice. Our 3 inspections under the new Ofsted framework have all returned good outcomes – the national picture under the new framework shows the % of 'outstanding' judgements dropping significantly (from 12% of primary schools to 3%) and the % of schools judged as less than good rising swiftly too (from 11% of primary schools to 18%)

so there is much to be pleased with in our recent inspections – although we constantly strive to make our good schools even better. No school's grade has dropped while part of the trust. We are looking forward to Ofsted's visits to the 3 schools currently in the trust who were judged as less-than-good at their last (pre-conversion) inspection, as we are confident that the collaborative working within CDAT has helped them to improve significantly.

QUESTION: If the admin charge is 5% how does this compare to what the council take in monetary terms. I think we need to see a £ per pupil comparison. It was stated in the meeting that a full financial review was done so this information should be made available (even just in highlighted form as is available on the gov website).

ANSWER: There are elements here of not really comparing like-with-like, as an academy trust is more than a provider of services. However, we do know that none of our current schools have found themselves worse off financially by becoming part of CDAT. You are correct: during the formal conversion process, detailed work is done with the school on the school's budget to ensure best value is being achieved.

QUESTION: As we already have a lot of the things in place that were stated as positives e.g. school improvement partner what is the actual benefit financially.

QUESTION: We already do all of these, other than working with geographically distant schools so what is the benefit really?

ANSWER: A decision to join CDAT will not be solely motivated by money. We view CDAT as more than a replacement for the Local Authority and a provider of services. It is an opportunity to join a family of church schools to work alongside each other in strong partnership. The opportunity to work with new partners and schools, working together to ensure standards across the Trust are consistently high, is an exciting new proposition. It would provide really good networking opportunities for all staff, building relationships with professionals in similar roles across all schools in the Trust. Working within our own school, or with schools in the immediate locality, or within the same local authority, has some advantages and these partnerships will continue. However joining CDAT will open up opportunities and innovation that exists across the Diocese and within different local authorities which Dawpool will be able to benefit from. We would receive strong school effectiveness support from CDAT. We would work alongside a group of schools who share a common Christian ethos, vision and values, but we will continue to actively work with all local schools and current partners, ensuring the best of both worlds.

QUESTION: Is it going to be a majority or unanimous Governor decision.

ANSWER: The feedback from this consultation will inform the decision of the governors. All governors will be involved in the final decision. The majority of the full governing board would need to be in favour of academy conversion in order to proceed.

QUESTION: At the recent Governors meeting that took place before the process was started (as stated in the letter) what was the reason that this was started now as opposed to any point in the past or future, what has changed.

ANSWER: The government's 2022 white paper on academisation is due to be published soon. The 2022 white paper will reinforce the government's commitment (as outlined in the 2016 white paper) that the majority of schools will become academies over the next few years and will put things in place to strongly encourage them. The DBE have already indicated that CDAT is its strong preference for diocesan schools considering academy status. It remains the case that it would not be a requirement for diocesan schools to join CDAT but it should be seriously considered by diocesan schools. The DBE have recommended that governors bring academisation back onto the agenda and discuss what the school's future will look like within the parameters set out for church schools and the DBE's preferred option. Dawpool, like many schools, want to be on the front foot with this and wish to make the move now to determine their own destiny and to make the changes when it is right for us. We have been in discussion

with CDAT for several years about joining their Trust and Governors feel that now is the right time to take this forward.

QUESTION: Is this process why we haven't been inspected and if so why?

ANSWER: No. The school has, until recently, been exempt from inspection because it is an 'outstanding' school. Ofsted are now working through those schools, largely starting with those inspected least recently. Dawpool was last inspected in 2008 and so is likely to be one of those schools Ofsted look to visit soon, although there are still some schools last inspected in 2007 that have not yet been visited.

COMMENT: Thank you for the information provided, the opportunity to attend the online presentation, and for the facility to provide feedback. Although I attended the presentation, I was unable to stay for the Q&A session so forgive any duplication of questions asked or observations raised which were otherwise covered in that session. It seems like the correct time for governors to be considering this. It is important, given the changing education policy landscape, that as much control of the process is retained as possible. It is also important that, if the school converts, it does so within the correct MAT and not one that is in any way imposed by central government. This is not an easy decision but I consider that it is one that is sensible to consider now. Some questions:

QUESTION: Are governors considering any other MATs? If others have been discounted already why was that the case?

ANSWER: KR - It has not always been approved MATs the school has approached; the school considered the option of forming a new Trust with other schools.

