



Ebor Academy Trust

Consultation

Questions from parents, that have been asked during the consultation period

(Parent questions and comments in black, Governor/Ebor responses in blue)

- Would Park Grove School gain extra revenues as a result of academy status? If so, approximately how much?
£77 per pupil as the LA can no longer “top slice” our budget to remove the Education Support Grant. This apart, money will be additionally saved from:
 - *items Ebor will pay for through their corporate services team, for example our website support costs, recruitment advertising and supply teaching*
 - *lower purchasing costs through Ebor’s buying power, for example CPD, computer support, printing & stationery, photocopying*
 - *the removal of services currently provided by the LA which are provided by Ebor such as Accounting & Finance, HR and school improvement*
 - *the monies generated from Ebor’s School Improvement Programme. This money is clearly not all for Park Grove but is used for the benefit of all schools in the MAT*
- What extra savings can Academies make that are currently not possible in Park Grove School?
See above.
- I do not know Park Grove’s exact budget, but the DFE states that the average primary spends 79% on staffing. Is it envisaged that future staff will be hired on poorer service conditions than existing staff?
No changes will be made to the terms & conditions of staff and this commitment has already been made to all staff.
- It would be very helpful if you could contrast Park Grove’s existing budget with a primary school already in the Ebor Trust
We do not have access to such data but we hope from what is detailed above, you now better understand the issue of an improved financial position.

Capital

- Local authorities are very revenue light, but many are relatively capital rich. How is capital dealt with under the Academy system? Specifically, how do Ebor allocate to capital needs?
Capital is dealt with in exactly the same way with Ebor as with the LA via the DfE so we will not secure any increases but also no decreases. In addition, in the event of catastrophic failure such as a fire, the position is unchanged between Ebor ownership and the LA.

There are two specific areas of capital that are worthy of exploration. The first is the capital needed for major refurbishment or upgrade of the schools facilities, and would be broadly covered in the answer to the above. The second is in the area of major spend. As we all know Park Grove burnt down a number of years ago. The local authority’s response is

instructive. Out of non-education specific expenditure, the General Fund, it provided a complete new venue at Queen Anne's School. It negotiated the insurance and oversaw all rebuilding costs. In the event the insurance payments fell well short of the actual costs incurred, both in strict rebuild terms (mainly because the school community wanted enhancements such as a gym), and in business continuity costs. The council took a hit in excess of £1 million. Now Park Grove is also increasingly at risk from flooding so some planning is obviously necessary.

What reserves does Ebor have to cover these eventualities, or what other plans does it have in place?

As with all MATS, Ebor is fully insured.

Staffing

- The underlying principle of an academy system is often sold as being one of “freedom”. This may include the idea of freedom to hire staff on service conditions considerably less advantageous than those enjoyed by existing staff, who would be TUPE'd to the new arrangement in any event.

Questions that arise therefore are:

Is it envisaged that any or all of new staff employed in the future, should Park Grove become an academy, be employed on inferior conditions to those currently employed by the school?

This has been discussed by Ebor with all staff, and again no changes to terms & conditions of employment are planned.

- Is it envisaged that Park Grove could ever employ unqualified teaching staff to deliver front line teaching to our children?
Class teaching will be delivered by qualified teachers just as it is now.
- Do the existing schools in Ebor employ anyone on inferior terms to those currently enjoyed by Park Grove staff?
No.
- Do any existing Ebor schools employ unqualified teachers in frontline roles?
No.
- Your letter further states that academy status enhances the breadth of the curriculum offer, enhances opportunities for sharing and challenge and provides increased professional development opportunities. How?
Through the scale of its operations and the monies it has generated through its specialist teacher and school improvement programmes, Ebor is able to offer wider curriculum options in many curriculum areas. Ebor already has an exchange programme with teachers from Singapore which brings new ideas and ways of working into the MAT.

- It seems to me that Park Grove already has made advances in all of these areas. The question arises:

How does the Ebor approach, covering a small number of geographically spread schools, make these worthy aims more possible than achieving them through links with the geographically tight primary school group that already exists in York?

