

The Board of Directors, CEO (Chief Executive Officer), Central Team at TSSMAT (The Staffordshire Schools Multi Academy Trust) and Headteachers' have worked together in order to respond to the most common questions when outlining our intention to reduce the school day. There were a large number of positive comments, a range of questions which we have answered and a series of statements which we will take on board but do not require a response. We offer the following Q&A (Questions and Answers) sheet with questions common to all stakeholders. Responses are provided to questions submitted prior to Thursday 25th April. We will add to this as more questions are posed and meetings are held. Thank you.

**Response profile**

83 responses in total

**Questions related to:**

**Finance**

**What is the actual deficit?  
How much money will this save our school specifically?  
What is our deficit in three years?**

**What is the actual deficit?**

The deficit across the trust is circa £90K.

Anson - £11,962

St Marys - £33,491

Richard Crosse - £32,176

The Howard - £12,046

(with additional cumulative deficits from 22/23 and 23/24 of £120k)

**How much money will this save our school specifically?**

We have outlined for Directors, Governors and staff each measure and the amount saved per school. Because some of these measures identify staff we are unable to offer the full breakdown but can share across the Trust.

School day length: £19,087

Contractual changes (across 2 schools) £16,751

External provision reduction / deletion (French/PE) (applied to 2 schools) £24,123

The remaining deficit is managed by not replacing temporary contracts, reductions in hours or some resignations which have occurred/are planned, or the long term impact of wider measures already in place.

**What is our deficit in three years?**

If we implement the business case after consultation, admissions are as planned, the Government fund any unexpected pay rises, there are no further unexpected national insurance or pension contributions, and no further unavoidable costs such as large capital expenditure which is unknown, then we are able to balance years 2 and 3 of this current modeller.

**Is this a result of financial mismanagement?**

No, this is a result of ongoing budget reductions and rising costs which we have been mitigating for many years.

This is a national picture. As outlined below, we have mitigated this for many years and it is now time to make more difficult decisions that other schools and Trusts have already made or are currently making.

Financial data is scrutinised by Directors at both the Finance, Audit and risk committee level, and full Director level. Whilst not actioned by Governors, they receive the school level accounts and ask appropriate questions.

As a Company, our accounts are fully audited by external accountants (previously Cooper Parry Accountants <https://www.cooperparry.com/> and last year Dains Accountants <https://www.dains.com/>), at a cost to the Trust, as a statutory process. Usually this consists of circa. 4 accountants for 5 days and occurs each year. Our audit has been clean year on year with only a couple of questions or recommendations.

You can see our Trust accounts on Companies House.  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/companies-house>

Some increased costs outlined:

### **Pay**

- Teacher pay for the main and upper pay scales have increased by 12% since 2021. Another pay award is expected for September 2024.
- Support staff pay scales have increased by an average of 14% since 2021. A pay award is expected for April 2024.
- Pension employer contributions for teachers increased by 5% from April 2024.

All of these changes were only partially funded by the Government.

### **Provisions and Services**

Food and energy costs have risen significantly, on top of general increases across the rest of our budgets.

Our energy cost increases between January 2022 to January 2024 are as follows:

Electricity - 186% increase (this is an average of the day and night rate increases)

Gas - 176% increase.

Our food costs have risen significantly but we only increased the price of a meal by 0.10p last year, and have agreed not to put them up this year in order to support families. Our overall food costs as a Trust are running at a circa 8.3%. This would increase our current school meal from £2.80 to £3.03. Even if we only applied the consumer price index, which averages the costs at 3.5%, it would increase our meal price from £2.80 to £2.90. This increase would be on food alone (which excludes energy and staff costs) and Directors have not done this in order to protect families and limit the potential reduction in school meal uptake.

We have re-brokered contacts with a range of companies from food to cleaning to energy suppliers to secure the best rate we can, fixing wherever possible during this turbulent period.

We have secured new, higher interest accounts for our cash flow monies and reserves as well as grant funds.