ANSWER: DB - The school currently receives excellent support from the Chester Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) and CDAT is the Trust of the Diocese of Chester. The school cannot just join any MAT. It has to join a MAT on majority church papers (this means the school can only join a MAT where the majority of trustees are appointed by the Diocese, much like the majority of Dawpool's governors at the moment are foundation governors appointed by the church). There are other Trusts on majority church papers, for example the Liverpool Diocesan Schools Trust (LDST), but Dawpool would want to join a Trust within its own Diocese which already provides excellent support for our school. The school would wish to join a Trust where a strong church ethos exists; an ethos that we can share and where it brings a wide variety of expertise.

QUESTION: In terms of capital funding for the future development of the school building, does CDAT qualify for a direct SCA allocation or would applications need to be made to CIF? In either event how will the MAT support the school in developing an estates strategy and in accessing capital funds?

ANSWER: ND – at the moment we have been very successful with applications to CIF, having secured significant projects for heating, roofing and window replacement at Christ Church Moreton, Bredbury St Mark's and Brereton. We work with a building consultancy on these applications, and are also now working with them on developing a broader estates strategy in readiness for when the trust passes the SCA threshold.

QUESTION: Will there be any changes to the school admissions policy proposed as a result of joining CDAT?

ANSWER: ND - No

QUESTION: Are there plans for academies within the MAT to share support staff?

ANSWER: ND – As with teaching staff, opportunities may arise for support staff to work in more than one school, but this would be on a voluntary basis.

QUESTION: What are the growth plans for CDAT? Are governors clear that the MAT is sustainable? Does the scale of the MAT, now and in the future, support effective collaboration between groups of schools? As a small school, will our voice be heard?

ANSWER: JE - CDAT take a slow and steady approach to increase the number of schools. CDAT has only taken on one school in the last 12 months. CDAT want to ensure that there is capacity and that the central function is able to provide the support required by schools. CDAT would expand at a rate to ensure that they have the capacity.

ANSWER: DB - There is good practice in all CDAT schools that can be shared across the Trust. Dawpool can use the expertise at the other CDAT schools and vice versa. All schools are striving towards outstanding status in the Trust & locally. This would be an extra layer of support to improve.

ANSWER: ND – Dawpool isn't the only school currently judged 'outstanding' that is interested in joining CDAT, and there is a lot of excellent practice across the trust that all of our schools have benefited from sharing. As Jane said, CDAT has deliberately built steadily to this point to ensure that we can work effectively with all of our schools. I'm certain that all of our current heads would confirm that their voices (on behalf of their schools) are heard and listened to.

QUESTION: Is there a clear role for LGBs?

ANSWER: Yes – the LGB will have very similar powers delegated to it as the governing body does now – the main difference being that it will be CDAT delegating the powers to the LGB rather than the local authority, as is the case now. The role of the LGB is clearly defined in the trust's Scheme of Delegation.

QUESTION: Will the top slice be against GAG or all income? Is GAG pooling in operation at CDAT? Would the MAT consider a reduction in top slice in year 1 (or 1 and 2) to help the transition of the school to the new systems?

ANSWER: The 'top slice' is just against GAG income, so things like pupil-led SEND funding, Pupil Premium, Sports Premium etc. all go straight to the school. CDAT does not GAG pool (nor do we pool school reserves). Our approach to 'top slicing' is transparent (set out in the current Scheme of Delegation): during the formal conversion process, a great deal of work is done with the school looking at budget etc. and there would be the possibility of a discussion around transitional arrangements should they be necessary in order to ensure a smooth and equitable transition into the trust.

COMMENT: By way of observation, I liked the point on the CDAT career pathway. It's really important to have systems for talent management and succession planning, and this was good to hear.

Staff Meeting, Monday 24th January 2022, 4pm

Attendees at Staff Meeting:

Neil Dixon (ND) – CEO, CDAT

Jane Evans (JE) – FD, CDAT

David Burrows (DB) – Headteacher

Karen Robson (KR) – Chair of Governors

Kate Reynolds (Vice-Chair)

Revd Jane Turner (Foundation Ex officio)

Rachael Manley (Parent Elected)

Helen Williams (Foundation DBE)

Andy Harford (Foundation DBE)

Liz Ellis (Foundation DBE)

Lynne Young (Staff Governor)

Catherine Mathieson (Foundation DBE)

Helen Wetherall (HW) – MD, AMF (UK) Ltd

Hardip Hayer – Project Manager, AMF (UK) Ltd

18 x Staff

QUESTION: If we join CDAT with schools in Stockport, Cheshire East and West, what expectations are there for us to attend staff meetings, Insets or twilight's across the schools in the Trust?

