



23rd November 2018

Dear parents and carers,

There has been a lot of discussion within the community and online recently concerning the idea of a local Multi Academy Trust (MAT). We wanted to set out our views on how we think it affects Wallands and to open this conversation up within our community so we can have a transparent discussion about our options as a school.

Currently, all the schools in Lewes have been thinking about how to improve education in the town – in the context of reductions in school funding- how we can do the best by our children, staff and community over the coming years, and how we can make sure our schools are well run, safe and a fun and creative place to learn and develop.

To do that, we feel we will be stronger if we work more in partnership with other schools. So far that has meant sharing the best approaches to teaching, seconding in teachers from local schools and making sure we work together for a fairer approach to attendance, for example, that is consistent across the town. These have had direct benefits for the children at Wallands.

To make sure we can do better for all our children and staff – and recognising the pressures on schools across the country on budgets, staff recruitment and investment in buildings and facilities – we have been thinking and talking about the best ways to ensure that Wallands can develop and thrive over the next few years.

We are also very proud of our school and want to protect and strengthen our culture and preserve our identity. With that in mind, we need to think about the context. In East Sussex alone, the council have announced a large reduction in services to schools to find £45 million of savings by 2022, and if we do nothing this will have a big impact on the kind of education our children receive and the kind of school we become.

At the same time, we want to choose the most effective future for the school that lets us build on and improve the education we currently give our children. We want to do more, not less. Wallands has been pioneering a partnership with Priory this last year that has provided additional teaching capacity, resources and new ways of learning and teaching. Governors continue to look at how that is working, meeting every month to oversee the partnership – with a formal review in January 2019 to work out what we do next.

So far, partnership has worked very well for us – and we are keen to see what more we can do to work with all the Lewes schools. One option that we have started to explore with the other Lewes

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schools is the creation of a not for profit local MAT. The idea is that this would bring most of the schools in Lewes – primary and secondary – together into a joint partnership that would help us to pool resources so we can support our teachers to do more in the future and guard against the wider financial pressures.

These are early days, though, and there are pros and cons to any such decision, and many questions that we are starting to think through and answer. So far, no decisions have been made – we are gathering information, talking to our colleagues in the other schools, talking to East Sussex County Council and trying to understand what the benefits are. To help this process, Lewes schools have recently created a working group to clarify the options and to give everyone a better idea of the exact shape of a potential local MAT. This group will meet frequently and will feed back to governors and schools over the coming months.

At Wallands, we want this to be an open discussion. We don't yet have all the answers and we want to make the best decision for our children, staff and community. Our plan is to involve everyone, and we will put the options out to parents and staff to hear your views and concerns directly.

This starts today, when we will be having an open conversation with staff to hear their views, and we will be opening up a series of conversations with parents and carers starting with the next Parent Forum on December 5th which will focus on this exclusively. After that we will launch a survey for parents and carers to gather wider views. We will also be discussing this at our next Governing Board on the 29th November, where we will hear directly from the National Education Union too and decide whether we continue to explore the idea of a local MAT as an option for the school over the coming months.

As governors, we want Wallands to be secure for the future and for our children to have the very best education we can give – and we welcome your views over the coming weeks and months before we make a decision next year.

Yours sincerely,

Debbie Collis

Headteacher

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Chair of Governors

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