Please note we cannot use our reserves to mitigate the situation. We have to have a reserves policy to pay all running costs of the Trust for 1 month as part of our ESFA (Education, Skills and Funding Agency), academy handbook financial requirements.

Additionally, we receive £5,000 a year per school for capital works, but as one example per school of the costs shows, expenditure far outstretches this:

- £9,000 on the drains at The Howard
- £11,304 contribution towards the new roof at St Mary's
- £3,220 on plumbing works at Richard Crosse
- £12,000 to be spent shortly on a new boiler at Anson

Due to the lack of reasonable capital funding, the majority of capital works comes from the main budget. We have to bid for a CIF (Capital Investment Fund) funding to secure capital works and competition is fierce. We have only been successful across a number of years for 2 projects. Finally, in order to educate the children properly in computing and the wider curriculum, and to have an IT infrastructure which is fit for purpose and safe for cyber security, capital monies have also been spent on the ICT initiatives we have implemented.

Schools are funded per pupil. Those schools with full planned admission numbers (PAN) per year cannot grow their income to meet these costs. Some of our schools had a couple of years of reduced intake or see a larger year 6 leave than the intake they receive, thus reducing the income for the following year.

We buy in services from a range of companies, they have also all increased their prices.

Our demographics mean we receive very little additional income for pupil premium (free school meals, service children and looked after children) and SEND. It is becoming increasingly difficult to secure EHCPs (Education and Healthcare plans) for children with more profound needs, and so we are providing the support without any funding in some cases. With our current school day, for those children with EHCP's this means we are funding an additional 2.5 hours a week. SEND funding is based on 32.5 hours a week.

**What has been done already to save money before getting to this stage and needing to make such dramatic changes?**

Since 2020, Directors, Headteachers and Governors have worked consistently to mitigate the projected deficits. We work with a three year modeller and are able to predict budgets based on knowledge of admissions, pay rises and inflation costs of services. Many schools have already restructured in previous years in order to mitigate the national funding challenges. We have tried to buffer any large changes for as long as possible - the following offers some examples.

- Not replacing temporary contracts, and not replacing staff who resign or request a reduction in hours.
- Removal of an entire teacher - going from five classes to four.
- Adaptations to the leadership structure offers career development, impacts on school improvement and costs very little more due to the limited uplifts in pay in comparison to the leadership and teaching pay scales.
- CEO hours from 5 days to 3 days
- A part time central team.
- Reduction of swimming lessons from whole year to a term per school alongside internal staff teaching swimming and providing transport.
- Removal of whole class music teaching from the external provider.
- Capital investments to reduce energy costs such as LED lighting.
- Purchasing power across the trust, rebrokering services, for example, as part of our decarbonisation plan, utilising new systems for dispensing chemicals and hygiene solutions.
- Rebrokering energy companies and service level agreements.
- In house clerking, saving a significant amount in a service level agreement.
- Reduction in TA hours from 32 hours to 16 hours and change of TA support removing SENCo support allowance.
- Reduction in catering costs - 1 high grade cook and 1 assistant cook to 1 cook on a lower grade - no replacement of Assistant Cook
- Reduction in lunchtime supervision from 1 staff member 5 days a week - 1.5 hours per day - no replacement of position.
- Reduction in EHCP support assistant from 3 days per week - 18 hours and no replacement.
- Replaced cleaning supervisor role from a higher grade to a lower grade and reduction in hours.
- Reduction in supply costs 2020-present. Most absences for office, catering and teaching now covered by HT/SLT/ existing staff.
- Donations from PTFA have been more heavily relied upon for support with building improvements, grounds improvements, curriculum resources, IT improvements and personal development enhancement opportunities for the children.

**How is best value for contracts being achieved across the Trust?  
Has the Trust optimised spending across all schools?**

Best value for contracts is achieved through our Tendering and Procurement Policy, available on our website. We use benchmarking tools to identify any areas where we do not align with like-size trusts and schools in order to make adjustments to secure best value for money.

