

Questions for Sandown Governing Body

Financial

- 1) Regarding financial due diligence - Was an independent financial specialist used to check the financial statements and projections, or was an individual employed by Dealt responsible?

Due diligence is undertaken by the Trust and therefore the assessment of impact has been undertaken by the interim CFO employed by the Trust. All maintained schools are required to submit three-year budgets forecasts to KCC and these are checked by the LA. The DfE also asked to see budget projections as part of the application process.

- 2) What exactly is the shortfall? Can we see the figures? How were these figures calculated?

Budgets for all schools are under pressure with income rising more slowly than expenditure. Every school joining DEALT has set a budget for the coming three years where annual expenditure exceeds annual income. They are able to do so because they have accrued balances in recent years; but once these balances are used schools will have to find savings. Given that staffing represents an average of 85% of school spending we cannot guarantee that restructuring will not be required – as it has already at Sandown.

- 3) Where are the cost savings coming from? How detailed have the calculations been?**

Academies are funded in exactly the same way as maintained schools – but academies have additional costs not required of maintained schools, particularly in relation to financial management, accountancy and audit. Budget savings are not the impetus for the DEALT proposal, but the focus of work on budgets is to establish that schools joining DEALT will be at least no worse off than they are as maintained schools; in other words that converting into DEALT will be cost neutral. That is the focus of the work currently being finalised and shared with local governing bodies.

1. Suppliers / Services are vetted for their credibility and should be equal to or better than the current provision.
2. The potential saving is only recognised at a quote level, no guess work.
3. Local traders are given more consideration due to the needs of the local community.

4) Parents have been told the ‘top slice’ will start at 3%. A FOI request shows that the MAT will increase this top slice to 5%. How easy is it to change? Whom is responsible and approves such increases and can they be reversed and by whom?

At the time of application to the DfE we were still developing proposals for the top slice – and speculated that it might rise to 5%. However as a result of more detailed budgeting work we have now agreed that a 3% top slice would cover the initial costs of the services required to establish the MAT: part time CEO, CFO, finance and insurance.

“Top slice” is a short hand description of the way in which each school contributes to the central costs of the MAT. Taking that contribution as a percentage of each school’s budget means that it is directly related to the size of the school and costs are shared equitably. Some of the central spending is new – as set out in the answer to Q3 – and some of it is not. So schools currently pay some of their budget to KCC to cover the costs of insurance. Within DEALT insurance will be treated centrally and therefore costs to schools of the top slice will be offset by savings in insurance costs. The same will be true of current school expenditure on support for finance, which in DEALT will be provided by the CFO, funded from the top slice. Increases in the percentage top slice are not therefore an additional “tax” on school budgets; where they are accompanied by economies of scale they can represent better value for school spending.

The level of top slice is set by the Trustees – but they will do so transparently so that each school knows what is being paid for from the top slice and that they are getting value for money. In DEALT, Trustees are committed to working collaboratively with schools – and the chair of governors board in the structure is a means of securing that collaboration. Any school which felt that it was being unfairly treated in the allocation of resources has the right to appeal to the Trustees and if not happy with the outcome to address the appeal to the Secretary of State.

5) No data exists on whether cash will be moved around the trust ie Sandown has 400 pupils. Will Sandown be responsible for propping up less financially secure schools to the detriment of Sandown. Is paperwork to reassure available?

The Finance FAQs document sets out how finances are allocated within the MAT and confirms the right of appeal described in the answer to Q4. Every school continues to manage its own budget and to set its own priorities. No school will prop up any other.

6) Parents have been told that the schools will have access to funding unavailable to LEA schools. Are you able to clarify what extra funding is available to MATs that is not available to LEA schools?

DEALT has been allocated £100,000 from the MAT Development and Improvement Fund, which is not available to maintained schools. All academies can bid to the Condition Improvement Fund for support to address poor condition in schools. Whilst maintained schools also have access to capital funding, it is allocated by local authorities with less opportunity to bid directly.

How the “economies of scale” will impact on the quality of education provided

7) What specific benefits are there to a MAT compared to the current DLA?