ANSWER: ND - The Trust work in local clusters. There are four Stockport schools. Meetings should only be done in school clusters. No one will be expected to drive to other schools for meetings that are far away. There is one Trust wide inset held once a year to bring everyone together. This has not been able to take place during the pandemic.

QUESTION: What if Governors are unable to reach an agreement? Is there a vote? Who makes the final decision?

ANSWER: ND - Much consideration has already been given when the Governing Body have made the decision to go to academy consultation. Then all feedback and input sought during the consultation phase helps aid the decision-making process. The Governing Body make the final decision on whether to convert or not. If there is mixed feedback received, then the consultation period can be extended so that any issues can be resolved.

QUESTION: When staff want to make contractual changes such as working part time or full time e.g., returning from Maternity leave etc, who will make these decisions?

ANSWER: JE – This is very much at a school level but would be supported by the Trust. The school would lead on staffing.

QUESTION: Can pay progress in the same way?

ANSWER: JE – Yes as there are no changes. CDAT adheres to the school teachers' pay and conditions document and NJC. Staff would transfer on existing terms and conditions.

QUESTION: Will we be asked to cover other schools?

ANSWER: NE – Nobody will be asked to 'cover' other schools. Opportunities to take on different roles – e.g. a shared role between 2 schools or a secondment – may arise but these are always offered out to staff on a voluntary basis.

QUESTION: I am concerned about the workload for admin staff and the business manager within our school, when converting. Will they be supported and will there be extra staff employed to deal with this?

ANSWER: JE - Julia who is a school support officer at CDAT and the team at AMF would be able to provide support to the school through the process. CDAT would go through the financial aspects with the school in advance of the school converting. No additional staff would be employed.

QUESTION: Who is collating the information and the questions raised on the online survey and feedback form? Dawpool or CDAT? And will all stakeholders - including parents - get to see all the questions raised and a response to them?

ANSWER: The Project Manager at AMF UK Ltd will be collating all the information and feedback received through the consultation meetings and via the consultation survey. All questions raised and responses provided will be made available on the consultation website during the consultation period.

QUESTION: Who determines the appropriate staffing levels? e.g. Number of teaching assistants, senior leadership roles etc.

ANSWER: ND -This is very much school lead. CDAT would support the school with their budget setting and provide guidance on an affordable staffing structure (in much the same way as a local authority budget officer might offer suggestions on budget). If the school decides to convert, the school will have their own local Governing Body. The school leadership team will be the people making the day-to-day decisions as is currently the case.

QUESTION: How much extra work will be involved for staff in supporting other schools and will staff have a say in this?

ANSWER: ND – There are options for staff. It is not something that is forced upon staff. Someone in a SENCO role at one school may wish to provide their expertise in a second school – we have an example of this working well between 2 other schools in the trust. Those staff who are happy doing what they are currently doing will not be forced to support other schools. It is not a model the Trust chooses to adopt.

QUESTION: Can the slides be shared.

ANSWER: Yes, the slides will be made available on the consultation website.

Staff Responses to Online Survey

QUESTIONS: Why are we looking to convert now?

What are exactly are the benefits (the information provided so far is not clear. We are told that many schools nationally are choosing to take advantage of academy status but this is not quantifiable)? What are the alternatives?

How do we know if there is not a better option?

We are told in the information provided that there are many different types of academy so why are we not looking at other options too?

ANSWER: Dawpool's Governing Body have looked at options for academies for a long time and discussed at length what the school's future may look like within the academisation parameters set out for church schools.

Dawpool cannot just join any MAT. It has to join a MAT on majority church papers (this means the school can only join a MAT where the majority of trustees are appointed by the Diocese, much like the majority of Dawpool's governors are foundation governors appointed by the church). There are other local Trusts on majority church papers, for example the Liverpool Diocesan Schools Trust (LDST), and the Rural Church Schools Academies Trust (RCSAT), but Dawpool would want to join a Trust within its own Diocese that is the best match in terms

of size, locality, vision, values, ethos and strategy. Having carefully considered all the options available to Dawpool over many years, the governors believe that CDAT is the best match for our school.

Six years ago, academisation came into sharp focus on the government's agenda. At that time, governors looked at every option available to Dawpool given its Church Aided status, including geographically, non-geographically and establishing a new Trust with local Church schools. None of these options were right for Dawpool at the time. We are aware that the Department for Education (DfE) is looking to expand current MATs rather than creating new ones and the DBE similarly is wishing to consolidate its academies. Having watched CDAT's development over the last few years, we now feel confident with the expertise that CDAT can offer us. CDAT has developed significantly over the last few years and has a strong team of personnel working closely with the DBE. CDAT will continue to grow and develop over the next few years. After 8 years of deliberating we feel it's the right time to join CDAT.