**How will these changes create a balanced budget?**

These changes will result in cost savings, which combined with other cost savings we are implementing across the Trust, will allow us to set a balanced budget.

**What specific staff reductions will be required if this change is not implemented?**

We modelled a large range of options and chose the 'least worst' of them. Ultimately, we have chosen those which reduce the deficit without losing 'whole people', but more drastic options would need to be considered if this change isn't implemented.

Examples include:

- Reducing the total number of support staff in our schools.
- A reduction in the number of teachers thus reducing classes or having unqualified staff teaching children.

**What were the other options considered? Eg. Staggered teacher work times, shorter lunch break, use of volunteers? What other time options were considered, i.e. finishing early on a Friday, losing time from the end of the day not the beginning?**

We considered a large and varied range of options to support the deficit with as little impact on teaching and learning as possible. For example, reducing teaching staff, therefore creating larger classes.

Staggered teacher work times (which is a reduction in hours and therefore a redundancy of hours), would not impact largely on cost as there still needs to be an adult in the room.

We cannot rely on volunteers to provide a statutory education, nor should we.

**Will the school reduce the cost to parents elsewhere to support them with paying additional funds for childcare?**

We always keep costs to parents to a minimum. Many of these costs are voluntary, however, we have to mitigate for those parents who do not pay these. We use grant funding to help with this for some families where possible. We reduce trip costs by running trips across the MAT to leverage economies of scale, and by using the school minibuses where possible. This saves on average £500 per coach per trip. School and PTA already subsidise as much as possible.

**Will the school be able to support more for things like the outdoor learning days and moving children between new locations as the proposed new times would mean as a family we are unable to get children to other locations and fulfil our own employment requirements.**

With our school mini buses, requests for parent car sharing and staff with business insurance helping out, we do the best we can.

**Is there any way we, as parents, can contribute to plugging the gap through school fees, for example?**

Parental contributions are not a sustainable option. We appreciate all the support that is given already, but this is not an effective financial model.

**Process**

**Is this consultation a tick box exercise?**

We will be taking feedback from all those consulted and using them to influence our final decisions. This is conducted by a panel of Directors informed by the consultation, the Headteacher's and Chair's of Governors feedback.

**Why were parents and Governors not consulted earlier?**

We have sought formal support in order to ensure we follow formal processes correctly and have conducted this consultation appropriately. The Governing Bodies of each school receive school budgets and we have shared school positions. They were informed formally about the business case on 7th February 2024 and are also included in the parent consultation.

The parent consultation was launched on Thursday 11th April, the morning after the staff consultation was opened.

It will be open until the 9th of May.

**Were there considerations around risk and impact on the school community made?**

When modelling all possibilities for measures (financial and HR), at each step of the process impact analysis was completed. We have updated our risk register around the impact of this change management.

**Has consideration been given to the impact on future intakes / school numbers when the times of the school day are one of the main reasons many parents chose the school?**

The central team and headteachers are always modelling school numbers, admissions and projecting year on year for group size and staffing needs. When modelling the possibilities for measures (financial and HR) we considered the potential impact on admissions for our school. We will have the same day length as the vast majority of schools across the country. Currently we offer a longer day than all other local primary schools.

