



Responses to consultation regarding Lightcliffe CE (VA) Primary School joining the Abbey MAT

Thank you to the many people who took time to complete the consultation feedback forms or attend the drop-in sessions in school or to those who have spoken to us about the proposal during this time. There were well over 20 written responses and about the same number of parents came to the drop-in sessions.

General Notes

All those who responded and commented upon the possibility of a change of name for the school stated that they would want to keep the school name as it is. There was a clear view that the school has a good reputation and a name change was unnecessary and not desired. A reminder that the Governors had no desire for a change of name but wanted to ask parents and the community, because once the name for the new academy is set it is nearly impossible to change it!

The school name cannot remain exactly as it is because we need to remove the VA (Voluntary Aided) from its title. The school will cease formal links with the Local Authority and will no longer be 'Voluntary Aided' in its running or funding by the Local Authority. It will be funded directly from central Government.

Similarly, the clearly expressed view by all who commented, was that the school uniform should remain the same.

Specific Questions/Comments

Q. What has led the school to decide to join a MAT at this point? Why not keep the status quo?

R. There are several factors:

- The Government's announcement that they desire all schools to join a MAT (they no longer insist on this but it is their clearly preferred option).
- The diminishing role and funding of Local Authorities; which is set to become much poorer in the near future.
- The Governors at Lightcliffe believe that for the school to move from good to outstanding, or to continue to improve, it will be best supported and challenged within the MAT.

Q. What will be the day to day changes in the children's experiences in school?

R. It is important to say that, for the children, most things will feel the same — certainly at the beginning. The change to Academy is seen as part of the school's evolution and improvement over time. It is hoped that all will begin to see benefits in the curriculum, the improved finances (gained through greater efficiencies), improvements to buildings and in the broader experiences we will be able to deliver for children whilst working in close partnership with other schools in the MAT.

Q. How will this affect the children's preparedness for high school, both if they go onto Lightcliffe Academy (part of the MAT) and if they go elsewhere?

R. We feel that we already do a very good job of preparing children for the move to High School. Children from our school move onto a wide variety of schools including Lightcliffe Academy, Brighouse High School, the Grammar Schools, Rastrick High School, Lightcliffe Grammar (fee paying) and occasionally others. However, we do feel that a closer working relationship with Lightcliffe Academy will lead to a better understanding of children's needs as they move to High School and so we will become even better at helping children have a successful transition.

Comment: This decision feels hurried.

R. The Governors started considering Academisation over 18 months ago. A working group from the Governing Body has carefully considered this over that time. The working group has kept the full Board informed all the way. The Diocese has held a number of workshops for Governors from Church schools to help them understand the issues around academisation and the strategy the Diocese has for moving church schools to joining/forming academies. This decision has been well considered and planned.

Q. Why is Abbey MAT the favoured choice?

R. As a church school we are led/guided by the Diocese. The Diocese has made it clear that they will only agree to church schools joining MATs which are church school led. They will also allow church school to form new MATs where a number of church schools have the capacity/desire to follow this route.

Once the Governors at Lightcliffe CE (VA) Primary School realised this we began to look at possible church MATs to join as we do not want to form a new MAT. Abbey MAT was chosen after a rigorous process involving visits to a number of MATs and visits from a number of Executive Headteachers (and others) from MATs. At the end of this process a vote was taken and the vast majority of Governors voted to join the Abbey MAT.

One of the key reasons for this is the clearly stated aims of the MAT, which largely mirrored the stated aims of this school; additionally, the aspirations of the MAT to drive schools to outstanding but to do this framed within a clear Christian framework.

Q. How can a MAT based in Leeds have the needs of our local community at heart?

R. The sense of community is central to the ethos of the MAT. To work in community doesn't require geographic proximity, however the MAT includes all its members and we are 'just up the road' from Lightcliffe Academy. In the future other local schools may also join this MAT.



Q. Are more ties to a poor school likely to have an effect on this school's reputation.

R. This school's reputation stands alone. We already work in association with a number of high schools. Lightcliffe Academy, the school to which this observation probably refers is seen as an improving school and we are confident that it will continue to improve.

