



**Minutes of Meeting to Discuss Future Direction
of the Federation of
Peasmarsh and Beckley Schools
held at Peasmarsh CE Primary School on
Thursday 15 June 2017 at 4:30pm**

Present: Jane Burnett (JB) Chair, Ian Bryan (IB) Vice Chair, Martin Harper (MH), Jane Nash (JN), Marie-Claire Erith (MCE), Emma Hogg (EH), Peter Mayers (PM), Greg Russell (GR), Kate Sims (KS), Alan Lloyd Smith, (ALS), Carolyn Weston (CW)

Also present: Lison Smart (LS) Simon Thurston (ST), Sue Evershed (SE) (Minutes)

1. MH opened the meeting with a prayer.
2. JB summarized and reiterated the reasons for the need for deliberations on the future of the Federation as follows:-
 - 2.1. Year on year, school budgets are getting tighter.
 - 2.2. There is an ongoing decline in LA support (for example, Anne-Marie Boulton (SIP), who is currently visiting Beckley three times a year and Peasmarsh once a term will only be visiting once a year from the next academic year. There is also a decline in LA support staff, with movement to a model in which schools pay consultants.
 - 2.3. The decline in LA support must be taken into account alongside the relative isolation of the Federation schools, due to their size and rural location, and the number of people available locally to support the schools.
 - 2.4. Consideration must be given to opportunities for school leadership development, staff development, succession planning and future recruitment of high-quality staff, which again could all be impacted by isolation. Heads agreed that in the current two-school federation there was limited capacity for teacher/leadership development. To attempt to compensate for this LS and ST had already put plans in place for school-to-school and Head-to-Head support from the start of the next school year.
 - 2.5. Governance is currently insecure, again due to the schools' isolation and reliance on too few people. There is additional concern of the availability of people willing to engage in development to meet the needs of succession planning within the Governing Body.

- 2.6. The current collaboration between Peasmarsch and Beckley has shown the benefits of engaging with a wider network. LS agreed, highlighting how “soft” cooperation with Playden and discussions with Winchelsea had been rewarding.
- 2.7. The Federation needs to consider future school leadership, namely the HoS and whether it wants to move to Head Teachers. CW is only in place as Executive Head until the end of the next academic year and decisions on future school leadership would need to be made before the Christmas holidays. Due to the nature of these discussions, they would be held without LS or ST present. Both HoS had been informed and understood the reasons for this.

Governors were asked to consider how long it would be viable to continue in the present situation.

3. JB updated the GB on actions to date:-

- 3.1. JB had received an email from Penny Gaunt, Chair of Playden IEB, confirming that the school are not interested in joining the Beckley-Peasmarsch Federation. GR noted that in the immediate future Playden are looking towards collaboration with Northiam and Hurst Green CEP, but in the longer term there might still be potential for Playden to open conversations with other schools.
- 3.2. JB visited Winchelsea COG. They are aware of the impact of isolation and are positive in developing relationships with both Federation schools. They are not keen to enter any formalized agreements or join a MAT at present but the idea of a “soft collaboration” in which schools kept separate governing bodies, but COGs and Vice COGs would meet regularly, was discussed positively. The COG of Winchelsea would explore this with his Governing Body and report back to JB. LS reported that Peasmarsch and Beckley are already working with Winchelsea and have a plan in place for the Winchelsea and Rye Primary Heads to carry out moderation and she felt it would be a natural process to work with Winchelsea.
- 3.3. LS/ST had had discussions with the Education Improvement Partnership (EIP) over the past few months and reported that the LA had concerns over the size and sustainability of Rye EIP. The hub had had a meeting with County last week with a view to maintaining the Rye EIP hub but moving it under the umbrella of Rother. This also has schools of a similar size and nature to Peasmarsch and Beckley. A meeting is planned with Rother next week in order to discuss this.
- 3.4. **Feedback on AQUILA:** Following discussions with AQUILA, Governors agreed that joining this MAT would not be a suitable option for the Federation.
- 3.5. **Feedback on DCAT:** DCAT are much better organised/structured since its early years. The Trust currently have 6 schools spread across Sussex. The Head of the schools visited had felt that the leadership team had a pleasing level of autonomy and the bursars and business managers had been the staff most significantly impacted by Trust membership. The school was only now (four years after joining) seeing the financial benefits of joining the Trust. The DCAT schools have been able to maintain its individual identity and character, and own autonomy through their own LGB. Both LS and ST liked the Christian ethos of the school and the fact that there was little evidence of corporate branding despite the school being part of a Trust. Recent significant personnel changes within the Trust had had a positive effect. Like TENAX, DCAT is expanding.