**Standards and Curriculum**

**Which areas of the curriculum will be reduced or stopped as a result of this change?**

**Will non core subjects like music PE and French take a hit so that core subjects are not faced with reduced time?**

<b>How will you ensure the children's education is not affected?</b>
<b>How will the loss in teaching time be addressed? What impact will this have on my child's education?</b>
<b>Are the Trust accepting a decline in the quality of education or are teachers being asked to deliver the same in less time?</b>
<b>How will our school get an Outstanding Ofsted grade when it's losing teaching time?</b>
<b>How does this fit with the Trust's previous argument that the slightly longer school day gave more time to embed learning, led to better SATS results, better outcomes for the children and allowed more time to engage in extra-curricular activities which otherwise would not be possible? - Also see answer below about attendance and how the alternative would be less palatable to children's learning and standards.</b>
<b>Minutes of education/breaks are taken from the existing day? What will they be missing or condensing anything?</b>
<p>Although the school day will be altered, senior leaders are taking the necessary measures to ensure the curriculum offered remains broad, balanced and appropriate for each school. The National Curriculum is based on a 32.5 hour week with requirements for subject provision and can be met for all subjects.</p> <p>Heads are considering timetable alterations with their staff in order to aim to adjust the curriculum the least and mitigate the time lost. For example, the length of worship/assembly and lunchtime/breaktime provision by a small amount.</p>

<b>How does reducing teaching time fit with the Trust's previous argument that high attendance provides the best chance for each child to learn and achieve as much as they can in their education career?</b>
This does not change our expectations on attendance.

<b>As a non CofE school could time be focused less on religious practices, with Christian values being taught as study alongside other religious beliefs instead?</b>
All of our schools have an appropriate, balanced RE curriculum covering a range of religions and cultures. No additional time is spent on religious practices other than those which offer breadth and links to the community such as Christmas and Easter.

<b>Will this change affect extracurricular activities such as Easter/Mothers Day and other Church services or May Queen etc?</b>
No.

<b>Will the amount of homework change?</b>
No.

### School Day / hours specifics

<b>What are the hours of schools in the area and how do we compare?</b>
The Government requirement is 32.5 hours per week. All academies and maintained schools in Staffordshire meet this requirement. Nationally, this picture is the same.
None of the local schools in Staffordshire work on a 35 hour week with the exception of private schools.

<b>How will the structure of the day change? Will breaks and lunch become shorter to allow all the teaching to be crammed into a shorter day?</b>
<b>Will breaks or lunchtimes be affected?</b>
Heads are considering timetable alterations with their staff in order to aim to adjust the curriculum the least and mitigate the time lost.

<b>What research has been conducted to look at the educational results of schools offering the bare minimum 32.5 hours versus those offering more?</b>
There has been no research conducted. No schools within the local area start at 8.30am and end at 3.30pm as the government requires 32.5 hours per week.

**Has the school day at the new schools had an influence on this proposal?**  
No.

**How many hours across the year for our pupils does this add up to and what is the equivalent in days?**  
95 hours overall. 14.6 days. A school day is classed as 6.5 hours which includes lunch, breaks, worship, registration etc. The current school day is 7 hours.

**Could a parent voice be heard as to what is the best start and finish time with the new day? Imagine most would need an early start with our school location. I worry the new time will make work impossible for most with our school's location.**  
We can take alterations to the measure to the Board. This will be through this consultation.

## **Staffing**

**What is the role of any non-teaching senior staff in the Trust and could this be reduced instead?**  
**Are we to understand that a reduction in the school day will be reflected in staffing costs? And by staffing costs, I mean at SLT / Board level. The teachers deserve to be remunerated for their exceptional efforts, is there a top-heavy management structure negatively impacting costs?**  
Considerations have been modelled to include the reduction in senior leader hours. All Central Team members are part time with the average contract being 3 days. Despite the growing number of schools in September, no alterations have been made to the hours of central staff. If central team hours were reduced, this would lead to an increase in the workload within the school, impacting on staff hours at school level. When benchmarking our management structure, our costs are much lower than those of other Trusts.

**Do the teachers not currently get paid for the 35 hours they work?**  
Pay for teachers is governed by the Teacher's Pay and Conditions document produced by the Government. As a Trust we can diverge from the national pay scales, but we have taken the decision not to. All teachers have what is known as "Directed Time". They are required to provide 1265 hours of Directed Time per academic year. Currently half an hour per day of this Directed Time is used in the classroom. Reducing the school day will give this time back to teachers to be directed differently, as per the needs of the school.

**Are you reducing staff pay as their hours will be reduced?**  
Where support staff hours are reduced, pay will be reduced in line with this.

