

17 JAN 2011

Bryn Thomas
Congleton High School

Richard Hinckley
Chair of Governors
Congleton High School

17th January 2011

Dear Richard

I am writing to you to express my concerns and objections on the proposed move to become an Academy school. I have endeavoured to be succinct in my outline below as I am aware that similar points have been made by other colleagues. It should be noted that we are concerned over the same issues so repetition should add further weight to this concern.

I am disappointed that the information to staff and to parents outlines advantages to be gained but does not focus on the disadvantages. In fact it states that there are none. I believe that this is not the case and urge you to consider these disadvantages and present them to the governing body so that conversion to Academy status can be halted.

The risks of new academies (or state-funded private schools as they really are) becoming involved with commercial activity and sponsorship is very real. It may not be the current governing body's intention but by converting to academy status you allow the possibility in the future.

There is no evidence to demonstrate that academy schools narrow the achievement gap and provide the highest standards of education for all.

By giving the governors of academy schools unfettered powers over the use of previously public buildings, land and other assets and taxpayers' money but with no requirement to act in the public interest and with widespread exemption from regulation and public accountability. This could incur major risks to the public and to the public purse.

Collaboration and co-operation between schools is a key part of effective and equitable public service provision. The public service ethos is about working together for the benefit of all, not about competition. Arrangements for collaboration with other schools outside of the Local Authority umbrella may bring advantages, but has it been considered what will be lost? Our current foundation school linked with the local authority has many benefits:

- It allows planning for school demand according to population developments,
- It allows for coordinated teacher training and development, Special Educational Needs, Early Years teaching, and much more,
- It means there is co-operation between schools over pupil admissions and exclusions,
- Governors and councillors are elected. Their decisions can be, and have been, challenged at elections.
- The local authority provides expert services which Academies will need to provide either in-house or purchase from elsewhere. Services such as pay, pensions, human resources and health & safety are too important to be left to anyone who is 'learning' and inexperienced. Purchasing from 'elsewhere' could also lead to higher costs

The Academies legislation enables schools to become Academies simply by a vote of the governors – no real consultation with parents, teachers, support staff or the local community. No vote for anyone but the governors! Why should such a small group of people be allowed to decide the future of our schools? My impression so far

is that for every comment against conversion the Head and you have a counter argument. Has the decision already been made before consultation has taken place?

Academies are not democratic. They are not accountable to the Local Authority, so they are not accountable to the public. Their governors are appointed, not elected. Academies are not covered by Freedom of Information legislation.

Much has been made by Mr Hermitt of the need for the extra funding which will be available as a result of conversion. Is there extra money? The only extra money available for schools that opt to become academies will be taken from money the local authority holds centrally for support services. Each new academy will get its share of this money and the central fund will be reduced accordingly. The Academy would then have to buy in the services currently supplied by the Local Authority. So will this extra money have any real benefit? This case has not been proven beyond the anecdotal. Instead school resources will be employed to source new providers.

This school has gone from strength to strength in recent years and has achieved record breaking results due to good leadership (including that of the governing body) and good teaching, coupled with the improvements in teachers working conditions, enabling teachers to have guaranteed PPA time and not be required to cover for absence. There is no evidence that Academies result in improved standards! In fact it is said that non-GCSE qualifications may be removed from the data used to measure Academy schools success. This could lead to us being seen as less successful and have a direct impact on our students and staff. Do Academies get better Grades? Of the 74 Academies that have entered pupils for GCSE's for 2 or more years, a third have seen their results fall.

The conversion to Academy status would enable the governing body to set their own terms and conditions, outside of the national pay and conditions framework. How can this be good for teachers at Congleton High School? Moving away from national pay and conditions could result in:

- Losing fairness, transparency, consistency and equality.
- Teachers being paid at different individual rates within the school.
- Deterioration in the pay and conditions of service for the majority of teachers.
- **The loss of continuous years of service record within the local authority being transferred to any future school as colleagues move on.**

All evidence shows that freeing up a school from the national framework and the STPCD serves to worsen the value of teachers' pay, not improve it. There is certainly no evidence that it raises the pay levels for the majority of teachers. As I've said, this is a successful school, thanks in the main to the work done by highly motivated teachers in the classroom. We are a team at Congleton High School and this should be protected.