The rationale for establishing DEALT is not financial. By establishing as a multi academy trust, DEALT provides opportunities for schools to work more closely together, to share accountability for the outcomes for pupils. Opportunities to share expertise, training and supply cover will be improved by operating within a single organisation; and a Chief Finance Officer brings capacity to secure economies of scale to support schools in managing increasingly tight budgets.

A MAT will also enable us to:

- Improve professional development opportunities for staff, particularly in career progression;
- Share best practice to raise standards across all schools;
- Buy in targeted resources that meet the needs of Deal families.

8) If we do join/become part of the MAT how will we be guaranteed that Sandown will have a voice?

The Articles of Association for DEALT require that schools “shall” have a local governing body. (The DfE model says that MATs “may” appoint LGBs, but that does not meet our expectations.) Trustees are committed to engaging with local governing bodies, to working with the Chairs Board as the voice of local governing bodies. Headteachers will meet regularly to share leadership of the Trust.

9) What assurances can parents be given that academisation would not lead to cuts of teaching staff?

Levels of funding for all schools are set by central government. As stated above, the rate of increase in income is lower than the rate of increase in expenditure and there is no indication that this is going to change. We cannot therefore give firm assurances that there will be no reductions in staffing, whether we establish DEALT or not. Working more closely together, sharing expertise and seeking greater efficiencies in the back office functions means that we will have wider opportunities to sustain current levels of spending in schools on teaching and learning.

10) Will the MAT guarantee that qualified teachers will continue to teach in every classroom?

Yes. Our aim is to continue to recruit, develop and retain high quality staff, just as we do now.

11) The flipside of ‘economies of scale’ is staffing cuts. One of our greatest fears about academisation is that it would lead to shared headteachers, and specialists like SEN teachers being spread too thinly across a whole group of schools. How is that in the best interests of children or the community? What is in place to stop this happening to Sandown?

Economies of scale are intended to enable us to sustain levels of spending on teaching and learning. There will be opportunities to focus expertise in particular

areas and in some cases more focused expertise, shared between schools may be an improvement on the support that is currently available. DEALT brings opportunities to make improvements in support, though that may mean change.

12)How many Executive Heads do we have? Is that going to increase? Dealt cannot promise there won't be further job losses - Are more planned imminently? How can they save £30k on IT unless someone has been, or will be made redundant?

There is currently only one Executive Headteacher – Jo Hygate. All seven schools have substantive leadership in place and we have no plans to change that.

We are committed to ensuring that the conversion is not a reason for further redundancies – and that any future changes will result from natural wastage. We cannot guarantee that the levels of funding we receive – whether we convert or not – will mean that we do not need to undertake further restructuring.

Savings on IT will arise from more cost effective support services, broadband and licence fees.

Legacy Concerns – Our school as a community anchor

13)No information has been made available (apart from one line in the Articles) that can concretely ensure the ethos of Sandown as a secular school will remain. When will this documentation be available? How will Sandown Governors seek parent feedback on these proposals?

The Articles set the rules for the Trust. The object of the Trust is set out in Article 4 and this places a requirement on the members and trustees to promote education by running academies whether designated Church of England or not and in relation to each of the Academies to recognise and support their individual ethos. Members and Trustees cannot operate the Trust unless they comply with this requirement.

In addition the supplemental funding agreement for each school is based on the character of the school before conversion. DEALT will be required by that agreement to ensure that the particular character of the school is protected.

14)MATs can make changes to policies and procedures with no warning, so the good intentions the Dealt MAT is set up with could be undone by a future leadership team or following a takeover if it struggles to survive on its own. Have the Governors seen evidence that these initial promises from the MAT team can be protected in the long-term?

Schools are not immune from change if they remain maintained by the local authority. We have done all we can in establishing the Trust to protect the approach we have described to parents – including by requiring a local governing body at each school. We have produced and agreed with Trustees a scheme of delegation that delivers on the approach we intend.

The context here is of a group of schools choosing to establish a MAT and to continue to work collaboratively within that structure. Schools will have a close involvement in the running of the MAT, including through the chairs board.

15) Where is the risk management plan Jo Hygate agreed to deliver at parent meeting about the Scheme of Delegation? When can this be shared with parents of all the schools concerned?