**Why is it only TA's being punished financially?**  
The school day length change only impacts the TA's financially due to their contracts being linked to the school daily hours. Previous reduction strategies have affected a wide range of staff roles and their pay.

**Are you putting/retaining the current staffing structure and maintaining jobs above educational provision?**  
The alternative options to ensure a balanced budget would involve reducing the current staffing structure. This would have an impact on the educational provision with larger class sizes, less support staff and potentially unqualified staff teaching our children.

**What evidence do you have that shortening the school day will achieve the objective of improving staff retention?**  
**Staff retention does not seem to be an issue - why are you saying it is?**  
**What is the data to back up the impact of a longer day on the wellbeing of staff?**  
**Have you considered any alternative proposals to improve staff retention?**  
**How many members of staff across the MAT have fed this back as a change they'd like to see?**  
**Retaining staff hasn't been an issue in the last few years so I would like to understand that reasoning?**  
No-one has left due to the length of the day, it has been cited as a reason for quality candidates not taking the role when jobs have been advertised. A number of staff have referenced the longer day in their wellbeing surveys and performance reviews. This decision has not been made due to the request of staff, it is a financial decision with less impact than losing 'whole' staff.

**Where is the evidence for schools not being able to recruit?**



Although our schools are attractive places to work and have superb reputations amongst the communities they serve, there is a national shortage of teaching staff which has impacted some of our schools too. We often have very small pools of applications and day length has been cited for some applicants.

**Do the Trust hold records of reasons for staff leaving?**

Exit interviews have been in place for a number of years within the Trust. We are aware that the longer school day has had a part to play in the decision making of a number of staff, most particularly staff with young families.

**Why has the issue of recruitment not been raised before?**

The issue of recruitment has been raised with the Directors and Governing bodies of the Trust previously, it is not procedure to share this with parents.

**How will reducing staff hours/pay affect retention?**

We are hopeful, despite the vulnerable national picture, that we will retain our current staff.

**Is this proposal to deliver consistency of school times across the academy and to allow movement of staff?**

No. Any movement of staff is in consultation and with their full agreement.

**Safeguarding and Wellbeing**

**Are the schools aware that this change could have a huge impact on children in abusive homes who will be potentially losing 2.5hrs a week from potentially the safest environment they have?**

We take our safeguarding responsibilities very seriously and work closely with all agencies where we are aware of abuse in the home.

**Has the parents' wellbeing been considered throughout this process alongside the teachers?  
Has there been any thought for the impact on working parents?**

The impact on all stakeholders has been at the forefront of the proposed change to the length of the school day hence the response to questions posed during this consultation process.

We have followed a formal process of restructure, redundancy and consultation so that we can meet statutory timescales.

We have tried to mitigate the impact with maintenance of costs for care club/wrap-around provision until October half term. We still offer care club/wrap-around provision in all of our schools to support working parents.

**Have the Trust considered the impact on school/parent relations?**

As part of our impact analysis, we are aware these measures would impact on all of our school's communities, including parents and our relationships with them. We discussed a range of measures and identified that all options which impacted on children's learning would impact on parental relations.

**What other initiatives are in place to support staff wellbeing?**

**How is staff well-being measured and how will we as parents know these changes are having a positive impact on all concerned?**

Our wellbeing strategy covers a range of areas. The initial INSET this year centred around staff wellbeing We have action plans which are reviewed regularly at school level with school specific actions for wellbeing improvements.

We have a 'pulse' survey throughout the year where staff answer questions about wellbeing which is analysed and specific responses are actioned. Staff well-being is being measured by Headteachers; it is not standard practice to share this with parents.

We have a wellbeing charter which was written by all staff and is reviewed with them.

**Care Club / Wrap around provision**

**What is the impact on care club hours - will these change?**

No, not due to this consultation. (other than we will provide care club from 8.30 am - 8.45 am which is additional and 3.15 pm - 3.30 pm to buffer the gap. End of day Care Club at Richard Crosse will come in line (or later than) our other schools with a 5:30pm finish - this is unrelated to the consultation.

