

Written Response to the Formal Consultation for Ashton Sixth Form College to convert to Academy Status

Background

The corporation of Ashton Sixth Form College approved a decision to begin the process for Ashton Sixth Form College to dissolve and reconstitute as Ashton Sixth Form College, a 16-19 academy at the full corporation meeting on 16th March 2017.

A statutory consultation period of six weeks is required as part of the conversion process. The process was launched on Monday 24th April and ended on Monday 5th June 2017.

Process

The statutory notice, equality impact assessment and consultation document were published on the college website and in the local and national press. A dedicated email address was set up for responses to the consultation. Copies of the consultation letter were sent to local stakeholders, including local school and colleges, the local authority and MPs, and an electronic copy was sent to the parents of all current students. The document was also internally circulated.

Outcome

We are grateful for the formal feedback provided on our proposal. The college received two responses to the consultation, one by post and one by email through the dedicated email address. These can be found in the appendix A at the back of this response.

In response to the concern raised about the use of the name 'Stamford Park Trust' and the connection with the now defunct Stamford Park High School, Ashton Sixth Form College will continue to be used on a day to day basis. From the student and parent perspective, the Stamford Park Trust will appear secondary to the name of the college. The reputation built up over many years will not be affected by the change to a Multi-Academy Trust.

In response to the concern raised by Matthew Bowler, CEO of the AspirePlus Trust concerning the potential to compromise the vision, mission and values of the existing A+ Trust and unnecessarily complicate the work of the AspirePlus Educational Trust, the college's response is as follows. Ashton Sixth Form College, as the largest educational institution in the A+ Trust currently and the founder institution, reserves the right to take strategic decisions which are in the best interests of the college. The de-coupling of the Principalship of the college and the leadership of the A+ Trust complicates the situation, but does not compromise the college's commitment to the vision and values of the Trust. The newly formed MAT will be part of the A+ Trust structure and will contribute to its aims as now. We do not agree that the formation of a second MAT in the A+ Trust will compromise the vision, mission and values of the A+ Trust. Nor will it complicate the work of the AspirePlus Trust. Our intention is that both MATs, the AspirePlus Trust and Stamford Park Trust, will work collaboratively and may, at some point, merge into one larger MAT, as was the initial intention of the A+ Trust. However in the last year, the educational landscape around the A+ Trust has changed. These developments have challenged the A+ Trust at a time when the college has been undergoing its own changes. Therefore, at the current time, joining the AspirePlus Trust is not a viable strategic direction for the college. Through the formation of an empty MAT, other A+ Trust schools are able to join the Stamford Park Trust when the time is right.

Conclusions

The College's corporation has considered the consultation responses outlined in Appendix A and has concluded that the proposal is the best way to provide a long term, sustainable and high quality curriculum to our students.

The Corporation remains convinced that the academy conversion of Aston Sixth Form College and the setting up of the Stamford Park Multi Academy Trust provides the following benefits:

- Allow for the further development of partnership work, begun through the work of the A+ Trust, aimed at raising the level of achievement in all member institutions
- Secure better value for money through the use of joint procurement allowing more funding to be directed to teaching and learning
- Provide opportunities for the development of shared back office functions, such as Human Resources, Finance, Payroll, I.T. and, Health and Safety, further improving value for money and creating greater resource for teaching and learning
- Create opportunities to improve the recruitment, retention and development of talented staff to ensure that students and pupils are taught by the very best
- Lead to stronger partnerships and collaboration between the institutions for the sharing of expertise in teaching and learning, and student support aimed at improving standards and educational outcomes across the partnership
- Strengthen transition arrangements between the schools and the college between educational phases
- Support better quality information, advice and guidance for all students to ensure the right educational pathway for all students
- Support the continuation of adult and Higher education provision at Ashton Sixth Form College
- Exempt Ashton Sixth Form College from VAT charges, bringing savings which can be diverted to the improvement of teaching, learning and educational outcomes for all students in the institutions.