The alternative to academisation would be to remain as we currently are. Dawpool is currently state funded via our Local Authority, Wirral Council, but operate within the Church school system. We are hearing from DfE officials that the academy agenda is going to be strengthened by the DfE going forward. We are not hearing that they will require schools to become academies but will be putting things in place to strongly encourage them. One of those levers is the removal of school improvement funding from LAs and making that funding available through MATs. The support that Local Authorities can provide has diminished over the years and this will continue as government funding is withdrawn further. Many schools nationally are choosing to take advantage of academy status and wish to make the move now to determine their own destiny and to make the changes when it is right for their own school, without pressure from Government departments. If we choose to remain as we currently are, we are likely to have to look at academisation again in the next couple of years and CDAT will continue to be a strong option for Dawpool for the reasons already explained. Joining CDAT now will enable Dawpool to help shape the Western cluster of the Trust as other schools across Wirral/Cheshire West join over the next 12-18 months.

There are many benefits to joining CDAT:

- We would retain our unique Dawpool identity, our school's name, our uniform, our Christian vision, values, curriculum and so on.
- All those things that already work so well for Dawpool would not need to change.
- Our links with the Diocese of Chester would be strengthened further.
- We would receive strong school effectiveness support from CDAT.
- We would work alongside a group of schools who share a common Christian ethos, vision and values, but we will continue to actively work with all local schools and current partners, ensuring the best of both worlds.
- The opportunity to work with new partners and schools, working together to ensure standards across the Trust are consistently high, is an exciting new proposition.
- It would also provide really good networking opportunities for all staff, building relationships with professionals in similar roles across all schools in the Trust.

QUESTION: We are told that there are 117 schools within the Diocese yet only nine are in CDAT. Why is this?

ANSWER: There are now 11 schools in CDAT which, as a Trust, has chosen to grow at a steady rate to date. We are in discussions with many more schools, as interest in academisation has significantly increased over the last couple of years. There are other church schools in the diocese that are in academy trusts – but these are almost all previously 'Controlled' (rather than 'Aided') schools whose trusts operate on 'minority papers' – where

only a minority of trustees are church appointed. Roughly a quarter of the schools in the Diocese are now academies. Nationally the figure for primary schools is around 40%.

QUESTION: We were told when we looked at this option a few years ago that staff may be asked to cover staff absence in another school within the academy. Is this still something that will happen?

ANSWER: ND – No.

QUESTION: As the vast majority of the schools within CDAT are some distance away, this is a concern.

ANSWER: ND – Without naming schools, the vast majority of schools we are talking to at the moment are Wirral/Cheshire West schools, and it's our expectation that we will have a Western cluster of schools within the next 12-18 months as we already have in the Eastern side of the Diocese and in Stockport/Tameside. We'd like Dawpool to work with Christ Church Moreton, our other current Wirral school, and other schools coming into the trust to shape how that Western cluster works.

QUESTION: Is our sick pay the same (six months full pay and six months half pay)?

ANSWER: ND – There are no changes to current terms and conditions.

QUESTION: Is the funding taken by CDAT the same amount as would be taken currently by the LA?

ANSWER: CDAT takes a management fee to cover central services and support – when other schools have joined the Trust, they've found typically that they make some financial savings as part of CDAT. Of course, CDAT isn't just a provider of services.

QUESTION: We are told that it will not be to our detriment financially although there may be the potential for financial gain. Again, this isn't clear. In what way could there be a potential for financial gain?

ANSWER: As a trust with 11 schools there are some areas of procurement where we can negotiate trust-wide deals that bring with them financial savings – e.g. we have a procurement exercise at the moment around utility supply, have previously negotiated trust-wide deals for staff absence insurance and so on. I think Jane may have provided further detail in answering an earlier question.

QUESTION: What does it mean when we are told that there will be opportunities to support other schools? Will there be an expectation for staff to be out of our school as we are an experienced workforce?

ANSWER: There's no expectation/requirement for anyone to be out of school working with any other schools/staff unless it is something they want to do and it works for Dawpool. In terms of opportunities – when something arises it will typically be advertised to schools via their heads – e.g. we asked if there was a middle-leader in any of our schools who would like to do a 2 day per week secondment for a term to work in another school, supporting teaching and learning and working with that school on curriculum development. A suitable volunteer was found – she enjoyed the chance to develop her skills in a different context and the receiving school benefited from her expertise. Her 'home' school were obviously paid for her time. Across the trust we have about a dozen teachers who've had additional training and now coach on the NPQ programmes or help to lead the trust's own 'Reflective Practitioners' programme. We believe that collaboration is massively effective in supporting and improving schools – but people have got to want to collaborate to make it work – so would not be forced or pressurised into doing something they were not comfortable with.