**Can the school guarantee care club places for the additional children whose parents will be affected by this change?**

As is always the case, it is our intention to endeavour to meet the needs of the care club requirements.

**Can care club bookings be booked for shorter periods i.e. 15 mins, for those parents that just require a short care club booking to allow time to travel to and from school and work as a result of this change?**

**Could a daily 15 minutes free care club slot be issued to day time working parents to be used either at the start or end of the academic day?**

A free care club slot could not be issued due to the impact on staffing ratios. Alternative booking slots and lengths will be explored as a result of this consultation if it goes ahead.

**Will there be a variety of after school options? Such as 5.30 pm with or without food? An option for 4.30 pm - 5.30pm to allow children who do an arranged sports club to then go into care club afterwards without having to book the whole time and effectively double pay?**

Each school's wraparound provision is slightly different, so details for each are below. We believe that any child staying until 5:30pm requires a snack. It is also distressing for hungry children to see their peers receiving food but not being able to partake. This is not an option we will be looking at.

#### **Anson**

We do not offer a Care Club until 5.30 pm at Anson. Currently it finishes at 5.00 pm but going forward will finish at 4.45pm as it is not breaking even just yet. We charge for clubs at the same rate as Care Club as we don't pay outside providers. This means the children who attend Care Club until 5.00 pm can attend the clubs with no impact on cost.

#### **Richard Crosse**

Attending after school clubs and then Care Club has been implemented before. Because parents paid the external sports provider and then 'topped up' to attend Care Club afterwards, this meant that Care Club ran at a loss, which is not sustainable. It was also our experience that parents used the sports club for child care whether the child wanted to attend or not, this negatively affected behaviour during clubs, which impacted the experience of the children who actually wanted to attend. This is not an option we will be considering.

#### **St Mary's/The Howard**

This is not an option we will be considering due to the experiences of other schools and the impact on Care Club's financial viability.

**Would free care clubs be offered to parents on benefits/low income that potentially need it to be able to get siblings to another school?**

We have very few children for whom we receive specific grant funding and only in exceptional circumstances can we use this money for care clubs; however, each case would be explored on its own merits.

**Are there going to be any proposed changes to care club provision as you are finding staff retention difficult with the length of the day?**

No. We sometimes find it hard to recruit to these positions and have offered the options to current service staff however, we do not have plans to make any changes to care club provision in the light of this consultation.

**Is this a purely financial measure motivated by forcing more parents to use care club?**

No, we are very aware that this change will impact on some parents financially. We have been looking for a long time at a range of measures we could take to ensure our budget is balanced. Care Club is not set up to be an income generator for the school, and often only generates enough income to break even.

### **Miscellaneous and unrelated to the consultation**

**Does this bear any relation to the additional May week?**

**From several statements there is confusion by parents regarding this additional week for staff working hours.**



**Will this affect the extra holiday in May? Will training days be reinstated?**

No. The current format will continue on the back of last year's consultation with Governors, staff and parents.

To clarify, staff return to school a week earlier than other Staffordshire schools in August to conduct the INSET in a blocked week rather than across the year, therefore reducing the summer break which is returned in May.

**Why can't this be postponed until a new government is in place?**

There is no guarantee a new government will make any immediate changes to school funding. We are required by law to return a balanced budget to the government each year. Waiting for a new government is not an option open to us.

**I would like to know how the significant increase in reception numbers for 2024/25 is going to be resourced to ensure no deprecation in quality of care and education**

Mr Wynn and The Howard Governors will communicate with parents regarding the increased admissions intake.

Thank you for taking the time to read this Q&A. Our Directors, Governors, Leadership Team and TSSMAT are committed to ensuring our schools continue to flourish, serving all members of their communities.

We will keep you fully informed of future developments.

Thank you for your continued support.

Kind regards,



Mr P Halifax and Mr K Borg

Chair of Directors



Mrs C Gethin

CEO of TSSMAT