To follow on the website

16) Is it true that MATs are free to sell off their assets, including land? This happens in practice. How have you reconciled this when deciding to press ahead with MAT conversion? Will the physical assets belonging to Sandown School be protected for North Deal?

DEALT will not own any land and have no power to sell it. All the land used by Sandown School Community School is held by KCC and will be leased to the DEALT for use as a school. The same is true for Hornbeam and for playing field land at other schools. Land for church schools is held on trust and made available to DEALT for use as a church school and for no other purpose.

17) Why NOW? Sandown is already a successful school. What evidence have Governors seen that this will change? It would appear that Spring 2019 would be a particularly bad time to authorise and implement such a fundamental change . . .

- a) The momentum towards academisation has slowed across the country, and all political parties are moving away from them.**
- b) The political instability may result in a national election. What implications will this have for reducing some of the issues at local government and national level that have made Academisation in Kent an attractive option in the past.**
- c) There are serious doubts about the impact of Brexit on the UK economy that could have huge logistical and cost implications for all UK businesses let alone a fledgling MAT. An LEA is more likely to be able to cushion its schools from these problems due to its size and purchasing capacity.**

The last 30 years have seen constant change in the education system as governments bring their own view to what schools should teach and how; and how they should be organised. Schools are therefore used to absorbing those changes and working within the context that exists. Academy status is not an end in itself but a means to enable us to develop our existing relationship and to work more closely together in ways which we are confident benefit primary aged children in Deal.

Local authorities are limited in the extent to which they can support schools in dealing with change because of the way in which funding for schools is structured and the continuing reductions in their own budgets. And our own assessment of alternatives shows that purchasing capacity is no guarantee of best value.

Alternatives

18) How have the Governors been given the opportunity to approach parents to discuss what Schools and Parents could do together to help tackle the funding crisis?

We welcome all the support that parents give to our schools. But it is important that what we provide remains free at the point of delivery to children.

19) There are still legal issues surrounding Kingsdown. Will this prevent Kingsdown from being part of the initial set up of the MAT? If so how will the “lead” School not being a member impact on the role and relationships of Jo Hygate as its current Head and the proposed CEO of the MAT. Will the CEO job be openly advertised instead?

There is not a lead school in DEALT. The role of CEO is part time in the first instance and it was important to us that it be filled from within the group of existing heads. Jo was appointed following an open process involving all the chairs of governors and an external adviser (now a Trustee).

The legal issues surrounding K&R are outside the governors’ control. The school is fully committed to DEALT and we will have in place an agreement that creates a formal partnership between the school and DEALT. This will ensure that Kingsdown contributes financially to the MAT and engages as much as it can in DEALT whilst remaining a maintained school. DEALT will contract with K&R to secure Jo’s services as part-time CEO.

20) What is being done to understand the position of Sandown after the event of the MAT being formed if other schools are not part of it?

All seven schools are committed to being part of DEALT. DEALT will not come into being if all FGBs do not agree a resolution.

21) Why isn’t the role of CEO being advertised as part of an open recruitment process?

The post is part time – and schools agreed that it should be restricted to existing heads as a means of enabling DEALT to build on DLA.

The LEA

22) What can a MAT deliver that the LEA cannot?

The support that the LA can offer has reduced dramatically in all areas of the school – as its budgets have been reduced. The MAT will

- Monitor education standards in all its schools and provide bespoke high quality educational development
- Engage more actively with schools so that it can react more quickly to any issues that arise, whether staffing, finance or standards, tackling issues before they escalate.
- Strengthen the existing collaboration’s work in meeting the needs of all Deal families by providing targeted resources such as speech and language support.

- Through the CFO, ensure that we are securing best value for money for funds available so that as much as possible is spent where it should be, in the classroom.

23) What do schools stand to lose if they stay in the LEA?

Opportunities to develop shared accountability and benefits of shared working where that delivers economies of scale and enables us to sustain levels of funding for teaching and learning.

24) Would we still have access to the LEA Emergency Fund, and if not, how would an academy fund exceptional expenses such as building repairs?

We would not have access to LA emergency funding. Academies can access the Condition Improvement Fund to cover building improvement costs.

25) What is the plan for including parents and the community in the final details of this process?

