



26th May 2021

Dear colleagues

I am writing to update you on the consultation process. As you may know, after representations from unions we extended the process by two weeks, and following a meeting with parents last week we have now decided to extend the consultation process a further two weeks so that it will end on Monday 14th June. The survey for staff and parents, including a direct question on whether you support the proposal for the school to join NCST as an academy, will now issue on 7th June.

I have much appreciated the willingness of staff to engage in discussions about the proposed conversion. We all come to this with different perspectives, but I know that all staff have the interest of the school at heart, and it has been very helpful for me to hear from so many of you. I hope that you will use the survey not only to express a preference but also to share what your biggest concerns or positives are.

Since not everyone has been able to make every meeting, I'd like to take this chance to recap some of the key talking points in the meeting I've attended. There isn't space in one letter to go over every point in detail, but please let me know if there's anything on which you would like more information.

The benefits of partnership

There seems to be a general consensus that close partnerships between schools can be good for everyone. I know from recent interviews that new staff are attracted by the chance not only to work in a good school but also to work in one that provides opportunities to work with and learn from a wider partnership. Our partnership with our fellow NCST schools is developing gradually, because we are not imposing a top-down, one size fits all model. The overall strengths of the model are already clear, with benefits for students, staff and the overall efficiency of each school, eg:

- The chance to share expertise so that students in all our schools can benefit from the best quality practice, including cross-Trust support in any area where it is needed, for example when a school has a new subject leader or in an area such as developing pastoral roles where a team has particular strengths to share.
- The cross-fertilisation of ideas, from lots of staff having exposure to what's happening in each school, whether that is ways to support staff-wellbeing, or the development of LGBTQ+ groups, or better ideas for student rewards.
- Working together to give all staff greater career development opportunities, through joint training programmes, visits and secondments to schools within the partnership, and opportunities to work on projects across the group of schools
- There are significant savings to be made by joint working, eg through shared contracts for HR and payroll services, ICT support contracts, Legal advisory contracts, lettings arrangements. This enables us to protect jobs and spend more on pupils' education.

Why we can't just go on as we are now

- We made a commitment to this process after consultation in 2015, and it was only PFI that blocked our conversion. Sarah Bonnell proceeded to academise on the basis that Lister and Rokeby would follow. Not to go ahead now that we have the opportunity would be a serious breach of that commitment
- It would destabilise the partnership and make it more difficult to attract anyone to work in cross-Trust roles. If we choose not to academise now, it will be hard to sustain a CEO role, or other cross-Trust positions, but we will have to keep operating with separate Boards and on different financial years. The partnership then becomes a soft partnership, of the kind which often falls

apart after a while - like the E13 soft federation (of Lister and 7 local primary schools, which ceased functioning after about three years).

- We would lose the support of the DfE; the Regional Schools Commissioner supported NCST taking over Eastlea, and has recognised the positive work NCST is doing there. This puts us in a stronger position if we have any further projects to propose (see below). But we would be in a very different - and much more risky - position if we now positioned ourselves as schools which are determined not to academise.
- We would miss out on grants - Sarah Bonnell gained £160k in Condition Improvement Fund once it became an academy, and NCST has been awarded c£240k in grants to enable us to support Eastlea and improve its facilities. If NCST grows, we can expect to receive more substantial annual capital funding.
- We would not be able to grow (see below for why this might be important)

The long term strategic picture

If NCST does become a four school academy Trust, we will be big enough and cohesive enough to achieve three strategic goals:

- a) To be much more secure from being swallowed up by a larger Trust
- b) To be a focal point for other schools in Newham which would be interested in joining NCST, including potentially primaries
- c) To be able to explore additional growth through projects such as
 - i) Developing vocational provision and/or alternative provision programmes as a Trust. There is a major need for extended high quality provision of this kind in the borough, and we could take the lead on a new project, possibly in the form of a new vocational 14-19 centre
 - ii) Developing a 6th Form for the Trust, allowing our students to stay within the supportive environment that they are used to, and providing an attraction to retain staff who would be keen to teach 6th Form

Our growth plan is to stay local, stay excellent, and keep at a scale where each school retains its individual voice. A group of four or five secondaries and six to eight primaries would be big enough to be a really strong voice for our community, and to engage as a key partner of the Local Authority in addressing how we can provide for SEND students, or develop effective engagement with social care from reception all the way through a young person's school career. We will also be able to be an even stronger voice for our students and our community on issues such as youth safety.