All York schools work within a “cluster”. Park Grove’s is in the North East Cluster comprising 12 schools in an arc from Wiggington & Haxby primaries, through Joseph Rowntree and Huntingdon secondaries to Yearsley Grove Primary and all schools in between. Whilst this has been partially successful in particular areas such as phonics, it is informal in nature. Joining with other schools in a more formal way will be a benefit to Park Grove in terms of sharing best practice and increased resources.

Options Appraisal

- You state in your letter that the Governing body considered a range of options. Would it be possible to have sight of that options appraisal, in order that, as a parent, I can see for myself the pros and cons?

This will be published on the school’s web site in a PowerPoint presentation.

Procurement and Economies of Scale

- You state in your letter that one of the reasons that an academy option is attractive is to make economies of scale coupled with the “higher costs of local authority services”. I am not clear how this is so. As it stands Park Grove can opt out of using local authority services at any time, so does not need to pay over the odds. Indeed I thought that it had already done so, and that Park Grove’s biggest service cost, the school meals contract, was not provide by the local authority at all. My questions are:

Why would a MAT provide greater economies of scale, than an Education Authority, with a greater number of schools?

The LA is increasingly subject to budget restrictions and as schools look to secure services from outside the LA, such services become increasingly expensive for the remainder who choose to use the LA. For example, in the current financial year, the cost of Park Grove’s HR provision increased 26%. Park Grove can as you say “opt out of using LA services” but as a single entity its buying power is small, to secure the best possible deal. As regards school meals, this is currently provided via an LA contract which schools are free to opt out of. However, as pupils pay the costs of meal provision, it is essentially cost neutral.

- What are the costs savings on procurement and bought in services projected to be per annum, should Park Grove join a MAT?

This will only become clear once the decision to join Ebor is made. However, from discussions to date, we know savings will be made some of which are detailed above.

- What savings in these areas have been made by schools currently in the MAT? (A median figure is probably best to avoid statistical outliers)
Not currently known.

Governance

- Under the existing system we have very clear, open and accountable governance. As a parent I know that the Head is always approachable on operational matters. I regularly meet governors in the playground and know that they are utterly focused on this school, and have the best interests of it, and of my children, in mind at all times. I know who my councillors are, and if the authority does something wrong they are easy to get hold of, and they are all York residents. Will this be the case in a MAT?
The existing Park Grove Governing body will remain in its entirety. This locally based governing body remains responsible as now for consistently improving outcomes for pupils who attend Park Grove School. Within the MAT, each school is responsible for its own budget and local decision making on recruitment, except the Head & SLT, curriculum, teaching & learning and policies and procedures. It implements and manages its own disciplinary, attendance, welfare, safeguarding and SEN policies and procedures on a day to day basis.
- Who are the trustees?
See Ebor's website for details.
- How can they be influenced?
Ebor operates with a Heads' Board comprising the Head of each school within the MAT and the CEO working together to drive improvement. There is also a Chairs' Board comprising the Chair of Governors of each of the schools within the MAT. The minutes of these monthly meetings are circulated to all members of the Trustee Board.
- Are they York based?
Yes
- It would also be helpful to know where decision making lies.
See "Options" document on the school web site.
- What decisions are reserved to the Trustees of the MAT?
Mid to long term Business strategy, budget approval, monthly accounts review, approval of key appointment recruitment and remuneration and capital expenditure.
- Are there any circumstances where the views of parents and Governors of Park Grove School could be overturned by the Trustees?
Yes, the Executive Board has ultimate say on any strategic decision.

Asset Protection

- You refer in your letter to the school field. This is a huge resource not only to the school but to the community in general. In an area where very few dwellings have gardens, this is a vital part of the school experience for the health and wellbeing of our children.

The answer to the question that you yourselves posed in your letter is difficult. It is possible that legislative change, or academies being hit by declining DfE resources, could alter this at any time. Indeed some MATs have already sold off assets. Unlike the rest of my letter I think I may have an answer to this rather than a question. Why don't the governing body suggest the following as part of the contract with the Ebor group: *No asset, including the school playing field may be sold or transferred by the Ebor Trust or any of its successor bodies, without the consent of the parents of children attending Park Grove School? Such consent must be shown by a binding postal ballot of all parents with children on the school role*". Given that such a proposition is not thought possible at the moment, then this should be an easy amendment for Ebor to accept.

