

JOINING A MULTI ACADEMY TRUST – FQA’s – Issue 1 dated 08/06/20

Introduction

The following is the first of what we envisage to be a series of Q & A documents to be issued during our consultations. Designed primarily for current and future parents and carers we will be monitoring the questions that are submitted and attempting to provide comprehensive and honest answers. Where we do not know the answer, we will tell you and find out the answer. This first document of the series deals with general questions and as we receive feed-back we will refine to focus on the specific issue you raise. If you do wish to raise an issue, ask a question or simply add your support, please do so via the dedicated email address - RSAMAT@waseleyhills.worcs.sch.uk.

Further information regarding the Central RSA Academies Trust is available on their website – <https://www.centralrsaacademies.co.uk>

Q - Why now? We are in the middle of a Coronavirus pandemic; wouldn't it be better to wait until we are out of the current situation?

A – This is not a decision that Trustees have taken in haste. One of the main roles of the Board of Trustees is to determine the strategic direction of the school and we have been considering the next phase of development during the last four years. Initially this was prompted by a hint from the Schools Commissioner’s Office that the future of ‘Stand Alone Academies’ (our current status) was limited. During our research into options for partnerships with other schools we became increasingly aware that our situation was not sustainable. To bring about the benefits and improvements we would wish for children attending Waseley we needed to move on. Over the last four years we have met with a number of potential partners but until last year had not found any that fitted our requirements in terms of our values and culture. In 2019 we began discussions with two potential partners who we felt could be a good fit. Despite the current uncertainties, as Trustees we have a responsibility for the future wellbeing of Waseley. With that in mind and after consultation with the Senior Leadership Team, at the Board meeting on 2nd April 2020 the Trustees took the decision to enter into detailed discussion with the Central RSA Academies Trust (CRSAAT) with a view to joining the Trust in January 2021 assuming the process of ‘due diligence’ and consultation reveals no good reason not to. Trustees felt there was nothing to be gained from delaying the decision but there was a risk of losing an opportunity if we did.

Q – How long will the process of due diligence take and when will a final decision need to be made?

A – Given the restrictions currently in force the process will take longer than usual but there is much that can be done in the short term to move us forward. We anticipate that we will be in a position to make a final commitment by October this year. Assuming both parties agree that there are no good reasons to terminate the discussions we anticipate signing an agreement to join the Central RSA Academies Trust in November with January 2021 as the formal target date of joining.

Q – What influenced your decision to choose the Central RSA Academies Trust (CRSAAT) as the potential partner?

A – The decision was not easy as we had two potentially suitable partners but Trustees and the senior leaders in school felt that unanimously that the best fit was the CRSAAT. Uppermost in our considerations was enhancing the educational opportunity for current and future pupils at Waseley. Both had excellent records of improving the schools in the respective Trusts but it was felt that integration of our current school improvement plans would be easier with the CRSAAT. We have not been able to visit and check the outcomes of schools in the Trust first-hand but are planning to do so as soon as conditions permit. Meanwhile we will continue to examine published data to inform the questions we will be asking.

Q – What benefits will Waseley derive if it joins the CRSAAT?

Aside from the performance issues Trustees and school leaders believe there are a number of potential benefits, including the following: -

- The RSA (*Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce*) is an international 'Brand' with over 250 years of history in the influencing of society and encouraging education and training of a wide spectrum of society. In addition to some extremely eminent 'Fellows' it has links and contacts in a wide-ranging number of important sectors of education, arts, manufacturing and commerce. Access to acknowledged 'experts in many areas of life allows a broadening of the educational opportunities and with the RSA's links we believe our children will derive considerable benefit.
- Values and culture – this is difficult to measure but at Waseley we have always focussed on the welfare and development of the whole child, i.e. the 'holistic' approach. The RSA as an organisation has through time campaigned for 'social justice' and those values are shared by the Central RSA Academies Trust; values identical to those we support at Waseley. Success is not all about academic achievement, and for us it is important for each child to be encouraged to fulfil their potential; a fundamental value we share with the CRSAAT.
- Support in the design and delivery of an 'appropriate' curriculum – whilst we have made considerable progress on curriculum development in recent years, we believe the process will benefit from being able to access the wider experience within a Multi Academy Trust. Our initial discussions led us to the conclusion that the work being done by CRSAAT closely aligned with our ideas and would help us to achieve our objectives more quickly. This is at the heart of our goal of offering and enhanced educational experience.
- Staffing – we have some great teachers at Waseley, and it is a source of frustration that we are unable to offer the range of CPD opportunities they deserve due to financial constraints. As part of a larger organisation, especially one with links and access to acknowledged experts in their field, we believe the opportunities for staff development, progression and recruitment will be enhanced, which can only be of benefit to our children as well as staff. The Trust is a National Teaching School, training teachers at all levels. It also provides opportunities to work in other schools within and beyond the MAT, across the RSA Family of Academies as leaders, coaches and direct classroom support and/or in an advisory capacity for other Trust activities.

- Community involvement – the CRSAAT believe passionately that schools should be at the heart of the local community and provide educational and development opportunities for the children that are appropriate to that community. We believe that being part of that MAT will assist in developing closer and more proactive links with our local community.
- Financial issues - we have an excellent record of managing our finances under increasingly demanding circumstances, but we believe that unless funding arrangements are improved our position is not sustainable. Funding will not be improved if we join CRSAAT, but we will have access to support and benefits of 'economies of scale' that currently we don't enjoy. We will continue to manage our finances carefully but will benefit from the support the CRSAAT can provide and access to funding that may otherwise not be available to us.

Q – How will local governance be affected?

A – Implicit in the value of 'being at the heart of the community' is that Governance should continue at a local level through governors who understand the needs of the local community as well as the broader implications of education. It is inevitable that governance will change as a result of joining a MAT but the 'Local Academy Governing Board' will still be drawn from the local community and be responsible for the strategic direction and performance of the school. Governors will no longer be Trustees and some of the responsibilities will change in that Finance, legal, HR and Site issues are dealt with centrally, leaving governors to focus on meeting the needs of the community and monitoring performance as key responsibilities. One of the benefits is that there is strong collaborative working at governance level as well as between schools. Training and development opportunities for governors are enhanced and conferences are held to enable the sharing of ideas and experience. In accordance with the principles of transparency and clarity there is a published 'Scheme of Delegation' which clearly defines the tasks delegated to the LAGB's and the role of governors.



A Roll – Head Teacher



Eric Hogg – Chair of Trustees

Issue 1(rev) - published 8/06/20