- 3.6. **Feedback on TENAX:** TENAX has 11 schools in total. It is a Church of England MAT, rather than a MAT belonging to a specific diocese. Its schools include church and non-denominational schools and each school maintains its autonomy by having its own Governing Body. LS, ST and IB had visited Brenchley and Matfield CE Primary School where they met with the Executive Head and several teachers and had been able to have open and frank discussions with them.

Teachers had expressed very positive views about staff development and inter-school promotion opportunities. The TENAX representative at the meetings had been extremely informative and helpful. There was some concern over the geographical location of TENAX schools and that the Federation schools might still feel isolated due to the distance from many existing TENAX schools. However, it was noted that TENAX are currently in discussions with another local school so this would be unlikely to be an issue in the future.

Both TENAX and DCAT schools confirmed that they feel that their schools had benefited by joining the MATs. The Chair confirmed that both MATs would consider Peasmarsh and Beckley as “Good” schools, and this would be beneficial financially for the schools (as opposed to being considered as “Requiring Improvement”).

- 3.7. PM, MCE and JN had met with Beckley parents who were concerned about the future of the school. The parents were grateful to have their questions answered and had been assured that no final decision had yet been made regarding the future direction of the Beckley and Peasmarsh Federation. It was evident from the meeting that many parents were not aware of the drivers behind the Governing Body’s need to consider various collaboration options, including Trust membership, nor were they aware of the decrease in future LA support and how this would impact resources and pupil outcomes.

4. The Chair led a discussion with the Governors using the following questions:-
(Agreed responses are in italics below each question)

4.1. Where do we want to be in 3/5 years’ time?

- *Each school should maintain its own identity and local village school character*
- *With good levels of autonomy for Governors and school leaders, and curriculum flexibility for teachers*
- *The Christian Ethos, specifically Church of England identity, should be maintained and developed*
- *Financially secure*
- *With good opportunities for staff development and support for subject leaders.*
- *Able to grow teams to enable the best for all children, ensuring every child feels they are valued, recognizing every child is unique and the needs of every child are made.*
- *A future plan that ensures the survival of the schools in a non-isolated way*
- *Schools should be good to outstanding, and able to provide for the best possible outcomes for all pupils*
- *Able to attract and keep outstanding staff, provide outstanding lessons*
- *Outward looking and progressive in order to develop and improve in pace with other schools, and able to access the best possible resources; at the same time reflective on the best way forward*
- *Avoid becoming isolated, which would include becoming isolated from resources and opportunities and possibly also rigid in thinking*
- *Able to contribute to the bigger whole as well as receive from it*
- *Have good governance, with secure succession planning*

4.2. What do we want it to look like?

- *Increased capacity, increased resources. Have resources such that we do not lose pupils to better-equipped schools*
- *Increased pupil numbers (but not to the detriment of similar nearby schools)*
- *Become outstanding, attractive to parents and to potential employees*
- *Keep our identity as small, village schools*
- *Schools where staff always act in what they believe to be in the best interests of children's education and well-being, even if, in instances, parents disagree*
- *Schools where the happiness of the children is important*
- *Schools with outstanding pupil achievement and the backing of parents in support of the schools*
- *Schools where every child feels safe and valued*
- *Schools with outstanding teachers and an outstanding management team*

All Governors agreed that in order to meet the visions expressed in 4.1 and 4.2 above, it would be necessary to become part of a larger group.