The school buildings and field are leased to the MAT on a 125 year lease. The freehold is retained by the LA. The MAT cannot therefore, sell the land or buildings or any part thereof without the consent of the leaser, the LA.

Timescale

- Given the momentous nature of the decision, the timescale and consultation appear a little rushed. We appear to have time on our side, at least for now, so what is the rationale for such a short consultation? An extra couple of weeks for parents to digest the implications would not go amiss.

You are correct that time is not of the essence. We have only decided on this timescale to try and focus busy parents' time and not let the issue "drift". If the will of the parents is to seek to extend the period, I would be willing to agree provided I understood why this additional time is necessary. Once governors make the final decision, there is a defined process some involving the LA, the DfE and external advisors, including solicitors which takes the timescales at least partially outside our direct control.

- Can we have a more objective view as part of the consultation, rather than just a 'sell' for an Academy?

We believe that the information we have supplied to stakeholders via the website and as detailed in the minutes of the Governing Body meetings demonstrate that intensive discussions have taken place and that an objective view has been taken throughout.

- What are the alternatives and what has been done to look into these?

Please refer to the website and the Academies discussion PowerPoint presentation.

- What are the proposed policies for subjects?

These will remain the same as they are now.

- What are proposed policies for wider issues such as behaviour management?

We would not anticipate any major changes to our existing behaviour management policy.

- Who appoints the headteacher and the Senior Leadership Team if Park Grove joins with Ebor? Is it any different to what happens now? (I presume the Head is currently appointed by a combination of both CYC and the Governors?)

Appointments to Headteacher will be made by the Park Grove Governing Body with representation from Ebor. All other staff are appointed by the Headteacher and the Governing Body.

- The main benefit seems to be an increase in access to resources. What does that mean in practical terms? It sounds like the schools under Ebor's leadership could, in theory, be simultaneously be trying to access these resources – what happens then?

The increased access to resources both in terms of staffing and equipment/facilities will be carefully managed by Ebor and its schools, and conflicts are not anticipated.

- I understand academies have the power to appoint non-qualified teachers to teach children. Would this be likely to happen at Park Grove?

There are no plans to appoint non-qualified teachers to front line teaching roles at Park Grove.

- If the decision is made, when would the academisation be likely to happen?

This would depend on the Department for Education. However, we anticipate it is likely to happen within 6 months.

- If all the 18 to 32 schools in the 3 or 4 hubs decided in the future on a one uniform for all schools in the Ebor multi Academy Trust, so as they can be seen as Ebor, would Park Grove still stand as a no uniform school? We know it says that it will stay, but as companies grow they want to advertise to grow bigger and a uniform is a form of advertising. The last school our son went to became an academy and it changed very fast and we thought that it became more about getting kids to get past later exams and it meant the loss of child oriented teaching and more about keeping Ofsted happy which is needed but not at the cost to the creative learning which this school is so good at.

Park Grove has no uniform at present because the Headteacher and governors have made this decision. A new Headteacher or local Governing Body could make a decision to introduce a uniform. Ebor have no plans to take away autonomy for schools. Local Governing Bodies make such decisions.

- We also found an increase in letters from the school mostly about ill health and accidents to prevent the academy group getting sued by parents but most of the letters were unnecessary and were only for that reason can Ebor give us some sort of reassurance that this won't be the same at Park Grove if they become an academy.

At Park Grove we pride ourselves in maintaining excellent communication with parents. This would not change under the MAT. As now we would endeavour not to send unnecessary communications.

- How large do you want Ebor to become?

Geographic clusters of 8 to 10 schools, with the Trust being around 40 schools in total.

- How will Park Grove be a 'shaper' if joining established Trust rather than starting up its own?

The Trust is the schools within the trust who discuss debate and come up with standards, policies, procedures etc. The Board is a representation of schools from across the Trust. Ebor is still at the early stages of its growth so joining now allows us to participate and influence decisions.