We consulted all parents in May and have continued to keep parents informed.

26) What date will the board vote on? If you don't know yet please pledge to tell us when you have a date.

The decision will be taken on 27 February

27) Would you be prepared to have a ballot of Parents and one of teachers based on a more detailed presentation of the most recent position for the Dealt proposal?

No. The basis of the proposal has not changed since we consulted

28) If the parents, staff and teachers of Sandown say they don't want the school to join/become part of the MAT will the governors listen?

The majority of those who responded to the consultation were in favour of proceeding. Staff are currently engaged in the TUPE process and no Sandown staff (TUPE meeting held on January 28th) have raised concerns with school leaders as part of that process.

29) In a meeting with Governors the possibility of KCC Education not existing in the long term was raised (due to loss school via Academisations taking place). The difficulties of working with KCC are understood to be one of the reasons the schools are seeking to leave LEA control. Have Sandown Governors discussed this? Do they think this is a realistic consideration? If so have Governors sought any advice from the LEA or DFE on what the alternative state provision will be should they choose not to become an Academy and this happens? Does Sandown need to consider opting out of LEA control if the LEA will change in this way?

We need to deal with the situation as we see it now. Future change is speculation.

The People Driving the MAT Project

30) Do Governors have any responsibility to represent parents views? If not, who are they answering to?

The purpose of governance is to provide confident, strategic leadership and to create robust accountability, oversight and assurance for educational and financial performance. Governors are accountable to the government and as maintained schools to the local authority.

31) What is the Governors' MANDATE to do this?

Governors have a strategic responsibility to consider how best to secure continued improvement in outcomes for children attending their school.

32) Do the governing bodies of the primary schools in the proposed MAT fully understand that once they join, they will lose control of their school and there is no way to leave the MAT, or veto future takeovers that will disadvantage them further or if they don't like the loss of the school's ethical identity, culture and ethos due to the normalisation of standards and procedures?

Legal accountability will rest with the Trustees, but there is a commitment from the members and trustees to continue to engage with local governing bodies.

33) How could a DEALT MAT insulate itself from the sort of pressures and forces that have led to examples of mismanagement and failure of accountability that have occurred in other MATs.

DEALT is driven by a moral imperative to secure improvements for children. DfE is also acting to address the examples of mismanagement and to tighten the accountability framework so that opportunities to behave poorly are removed.

34) Once the difficult legal process of MAT conversion has taken place, won't it be easier in the future for the DEALT MAT to be taken over by a larger MAT, including a hostile takeover? How can you protect the MAT from this?

Whilst DEALT remains effective there is no reason for any other MAT to become involved. Change could proceed only with the agreement of the DfE. The involvement of Church schools and of the Diocese also provides some protection to the Trust as a whole. The DfE is obliged to consult the diocese on any change and could not permit transfer to a MAT to which the diocese objected.

35) You've had presentations on the benefits of a MAT. Would you be prepared to hear a presentation on the cons and risks of a MAT?

There is not a single model for academy conversion or for MATs. We are confident that the model we are putting in place meets our needs and addresses risks that have arisen elsewhere.

Improving Governor-parent engagement

36) Would the Governors be prepared to work with parents to find better ways to engage. This process has highlighted a huge problem here and one that has created unnecessary tension and frustrations.

Sandown currently has a working party exploring ways to improve their communication. This will be shared when a format has been agreed.

The scheme of delegation for DEALT includes a requirement for each LGB to hold an annual meeting of parents.

37) Would the governors be prepared to meet with the parents of Sandown to discuss what they know at this point and answer any questions/ concerns parents may have. Especially since they will now be in a more well informed position to do so than they were in April last year?

All the information that the governors have received is on the schools' website, the governors are not hiding anything

38) At the time of the original parent consultation parents were told the MAT would be ringfenced to the 7 schools of the Deal Learning Alliance. It would appear that this position has changed already and that other schools are being approached to join the new MAT. Will parents be offered the chance to say whether or not they would support the new proposal now that many of the original key assurances have changed?

No new schools have been approached- schools have shown an interest. However when the MAT is established and secure if a local school approached or a free school was built in the local area the Trustees would undertake due diligence to see if it was a good fit. Locality is key though