



Executive Headteacher Mrs J Hygate
and Chair of Governors
Lee Reading
Kingsdown and Ringwold CEP
Via email

**Children Young People and
Education Directorate.**

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Date: 17 July 2018

Dear Headteacher/Chair of Governors

Academisation proposals re Deal primary schools

I am writing to you in reference to your proposals for academy conversion. I have felt compelled to take this unusual step owing to the information published on your school websites, the contents of which has been drawn to my attention by a number of concerned parents.

The decision to take on academy status rests with the Governing Body of any well performing school that is therefore free to make this choice, should governors consider it to be in the best interests of their school. Kent County Council has always maintained a position of supporting governing bodies whether they adopt this change of status or choose to remain under the oversight of the Local Authority. This stance is reliant of course on that information which is made available to parents, staff and others being factually correct and clear accurate explanations of how these considerations apply. The successful implementation of such a wide ranging and irreversible change requires strong stakeholder engagement, underpinned by a fair representation of the context.

I am concerned that a number of statements I have seen on the school websites are not correct and it is important that these are amended, and the accurate position made known to governors and stakeholders.

Specifically:

It has been stated that as academies the schools would have access to a wider and more appropriate range of services and wider options for procurement as well as greater negotiating power. This clearly is not the case as all maintained schools have had the ability to buy and procure services from wherever they choose since 2001.

All schools are expected to secure Best Value in all their purchasing decisions, that does not change with any move to academy status. There is no requirement to buy from KCC, nor has there been since the late 1990's. It may be the case that schools are tied into some contracts for the term of that contract, but these will be contracts that the school has chosen to enter into. Equally schools can come together to negotiate with KCC or other providers as maintained schools and many already do this. There is nothing that prevents the schools from doing this now.

It has been stated that Academy status will give access to funding unavailable to the Local Authority. Whilst this is true Academy status will also mean you can no longer access certain funding available from the Local Authority. As with all of these issues there is a judgement that Governors need to make.

It has been stated that KCC services that were formerly free are being transferred to commercial structures or will no longer be available. Insufficient detail has been provided on this, but it is important to note what has not been said which is that all of the educational services that KCC currently funds and which are being transferred to the new Local Authority wholly owned trading company, The Education People, which will come into effect in September will continue to be centrally funded by KCC and will be free of charge to the schools at the point of use. This maintains the current position and so does not represent any change or any kind of degradation to Kent maintained schools.

Various references to the amount that KCC "top slices" have been made along with statements around tens of thousands of pounds that Deal schools pay" to help schools in financial difficulty in other parts of the county". Much of what has been said is incorrect. The national funding mechanism for schools that created the "top slice" model ended many years ago. There is no "top slice" by any local authority. The only funding KCC holds in respect of schools in this context is the money that the independent statutory Schools Funding Forum (comprising Headteachers from maintained schools and academies) has decided should be "de-delegated" and managed by KCC as it makes financial sense to do that. In the case of your group of schools this equates to just 0.68% (i.e. less than 1%) of your budget or £43.2k (£43,200) for all 7 schools in total. This is out of a total budget of £6.2m (£6,200,000).

The greater part (70%) of this small de-delegated sum is handed back by all maintained schools in order to contribute to a county wide fund for schools in financial difficulty, which can arise for a variety of reasons. It is also worth pointing out that over the past 25 years various schools in Deal have enjoyed support from this fund. This will no longer be available upon conversion.

However, the remainder is for services that academies can no longer access from KCC and have to pay for themselves or take out insurance products to cover.

This money is not therefore in any way 'free' or 'extra' because with it will come a range of costs that will fall to the schools or MAT to meet. Furthermore, this additional funding will be the only recurring addition to the schools' revenue budgets upon conversion. There is no extra money that isn't one off.

The Department for Education says that becoming an academy should not leave schools any better or worse off financially in the funding they receive. Schools' revenue income remains the same. The only case to make and what the governing bodies need to satisfy themselves of is that these same funds can be spent more effectively. Can you get the same or more for less money? How? Where is the evidence for this and the detailed plans to back it up?

Another important consideration is around the removal of the Education Support Grant that the DfE used to pay academies. This no longer exists for schools that are now converting and means that any new academies have to pick up additional responsibilities without any extra money to pay for them. One example is redundancy costs, but there are others. These will also have to be met from the de-delegated funds, which are likely to be insufficient and therefore from elsewhere within the MATs finances.

Statements have been made about there being a requirement to become a MAT or academy and that KCC may require schools to enter into a MAT. These comments are highly inaccurate and do not reflect the Department for Education's current position. There is no requirement from the government for schools which are not in Special Measures to convert to become academies. All the Deal schools involved in this proposal are 'Good' or 'Outstanding' and therefore have complete freedom over whether to become an academy or not. No one can force them to convert. The proposed policy of compulsive conversion was so unpopular when it was proposed that it was rapidly withdrawn in the face of widescale opposition.

Ever since academy conversion began in 2010 KCC has been consistent in its approach of supporting whatever decision a governing body makes. KCC just wants to be sure that any decision is based upon accurate information. KCC has no intention or ability to require schools to become academies or join a MAT. It isn't the decision of a local authority in any case. It is the Regional Schools Commissioner on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education who has the remit and power to require underperforming schools to academise.

The DfE knows and accepts that nationally we now have a mixed system of both maintained and academy schools and that this will not change. All plans to attempt to force academisation on schools have been withdrawn and it has been made clear that they will not be revisiting this.

I hope that this letter assists you in clarifying the position for governors, parents and other stakeholders but if you would like a further conversation or have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Keith Abbott
Director - Education Planning and Access