QUESTION: I just wanted to ask what happens to our employee benefits, as in will our years of service be reset as we are in effect moving employers. Will we retain our number of paid holidays/sick days?

What pension scheme will we be a part of? Thank you.

ANSWER: Current terms of service remain. Employees retain existing terms and conditions – they come across into the trust through TUPE arrangements which protect their T&Cs.

The Trust is a member of the Teachers' Pension Scheme and Local Government Pension Scheme

QUESTION: What happens with our pension? Do we still get the same terms conditions as we do currently?

ANSWER: The Trust is a member of the Teachers' Pension Scheme and Local Government Pension Scheme so staff retain existing terms and conditions.

QUESTION: Is there opportunity for progression and to work across a number of schools within the academy?

ANSWER: The opportunities are there. Some will enjoy these opportunities and others will not. There are opportunities for shared roles and secondment. From previous experience those who took advantage of such opportunities found it added an extra something. No staff are forced to do this. I've mentioned previously that we have examples of shared roles across 2 schools and fixed-term secondments. CDAT works with the Church of England Foundation for Leadership to deliver the national professional qualifications for school leaders – some of our staff are going on those courses, some have undertaken coach-training and are leading/coaching on those programmes.

QUESTION: Will the school still be in charge of its own curriculum?

ANSWER: Yes. The school are currently happy with its curriculum. Dawpool teach the National Curriculum. If we did make any changes, we would explain any changes made to parents and any changes could be viewed online. At the moment there are no plans to change the curriculum. If we did, it would be advantaging our children. There will be opportunities to do something different if the school wants to.

QUESTION: Will the school still make its own decisions about what is best for the children at Dawpool?

ANSWER: ND – Absolutely. This is key to how CDAT operates – we work with our schools to help them be the best they can be within their own context: some other trusts take quite a corporate approach, or have a fixed curriculum model – CDAT trusts its school leaders to know their own school best.

QUESTION: Will staff be expected to teach in other schools? Will TLR's be revoked or changed?

ANSWER: ND – No. There is no expectation to teach in other schools (but opportunities may be advertised that people could choose to pursue). No – TLRs that are in place aren't revoked or changed.

QUESTION: Will there be any changes to staff's terms and conditions?

ANSWER: Staff retain existing terms and conditions.

QUESTION: Will there be more inspection and monitoring visits?

ANSWER: ND – Myself and Sue Riley (our school improvement lead) typically visit our schools half a dozen times a year – but these are not inspections! We work with the school to plan school improvement activities and our visits will focus on these – so we may work with subject coordinators, or lead staff meetings etc.

QUESTION: Will office staff have a greater workload?

ANSWER: ND – Realistically, there may be a little time needed to get used to new systems etc. – but there is always support at the end of the phone from Jane and Julia (our finance team) – and Jane and Julia also do regular school visits to provide support for office staff. There are also some clear benefits – some tasks can be done centrally and remotely, which can save work. We use a standardised single central record system – cloud based and easy to export the current SCR into. We don't ask schools to change their MIS – most currently still use SIMS. We don't require any additional reporting etc. – so after the settling in period, schools find systems and support work really well.

QUESTION: I have many misgivings about moving over to academy status even though I have been presented with the main reasons for doing so. I think we need more time for reflection and evaluation as we need to be certain we are making the right decision. The consequences of getting this wrong is too serious to contemplate. Dawpool is a special school with a unique distinct Christian ethos which is becoming increasingly rare in even church schools. I believe many more questions need to be answered before we make the final decision

ANSWER: ND - Much consideration has already been given when the Governing Body have made the decision to go to academy consultation. Then all feedback and input sought during the consultation phase helps aid the decision-making process. The Governing Body make the final decision on whether to convert or not. If there is mixed feedback received, then the consultation period can be extended so that any issues can be resolved.

I think it's also very important to remember that CDAT is the trust established by the Diocese with the very intention of securing the church-school status and Christian ethos of schools within the MAT. The trust has an extremely strong Christian ethos, which was further strengthened when all of our school staff met together for a Commissioning Service in Chester Cathedral – an event we intend to be biennial (but which has been delayed this year by covid). I would suggest that being part of CDAT would help to secure the school's Christian distinctiveness through strengthening its links to the Diocese.