Next Steps

The Corporation of Ashton Sixth Form College has taken into account the views raised by our staff, parents and community. We have also taken the outcomes of the Greater Manchester Area Based Review into consideration during our discussions.

The Corporation has concluded that it is in the best interests of the College, its stakeholders and the local community to proceed with the proposal to dissolve the Corporation of Ashton Sixth Form College and transfer all property, rights, assets and liabilities to the Stamford Park Trust in order to operate the College as a 16-19 academy to be called Ashton Sixth Form College. The College will continue in its academisation application to the Department for Education and, subject to satisfying the Department for Education's requirements, the Corporation would be dissolved and its property, assets, rights and liabilities would be transferred to the Stamford Park Trust.

Appendix A: Summary of Responses

Response 1: received 24th April 2017

Dear Sirs,

your college has a fantastic reputation in and around the local area. Your reputation has taken many many years to build and achieve; being the envy of other local colleges. I feel you currently attract the 'cream' of students.

Although I can see the potential benefits, my initial thoughts are to avoid any academy status merge. As a parent of two children (and having lived in the area for over 45 years), I believe that if ASFC becomes an academy it will be linked to the now obsolete Stamford High. Unfortunately this school did not have a positive reputation.

Reputations cannot be bought.

Good luck with the final decision.

Regards Mrs Brierley.

Response 2: received 25th May 2017

Dear Anton and Governors of Ashton Sixth Form College,

Re. Ashton Sixth Form College consultation on establishment of a multi-academy trust

As CEO of both the A+ Trust and the newly incorporated AspirePlus Educational Trust, I appreciate the opportunity to offer my view of the proposal currently under consideration by Ashton Sixth Form College. I offer these views on behalf of the AspirePlus Educational Trust, Longdendale High School and Astley Sports College (soon to be Rayner Stephens High School).

The key issue I want to raise relates to the College's proposal to form a new multi-academy trust, the Stamford Park Trust. I feel that the formation of a second multi-academy trust within the A+ Trust has the potential to compromise the vision, mission and values of the existing trust and unnecessarily complicate the work of the AspirePlus Educational Trust that has already been formed.

It is important to highlight that the A+ Trust has already had a multi-academy trust proposal approved. The application that led to the formation of the AspirePlus Educational Trust, was formulated by all the leaders of the A+ Trust with the full support of the Board, Executive Group and all founder member institutions: Alder Community High School, Ashton Sixth Form College, Astley Sports College, Cromwell High School, Denton Community College, Longdendale High School and Mossley Hollins High School. It emerged out of our collective recognition that the accountability governance structure of a multi academy trust would be an essential and positive step for the A+ Trust to take. As the crisis at Astley had revealed, stronger accountability structures and levels of challenge were clearly the next phase of our development, significantly strengthening the work and impact our system leadership will be able to have.

The AspirePlus Educational Trust has been incorporated as a multi academy trust fully approved by the DFE and EFA. This trust is fully invested in Tameside and our local community and have been established to provide academy solutions for schools wishing to join, and more specifically, for any A+ Trust member institutions seeking to convert in the

future. The first member institutions, Longdendale High School and Rayner Stephens High School, are scheduled to convert and join on 1st July 2017. Alder High School was included in the original application and only removed as a result of guidance from the DFE. It was expected that following the establishment of the trust work would commence to allow Alder to join.

The vision, mission and values of the AspirePlus Educational Trust have evolved directly from the positive working relationships that have been at the heart of the best successes of the A+ Trust. In my view, the work of the A+ Trust and the interests of all existing members, now including Hyde Community College, would be better served by Ashton Sixth Form College seeking to academise within the AspirePlus Educational Trust. Doing so would allow us to further develop the collaboration that has driven such dynamic school improvement in Tameside to date. We would be delighted to engage with our partners to complete the necessary due diligence to seek to allow Ashton Sixth Form College, or any schools associated with the Stamford Park Trust application, to join the AspirePlus Educational Trust, as was originally intended.

I hope that governors consider these points carefully and make their decisions in the interests of educational improvement in our borough, rather than on any narrower considerations.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Bowler (CEO)