I hope that you will include my comments as part of your considerations and halt any progress towards converting Congleton High School to an Academy.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bryn Thomas". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'B' and a long, sweeping tail.

Bryn Thomas



ACHIEVING SUCCESS TOGETHER

CONGLETON HIGH SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY
Box Lane, Congleton, Cheshire, CW12 4NS.

Mr B Thomas

19th January 2011

Dear Bryn,

Thank you for your letter regarding Academy status. I'm sure you are aware that your letter is similar to those I have received from some of your colleagues save for one point. So in the same vein I have therefore included the relevant parts of the replies I made previously below.

Should CHS become an Academy it will be a not-for-profit charitable trust and as such there will be no sponsors or companies involved. As a Foundation School the governing body already has ownership of the schools assets and there would be no material difference with respect to an Academy.

The governing body is currently a mixture of appointed and elected governors. In particular the input of parent and staff governors is valued and no change is being proposed either to their number or method of election. Governorship would remain an unremunerated voluntary activity as it is now.

Accountability takes many forms. It is true that as an Academy we would no longer be accountable to the Local Authority. However we would continue to be OFSTED inspected and be accountable to the DfE. Crucially we will continue to be accountable to the most important constituency of all – the parents, both through their representatives on the governing body, and through the choice parents make in which school to send their children to.

The governor body has always sought to provide an environment affording the best education for its students and working conditions for its staff. Indeed many of the improvements that have taken place over the years (sports hall, school amalgamation, 6th form centre) have been instigated by the governors rather than the Local Authority. I believe that this has been in the public interest and I can see no motive for the governors to act otherwise.

The school is already part of a formal federation with 7 other schools in the locality for their mutual benefit and support, and this will continue and over time be strengthened – a fine example of public service ethos. It is a requirement that

Academies participate in admissions co-ordinated by the Local Authority and we already co-operate with other schools regarding exclusions.

The school already contracts with third parties for the provision of many of its services, and will continue to seek quality provision. To suggest that we would allow inexperienced "learners" to provide our services does us a disservice. It is true that as an Academy we will need to purchase services currently provided by the Local Authority. In many cases we will simply repurchase them, but over time other providers may be found to be more attractive. Despite this we believe that there will be a financial advantage in becoming an Academy but we will not know for sure until we have the budgets from both the Local Authority and DfE and can compare them. Should increased funding be proven this can only be to the benefit of the school - students and staff alike.

As an Academy we would continue to operate our admissions code, welcoming all children of whatever ability – as we would be legally obliged to do anyway. In no sense would we become a Grammar school catering only for academically able.

You are quite correct in your assertion that the success of the school has been down to good leadership and good teaching (and I would naturally add good governance!!). The governors are absolutely committed to maintaining and if possible improving this position, which is why I don't really understand your concern about terms and conditions. There is absolutely no reason why the governors should wish to alter terms and conditions to the detriment of staff compared with other schools in the area – surely our best staff would simply leave over time, negating everything the school is trying to achieve.

Change always produces uncertainty and this can seem uncomfortable. However we are, as you say, a team at CHS, and I believe that becoming an Academy would help us better to "Achieve Success Together".

The results of the consultation, including this input from you, will be reported and discussed by the governors before any final decision is taken.

The separate point you make concerns the loss of continuous service and the position is as follows:

If a member of staff transfers to an academy they have a new employer which is not Cheshire East. If this member then rejoins Cheshire East at another school there will be a break in service. Cheshire East does have the discretion to ignore this break in service if they wish. This does not affect pensions but could affect some benefits such as entitlements to maternity benefits. This is the same position as a person moving to a school in another Local Authority such as Staffordshire, or indeed to another Academy of which there are a growing number in this area.

Yours sincerely

Mr R Hinckley
Chair of Governors.

Head: D. Hermitt BEng PGCE MEd NPQH
Chair of Governing Body: Mr R Hinckley **Clerk:** Mrs M Bennett
Tel: 01260 387000 **Fax:** 01260 275477
Email: enquiries @congleton.Cheshire.sch.uk