- Have you had any school considering to join you and then pulled out?
No.
- If it is subsequently decided that the wrong option has been taken what are the school's options then?
A school cannot un-academise but they can move between different Trusts. However, this is very rare.
- Are all Academy Trusts charitable?
Yes.
- Can the final decision be made by ballot?
No, the DfE do not allow a ballot for the purpose of making the decision.
- Why is there a 2017 deadline? Why are Ebor presenting us with a deadline for joining?
Ebor have not presented PG with a deadline, but they would like us to join in 2017 to be involved in shaping the Trust as it grows. PG governors and SLT also feel this would be a good time for our school.
- If the school becomes an academy where does the budget come from?
The budget still comes from central government but goes directly to the school rather than going through the LA.
- How/What criteria do you use to share out the pot of cash at the end of the year?
Each school within the trust retains its own surplus or deficit. Ebor generates income through school to school support and this is used to benefit all schools in the Trust.
- How is this budget more than if the academy plan is not taken up?
There is one specific area of funding that the LA currently retain and do not delegate down to maintained schools, this is called the Education Services Grant (ESG). This is currently worth £77 per-pupil and would be received directly by the school.
- Will costs for Park Grove to Ebor change in the future?
No. We have no plans to increase the top slice we currently place on schools within the Trust. Ideally, we would like this to reduce as we become larger and the services provided would not require that level of funding. However, we do not know specifically when this would be.
- Will there be job cuts? Will teachers be given fair contracts?
There will not be job cuts unless the PG leadership and governors make that decision or the budget dictates that they are required. Ebor follow the nation teachers' pay and conditions for all teaching staff.
- Will there be a change to admissions?
No – admissions still go through the LA admissions procedure. Parents will still need to apply via the LA but may also need complete an expression of interest form to the school should places become in great demand.
- Ebor is a not for profit organisation so what is in it for them running Park Grove?
Ebor wants likeminded schools to belong to the Trust that can enhance the teaching and learning of all the schools within it. Ebor believes that PG would be a good member of our

Trust for this reason. Ebor would not be 'running' PG; PG would be part of Ebor, being able to make the decisions in the best interests of PG whilst also belonging to, shaping, and benefiting from a wider organisation.

- What is Ebor's motive/interest?
Collaboration, sharing of specialist teachers, good practice, resources
- Would they partner with a secondary school?
Yes. We already have a secondary school as part of our Trust; Ebor Academy Filey. We are also in confidential conversations with other secondary schools about belonging to Ebor.
- Who owns the school building/land, will this change?
The LA own the land and buildings and these would be leased from them on a 125 year term. This cannot change.
- The Ebor Trust is 'driven' by the CEO but what happens when the founding CEO moves on as there is no statutory guarantee that governance structure stays as it is? It is particularly difficult to rely on 'a driver' as the organisation grows.
The governance structure is decided by our Members and Trustees and is therefore protected from being changed by any new CEO leading Ebor. Part of the drive for Ebor's growth is to have a wealth of talented leaders who are leading the Trust, not just the CEO et al, so that there is strength in depth and the values and priorities for the Trust are retained.
- What changes does this mean for the children, benefits/negatives?
The teaching and learning and curriculum at Park Grove will remain the same but children should have access to more appointments and resources.
- Do you have any concerns about the very high turnover of governors over the past few years?
No. Ebor will work with PG if it needs support in finding governors. This is a national problem.
- Can we have more details on the other options available?
See PowerPoint presentation on the academy discussion (website).
- How do teachers feel about becoming an academy?
The response has been positive so far and teachers and other staff have been encouraged to give their views.
- What were the responses to all the questions raised to the meeting with the other schools, Haxby Road etc – could we have bullet points on a slide?
See PowerPoint on website.
- What are the disadvantages?
Joining an academy is not an easy option for a school as there is a lot of time and commitment needed by senior leaders and governors to research and put plans in place. Governors are all volunteers so giving so freely of their time is a lot to ask.

Academy conversion is not always popular with parents and/or staff so this would need careful management which could lead to extra pressure for senior leaders. Changes and benefits are not always obvious straight away so a lot of trust has to be given to the leaders and governors of the school by parents. In terms of disadvantages to the pupils, we do not see any at this current time.