Q. Shouldn't the school remain independent even if it becomes an academy?

R. Schools are no longer permitted to become 'stand alone academies' and must join a MAT when becoming an academy.

Comment. Our informed decision is that we are happy for Lightcliffe Primary to become an academy.

R. Thank you for sharing your opinion.

Q. I disagree with moving to Academy status. The school appears to be performing well and joining a MAT could divert finances or high performing staff to support other schools.

R. Evidence from other schools in the MAT shows that the schools are at least as well off financially as they were prior to joining the MAT, and most are in a better financial position. Staff currently at this school will remain here. It is true that future appointments would be contracted to the MAT and not to this school specifically and so there would be possibilities for staff movement both from other schools in the MAT to Lightcliffe and from Lightcliffe to other schools in the MAT. However, as the MAT is dedicated to improving all schools within the MAT any move would be very carefully considered. It is also important to note that teachers could gain from experiences at other schools in the MAT and bring that expertise back to Lightcliffe.

Q. Would LOOSC be affected (ie before/after school club)?

R. LOOSC are independent of the school and have a contract to rent the required space. There is no plan or desire to change this as the school benefits from this arrangement both financially and in the service offered to parents.

Comment: It would be a shame to lose some of the traditions of the school.

R. We feel the same. Lightcliffe was opened in 1869 and has faithfully served the local community since then. We believe this is the best way to continue that tradition.



Q. Will the Admission Policy stay the same.

R. The response to this is in two parts:

The aspiration of the Governors is for Lightcliffe to continue to serve the local community and so we would like to keep the admission arrangements as they are.

Secondly, each year the admission arrangements are discussed by the Governors in light of any changes to the School Admission Code (the legislation determining how schools must behave in relation to school admissions). Each year the admission arrangements are sent out for consultation to other admission authorities (ie Local Authorities, church schools and Academies) so they can comment on the admission policy of the school. On occasions, the admission arrangements do have to change to be in-line with any central Government changes (ie the School Admission Code) but the Governors believe that the current arrangements are framed exactly as we want.

Q. Will the 'corporate' approach of the MAT stifle the school?

R. One of the key reasons for choosing to join the Abbey MAT is the belief that the school will not be held back by a corporate approach. It is Abbey MATs stated aim that schools should (unless in difficulties) continue to determine their own future within the support of its partners in the MAT. It is explicitly not 'Academy in a box'! The Governors note that Lightcliffe Primary has a lot to offer other schools within the MAT and by working in partnership all can benefit — leading to improvements for the children in our care.

Q. Will there be more meetings for the head teacher?

R. The head teacher will meet with the other head teachers of schools in the MAT and the Executive Head to plan and for mutual support. This is one of the benefits of the MAT.

Q. Are unions recognised by the MAT?

R. The MAT has very good and positive working relationships with all the unions in school. All planned changes are consulted on and all employment legislation is supported and followed. Unions have been part of this consultation process.

Q. What happens about Governors?

R. The school will retain its own Governing Board. This will be reduced in membership as several of the tasks it currently fulfils (for example financial oversight) will be undertaken by the MAT centrally. The Governing Board will probably have about 10 members — currently it has 14 members.



Q. Who determines term times and school day times?

R. The local Governing Board would retain responsibility for this. As is currently the case, we would hope to follow the dates set by the Local Authority as we know this helps families with children at more than one school when planning family holidays etc.

Q. Would the MAT assess the teachers/staff in school to ascertain the standards and abilities of staff.

R. The school has robust systems in place for Quality Assurance. The school is currently monitored by the Local Authority in this regard and the head teacher reports regularly on such items to the Governing Body. The school's performance would be monitored by the MAT and the Governors to ensure good and better results.

Q. Will there be additional opportunities for staff progress/promotion?

R. One of the important features of MATs is the opportunity for staff development. If a member of staff is looking to develop their career there may be times within the MAT when their expertise can be called upon or further developed to the mutual benefit of all concerned.

Finally . . .

Thank you again, to all who have taken part so far. If you have any further questions or comments, please contact me in any of the usual ways.

Charlie Woodbridge
(Head Teacher)
01422 202235
head@lightcliffe.org