QUESTION: I feel at this time it is too soon to join CDAT. It makes sense to wait until more church schools closer to us join. If we are to be a family of schools surely it would be better to wait until there are schools close enough to work with on a regular basis. I do not feel it is necessary to have a new layer of bureaucracy and stress. We have the capacity in our school to manage improvement and development. I can't see a benefit for the children or teaching staff. For teachers it will mean more inspections and scrutiny. I understand we are accountable but feel it may become excessive.

ANSWER: ND – I appreciate your point about wanting to have more local church schools to work with – Christ Church Moreton are already part of CDAT and we have had conversations with a number of other Wirral schools, so maybe this is actually a chance for Dawpool to help to shape that local hub on the Wirral rather than joining an already established local group. The schools in CDAT – widely spread as they are – do work successfully together – collaboration is strong. I would very much hope that CDAT would help to alleviate stress, by providing timely support, rather than adding to it. I don't think teachers in our current schools would feel that there are additional inspections – our school improvement work is very much done with schools, rather than to schools – e.g. work with subject leads, coaching, access to specialist EYFS training etc. The trust don't require additional data collections above and beyond what schools already do. In terms of benefits to teachers – again, teachers across our schools would be able to point to the additional opportunities for professional development, for collaborative working, for career development (lead teacher roles, access to NPQs, shared training on things like the new EY framework etc.) – and through the support and development for teachers and TAs we'd hope that children would benefit too.

ANSWER: DB - Without naming schools, the vast majority of schools that CDAT are talking to at the moment are Wirral/Cheshire West schools, and CDAT expect to have a Western cluster of schools within the next 12-18 months, which will include more Wirral schools. By coming into CDAT towards the start of this growth, Dawpool can help to shape how the Western cluster works which is an exciting proposition.

CDAT works very closely with the DBE to promote and champion positive wellbeing for their church school communities. The school wellbeing support provided by the DBE is excellent.

Dawpool does have the capacity to manage its own improvement and development, but there is a danger of being inward-looking. Joining CDAT would provide really good networking opportunities for all staff, building relationships with professionals in similar roles across all schools in the Trust. Working within our own school, or with schools in the immediate locality, or within the same local authority, has advantages and these partnerships will continue. However joining CDAT will open up opportunities and innovation that exists across the Diocese and within different local authorities which Dawpool will be able to benefit from.

The quality of School Effectiveness Support is a key benefit of CDAT membership and will enable all staff to feel fully supported in their roles. As part of the Trust, all Dawpool staff would be able to access high-quality CPD, for example:

- Subject leader training
- Talk for writing, maths mastery and phonics training
- EYFS and Year 1 training, led by Early Excellence
- Training for SENCOs, including access to the National SENCO award
- Opportunities to undertake the 'NPQs'
- School Business Manager network meetings
- Governor training
- Training specifically for Teaching Assistants
- Access to the full DBE training offer;

Neil Dixon (CEO) and Sue Riley (school improvement lead) will visit Dawpool throughout the year, but these are not inspections! The visits will support senior leaders with school improvement activities, such as working with subject leaders, leading CPD and staff meetings etc.

QUESTION: We are advised that there will be additional workload for office staff but that staff will be supported. Again, it is unclear in the information that we have been given so far what way staff will be supported and for how long this support will be in place.

ANSWER: ND – CDAT has no special demands in terms of extra assessments or data, planning or reports that it expects of staff, and I'd expect the opportunity to share ideas, resources and planning to have a positive effect on workload. At a leadership/governance level, CDAT takes over the writing of a lot of policies etc. that the headteacher and governors would normally have to write, and I'm confident that our current schools would all agree that access to support is good. There would obviously be changes to finance systems that some staff would have to get used to, but support is provided for this and the system we use is a good one.

CDAT has a central finance team who provide support through school visits and phone/Teams calls – this support is there for all schools in the trust, but with new schools we'd schedule in more face-to-face support over the initial period while school staff get used to the finance system we use (HCSS Access). The central finance team pull together month-end finance packs and reports, and will also add new suppliers to the finance system etc. Our School Business Managers are a supportive group: they meet termly and access a range of specific training as well. They are also a good source of mutual support – the longer-established SBMs

are always happy to chat through systems and questions. HR and payroll support (provided by Working with Schools) is responsive and helpful.

QUESTIONS: My reservations are the fact that most of the other schools are so far away. I'm not sure this is conducive to collaborative working. The benefits have been put forward however would it be as well to consider any disadvantages such as less control of our own budget? How is the money divided up between schools and how much of the budget is paid to academy CEO, financial manager etc? Excessive extra management costs might impact on spending of resources and support for children. Would Dawpool definitely be better off financially by joining CDAT?