4.3. What are our main drivers?

- *The happiness and achievement of the pupils*
- *Recognizing the uniqueness of every child, to grow a team to enable the best for all children and aiming to meet the individual needs of every child*

4.4. Which Route of Partnership Would Enable Us to Get There?

After significant general discussion, the following was agreed:-

- *The current federation and local collaboration and strengthening of links with other local schools is important and should be continued.*
- *The Federation should make timeous plans regarding its future from its current position, rather than delay such planning which could result in its being forced to make moves at a later stage which may not result in its agreed vision for its schools.*
- *As diocesan schools, there are still opportunities for support from within the Diocese and these need to be explored fully. From next year, the SLT would investigate and make use of the Diocese Service Level Agreement (SLA). This could mitigate some of the impact of the decrease in LA funding in the next academic year.*
- *Currently, the Federation does not have head teachers, and so does not have strategic leadership in place. A MAT would take a lot of the strategic leadership from the LGB and also lead the LGB in strategic leadership.*

The GB will have an in-depth leadership discussion after the summer holidays and before Christmas.

5. Questions from Governors

Questions were raised and answered as follows:-

How long would the process of joining a MAT take?	8-9 months, possibly up to a year.
If we initiate discussions with a MAT, are we bound to proceed to joining the MAT?	No, we could withdraw interest at any time until the final papers agreeing MAT membership are signed. During the process of discussions we are under no obligations to continue to the end.
Could a MAT reject/postpone our wishing to join?	Yes, a MAT could withdraw from discussions, but this would be unlikely. For instance, it may occur if several other schools are trying to join at the same time and MAT resources become over-extended.
Would there be any significant impact on the curriculum? Would teachers have the same flexibility with the curriculum as they currently have?	There would be no impact on the curriculum if we join either DCAT or Tenax and teachers would have the same flexibility and curriculum choices as they currently have.
Wouldn't it be better to wait and only join a MAT when our schools are in a stronger position to do so?	Both schools would be considered as "Good" and are already in positions of strength and given that it would take several months for due diligence, public meetings/consultations and other processes to be completed, it would be better to initiate conversations sooner rather than later.
If we proceed down the route of joining a MAT, could we continue our collaboration with other local schools?	Yes, absolutely, and local collaborations should be continued and developed, as should other options for support such as the Diocese, because as yet we do not know if we will vote to join a MAT or indeed be accepted.

6. Votes on Future Actions

- 6.1. The FGB was asked to vote for or against: Do we or do we not want to further and develop conversations with MATs?

Of those entitled to vote, 10 voted in favour, 1 abstained.

- 6.2 The FGB was asked to vote for or against: Do we want to consider starting discussions with Aquila?

Governors voted unanimously against this.

- 6.3 Governors were asked as to whether they felt the Federation should further investigate possible conversations with DCAT or TENAX.

Five voted in favour of DCAT, three in favour of TENAX, with one abstention. (Two Governors who were DCAT Trustees and the two HoS were not entitled to vote, however if they had voted all 4 would have voted for DCAT.)

6.4 Governors were asked to vote whether they would like to pursue discussions with both TENAX and DCAT if this were possible. It was not clear whether this would be permissible, but the DfE could be approached for an answer.

Six Governors voted in favour of discussion with both TENAX and DCAT if possible.

The Chair confirmed that she would approach the DfE to express an interest in furthering conversation with both DCAT and TENAX. If this would not be possible then the Chair would express an interest in having discussions with DCAT. All Governors agreed with this proposed course of action. The Chair would also inform TENAX and DCAT of the Federation's decisions in relation to opening dialogue with MATs.

The Chair informed Governors that a letter would now need to be written to all parents and carers, informing them of the decisions reached in the meeting. All Governors wished to demonstrate their support of the Chair in moving forward with MAT discussions and asked to be signatories to the letter.

Governors understood that there would be considerable additional work required in furthering MAT discussions, and all agreed to support the Chair fully in the necessary activities going forward to enable this. Governors were reminded that Ofsted expected *all* Governors to be active in school development and hence they would all be expected to take on some additional activities in relation to the planned way forward.

Governors unanimously agreed to work collegially and to demonstrate full support of the decisions taken at the meeting.

The meeting ended at 6.10pm