The alleged risk to pay and conditions

When the NUT balloted for strike action in 2015, the schools made a commitment to there being no detriment to pay and conditions which we have reaffirmed throughout this process, including:

- No two tier workforce (ie same contractual conditions for existing staff and staff joining)
- Full union recognition, and establishment of a Joint Negotiating Committee
- No redundancies as a consequence of change of employer
- Having two elected staff members on each Local Governing Body, to which we have now added a commitment to have two elected staff Trustees on the Trust Board

These commitments are not simply verbal commitments - they are reflected in the Founding Principles of the Trust which explicitly commits the Trust to:

Recognise and value the contribution of staff to the success of the Trust, and in particular to doing so through:

- ***Formally recognising the Trade Unions that support staff in the schools, and***
- ***Securing for all staff terms and conditions which at least match, and in some important respects (such as the Living Wage) improve on those prevailing in Local Authority maintained schools***

This has also been confirmed in the Trust's scheme of delegation, and in TUPE communications with the Local Authority. In the highly unlikely event that the Trust at some future point were to break any of its commitments, the unions would be able to address these through the Joint Negotiating Committee. The Trust has also made clear its openness to discuss any further ways that assurance could be given that the consultative and transparent approach which we currently take will continue, including through discussion with the Local Authority of nominations for Trustee positions.

The political landscape

Newham NEU's main point of opposition to academisation appears to be that academies are inherently less good for staff and pupils than local authority schools. Whether or not Local Authorities are the best organisations to be running schools, it is absolutely clear that with the scaling back of Local Authority Education departments over the last 20 years, and with 80% of secondary schools now being academies, and with clear government support for further academisation, Trusts will be the main feature of the educational landscape for the foreseeable future. The fact that it was NCST that the LA had to ask for help when Eastlea was in difficulties demonstrates that the real capacity for school support is in strong groups of schools.

Lister and Rokeby were not well supported by the Local Authority when we were formally under the LA's control. Since we are already Foundation schools there is in any case no going back. We now have the opportunity to ensure that Lister is at the core of a strong unified partnership which we have already committed to, and which upholds the values that we all believe in - and being part of an inclusive, community-focused, ethical group of schools, with strong accountability to our community.

If the NUT had succeeded in 2015, Sarah Bonnell would not have academised, and Eastlea could not then have joined NCST. It would instead be likely to have gone to a large 'chain' of the kind which today's NEU is very critical of. Any weighing up of the benefits and possible risks of the current proposal must take into account the very substantial risk that if we do not academise now with the partners of our choosing we will be given no choice and have to join a large chain in the future.

I hope very much that following the consultation we will be able to move forward united in determination to ensure that NCST lives up to the commitments we have made, and that we can all work together to deliver an outstanding education in all our schools. This means looking after and supporting our staff as it is only a well-supported staff who can provide students with the support that they need.

We face many challenges in our work, and this year has been particularly tough for students and staff. It would be a source of huge sadness to me if the final half-term of this year were to be dominated by divisiveness, or by strike action which would damage the reputation both of the school and of the union.

I trust you will consider carefully the overall context, and the positive nature of the vision of Newham Community Schools Trust. Lister has improved enormously over the last ten years thanks to the efforts of staff at all levels in the school. I am confident that with Kunal taking on the leadership of the school, we can look forward to an even brighter future, and that becoming an academy within NCST provides the most secure and stable support for that.

Yours sincerely



Anthony Wilson
Chief Executive of the Newham Community Schools Trust
Executive Headteacher of Lister Community School