ANSWER: ND – A lot of the work that we do as a trust is trust-wide, and our headteachers say that learning from schools in different areas is one of the key strengths that CDAT offers. You are totally right though – the cross-trust work we do (including things like subject networks, writing moderation etc.) is enhanced at a local level through cluster working and we are looking to develop a 'Western' cluster within CDAT. I understand your point re. not having many local schools so far, but would suggest that this would give Dawpool (and Christ Church Moreton) the chance to really shape how that cluster worked, rather than coming into a cluster whose focus and ways of working had already been established. Please be assured that all CDAT schools are very much within the Diocese of Chester family of schools – CDAT and the Diocesan Board of Education work out of the same offices and work very closely together

The school's budget is calculated as it is now. A management fee is retained for central services – school improvement, HR, payroll, legal support etc. – much as schools will typically buy these services back from their local authority. The trust's management fee is capped at 5%. The rest of the school's budget, plus all pupil-specific funding (SEND funding, Pupil Premium, Sports Premium etc.) is delegated to the school. The school's budget is set in discussion with the trust and is agreed by the school's governors. CDAT does not pool funds – so schools retain control of their budget and reserves. The trust is audited every year and the financial reports for the year to August 21 are on the trust website – including details of executive pay etc. To date, schools joining the trust have found themselves to be at least as well off financially as prior to conversion – and then have benefited from joint procurement and benefits of scale through being part of the trust.

QUESTION: Have any schools within CDAT changed staffs' terms and conditions since being TUPE'd over? If so, for what reasons?

ANSWER: ND – No – CDAT stick to the national School Teachers Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD) and the NJC for support staff.

QUESTION: The National Education Union states "Academisation is driving down staff pay, terms and conditions, alienating communities and has caused the fragmentation of the education system. Despite this, English schools are still being put under pressure to become academies and to join multi-academy trusts (MATs)."

Given this stance from the NEU teaching union, how will CDAT and Dawpool Governors address this viewpoint as part of the consultation? Has there been any engagement with unions to consider the reasons why they object so strongly and to help support staff in understanding why Dawpool would move to CDAT when it is so strongly opposed by the NEU?

ANSWER: CDAT works closely with union colleagues: we meet termly with the unions, and all CDAT schools pay union facilities time. In conversion terms, unions have been involved in all of our conversions through the TUPE process.

QUESTION: Staff are being advised that there is a white paper due out that will direct all schools to become academies. Given that this white paper is not yet published and could be subject to change, is it wise for Dawpool to join CDAT (which is an irreversible change) until there is official instruction to do so from the Department for Education?

ANSWER: The government white paper is due to be published shortly. It is sensible to be on the front foot with negotiations so that Dawpool is in a strong position to make the move to academy when it is right for us and without pressure from government departments. The academisation agenda is here to stay and will continue to move forward at pace. The academisation programme was initiated under the 1997–2010 labour government so academisation is fully supported by the main political parties.

QUESTION: Academies have been a source of political debate. How secure are academies currently? And how secure will they be if there is a change in political leadership? Would the Dawpool community be better served by remaining within the larger Local Authority network of schools - at least until a national picture emerges which outlines a secure future for academies?

ANSWER: ND – 46% of schools nationally are academies, accounting for over 50% of the total number of pupils nationally. In the DfE's latest figures (January 2022), there are over 400 more schools currently going through the conversion process – around three-quarters of which are primary schools.

QUESTION: The geographical spread of schools within CDAT is a concern for me. They have a vision for local clusters of schools to develop in the future but this cannot be guaranteed. If Dawpool moved now, it could be years before a local cluster is formed - if at all. I would prefer Dawpool to remain as it is within the LA and Diocese of Chester until such a time that there is a requirement from the Department of Education to become an academy.

ANSWER: ND – A lot of the work that we do as a trust is trust-wide, and our headteachers say that learning from schools in different areas is one of the key strengths that CDAT offers. You are totally right though – the cross-trust work we do (including things like subject networks, writing moderation etc.) is enhanced at a local level through cluster working and we are looking to develop a 'Western' cluster within CDAT. I understand your point re. not having many local schools so far, but would suggest that this would give Dawpool (and Christ Church Moreton) the chance to really shape how that cluster worked, rather than coming into a cluster whose focus and ways of working had already been established. Please be assured that all CDAT schools are very much within the Diocese of Chester family of schools – CDAT and the Diocesan Board of Education work out of the same offices and work very closely together.

QUESTION: I understand benefits of retaining the school name and uniform, support for governors and headteacher, the opportunity for staff networking and sharing. What other benefits are there to teaching and learning, beyond what Dawpool already have?

ANSWER: ND – Opportunities for staff development within CDAT – we're developing a cohort of excellent teachers from across the trust as teacher-coaches (teaching & learning specialists) and lead teachers (subject specialists) – all benefit from specialist, accredited coach training. Our links with specialist providers (e.g. the EY Hub, who just ran an excellent virtual conference with many key EYFS speakers) benefit all of our schools. Engagement in our School Direct teacher training programme will give schools access to a trust-trained group of new teachers, making recruitment of classroom teachers easier.

QUESTION: Can you assure us that we would no longer be liable to pay finance 10% of large project costs? This is money that currently comes out of our school budget or from the very generous support and fundraising by parents and families. Would we therefore make this financial gain?

ANSWER: ND - Yes – academies don't pay the 10% that aided schools have to.

QUESTION: I understand that all schools are different. Is there any risk that Dawpool could be financially worse off?

ANSWER: ND - None of the schools who have joined CDAT have been worse off through joining the Trust.

QUESTION: Is there any firm evidence, from schools already in CDAT, to show us positive gains in terms of education and / or financial position.

ANSWER: ND - There has been a trust-wide improvement in phonics outcomes – helped by schools being able to see which resources worked best in schools similar to themselves, share training and organise visits to see good practice. Financially, we've been able to secure very significant investment in buildings at Christ Church Moreton, Brereton and Bredbury through the CIF programme for academies. Opening pre-school provision at Bosley and Astbury has seen a significant growth in pupil numbers in those schools, with consequent positive financial impact. We have successfully completed cross-trust procurement projects in a number of areas.

QUESTION: Is there any guarantee that more church schools from Wirral will join CDAT? We would feel more comfortable with a Wirral cluster, as well as Cheshire schools.

ANSWER: ND – We obviously can't make any guarantees, as conversion is a choice for each school's governing body. However, I can confirm that CDAT and the Diocesan Board of Education have held meetings about conversion with more than 20 schools this academic year – including schools who'd naturally sit within a Wirral-based cluster.

ANSWER: DB – The DBE has already indicated that CDAT is its strong preference for diocesan schools considering academy status. It remains the case that it would not be a requirement for diocesan schools to join CDAT but it would be expected that it would be seriously considered by diocesan schools, including those on Wirral. The parameters that have always been in place remain which is VA schools can only join MATs on majority papers and VC schools can join either MATs on majority or minority papers. We are aware that the DfE is looking to expand current MATs rather than creating new ones and the DBE similarly is wishing to consolidate its academies. The DBE has asked governors to bring academisation back onto the agenda and discuss what the school's future may look like within the parameters set out for church schools and the DBE's preferred option. Dawpool's consultation with CDAT is part of this process.

QUESTION: How long do the governors have to make their decision? Does everything need to proceed so quickly?

ANSWER: There's no fixed timescale for governors to make their decision – no deadline/cut-off date.

Governor Responses to Online Survey

QUESTION: Historically the land upon which school is built was owned by the church. I believe in trust with a covenant. I'm not sure if this is still the case. But if it is, how will consultation take place with PCC who would therefore be major stakeholders in this process?

ANSWER: The key thing is that the land stays on trust through the church supplemental agreement (CSA), which is signed when a church school becomes an academy. The CSA acts only to permit the occupation of the school site by the Academy, effectively under a licence. The church/Diocese retain the ownership and control of the school site. As part of the conversion process, the Trustees are identified and must give their permission and sign the supplemental agreement. Normally, the Trustees are either the Bishop, the DBE or the vicar/churchwardens. The DBE would hope that if they (the DBE) support the conversion, the Trustees would be reassured by this and also support the application. Although the PCC are not Trustees, we would hope that they are kept aware of the proposals, most typically through the vicar as a governor of the school and are encouraged to take part in the consultation process.

Member of Community Responses to Online Survey

QUESTIONS: I do not feel that this process has been transparent. There are no side by side financial comparisons and the reasons given are not strong enough. What is the reason for moving right now?

The school runs the risk of being marooned with only one other school. Why not wait until this fated White Paper is (finally) published and other schools are moving in the same direction? As the governors have already said they have discussed this matter for 8 years so why the rush now? You are using the withdrawal of school improvement funding for one of the main reasons which amounts to little over £1000. Not a good enough reason! Why has a financial comparison between current costs with the Local Authority and proposed costs with CDAT not been conducted AND published?

ANSWER: The school governors are holding finance-focussed meetings and budgetary work, supported by CDAT and the DBE. This is an ongoing piece of work which will take several weeks and a decision whether or not to join CDAT will only be made once the Governors are satisfied that they have the information they need.