

BEDFORD
FREE SCHOOL

SERVING BEDFORD & KEMPSTON

**Consultation regarding the formation of a multi-academy
trust – summary of outcomes**

Context:

As part of the process of forming a multi-academy trust, the Trustees of Bedford & Kempston Free School Trust undertook to consult with staff, families and the wider community regarding their proposals.

The proposal to form the MAT was shared with families and the wider community on 7th October 2016, through a letter home, wider dissemination on social media and the local press, and some opinion was shared with us from this point.

A formal consultation period ran between 15th November 2016 and 11th January 2017. Stakeholders were informed through social media, email, newsletters home and on the school website.

The documents forming the basis of this consultation can be found at:

<http://bedfordfreeschool.co.uk/about/multi-academy-trust.php>

Comments from parents and the wider community:

A very small number of comments were received back from parents during the whole process, via the school Facebook page. One parent of students at BFS attended the drop-in sessions held as part of the process. These can be found in the appendix to this document.

Response to comments:

Our response to the comments can be found in the appendix.


Next steps:

Given the responses received Trustees are confident that there are no strong feelings against the proposals, and that the opinions shared can be usefully incorporated into their actions as they form the multi-academy trust.


Appendix – responses to our proposals

a) Comments via the BFS Facebook page

Will children attending [Elstow](#) School get priority places when applying for places at BFS?
Unlike · Reply · Message · 1 · 7 October 2016 at 18:41

 **Bedford Free School** No, that's not the plan. Whilst we hope lots of [Elstow](#) families will continue to choose us for their children, both [Elstow](#) & BFS are passionate about parents having as much school choice as possible, and so are committed to working with *all* local schools equally. Mark L.
Like · Reply · 3 · Commented on by Mark Lehain [?] · 7 October 2016 at 18:48 · Edited

Making attending [Elstow](#) one of the criteria for allocation of places wouldn't limit choices though. Not for [elstow](#) families, anyway. [Elstow](#) parents would still be free to apply wherever they wished, and their choices would not be limited by being giving priority at BFS. It would potentially limit choice for patents from other schools if you become oversubscribed, (as you are likely to, in the not too distant future). But what is the advantage for children of being in MAT with BFS during their primary years if they cannot necessarily continue that into their secondary years? Much of the appeal of BFS is that it is small, but as your reputation continues to grow there will be more competition for places.
Like · Reply · Message · 8 October 2016 at 01:05

 **Bedford Free School** - thanks for your comment, you make some really good points.
BFS is now over its PAN of 100 pupils in nearly every year (and well over this in our new Y7.) It might be that BFS Governors decided that [Elstow](#) School students should be given priority in the future, but that would need to be balanced against disadvantaging students elsewhere.
We're keen [Elstow](#) continues to liaise with all secondary schools so students & parents have maximum info & choices when they apply for a Y7 place.
As to the advantages for [Elstow](#) & BFS in forming a trust together... Can't do that justice here, but we'll outline our reasoning when we write out to families with consultation meeting times etc. Thanks again, Mark Lehain.
Like · Reply · Commented on by Mark Lehain [?] · 8 October 2016 at 09:46

Was there no parent consultation or was it just that no one thought parents would care??

Could this also therefore lead to B.F.S. having a sports field facility at last ie [Elstow School](#) & if so how will that have a knock on effect on [Elstow School](#) children??

Unlike · Reply · Message · 1 · 8 October 2016 at 00:52

Letter home today invites parents opinions and views - check the school bag, [BFS](#)! It's not clear who to address those comments to though.

Unlike · Reply · Message · 2 · 8 October 2016 at 01:07



Bedford Free School Good morning. Our announcement yesterday was the start of our consultations with families and the wider community. Hopefully everyone got their copy of the letter, and we've posted it online too so people can see it more widely.

I can say now that there is absolutely no way BFS students will suddenly start using the Elstow field! We already have access to great facilities: we hire the Bunyan Leisure Centre, athletics stadium, and the field at Kings Oak Primary School (which is only a few mins away from us by minibus.) Hopefully this answers your questions. Mark Lehain.

Like · Reply · Commented on by Mark Lehain [?] · 8 October 2016 at 09:22 · Edited



Bedford Free School we'll be arranging drop in sessions for people to come and ask any questions they have. We just need to finalise dates for these & then we'll let everyone know. We'll also confirm how people can pass on questions & comments to their respective schools too. Bear with us - should have it sorted early next week. Mark Lehain.

Like · Reply · Commented on by Mark Lehain [?] · 8 October 2016 at 09:26

When the seeds were set, why were no letters released then....

Worried about peoples opinions throwing a spanner in the works....

People say BFS is too small.... In tgat case why was the Abbey School site not used, modernized & then [Elstow School](#) & BFS combining would have seemed a natural progression...

I have NO problems with BFS before people think that, infact I have seen AMAZING results, especially in children where other schools had failed them... My problem is why the secrecy???

Like · Reply · See response · 8 October 2016 at 15:01



Bedford Free School I'm not sure that there has been any secrecy. We've announced that we're starting discussions, at the point that both sets of governors have agreed to do so. There was nothing to share before as we'd not decided anything.

This announcement is the start of the process, and families and others will be able to have their say as part of it. Mark Lehain.

Like · Reply · Commented on by Mark Lehain [?] · 8 October 2016 at 18:24

b) Questions from the drop in sessions

Questions from the parent who visited the drop-in session covered:

- i) *What are the main aims for forming the MAT?*
As per the consultation document published, and further refined in our Vision, Values & Operating Principles document
- ii) *What impact will it have on admissions criteria?*
None at all are planned – one of our operating principles is “parental choice” and we are adamant the MAT should not lead to a diminution of choice for families within and outside the Trust
- iii) *Who will be the new Trustees & Members?*
A combination of existing governors from both Elstow and BFS, supplemented by a few new people independent of either school, recruited to ensure Trustees and Members have enough capacity, and the right set of skills, to carry out their duties and ensure all the Trust’s schools are successful.
- iv) *Will back office functions be shared?*
Potentially this will happen over time – but the model adopted is one of maximum autonomy for individual high-performing schools, so it would only happen should schools decide it was a good thing to do, and would be in consultation with the Trust’s schools.
- v) *With Elstow & BFS linking, plus the proposed new secondary project in St Neots, how will you ensure you are not expanding too quickly?*
We believe that the Trust’s current plans are achievable with the capacity it already has – indeed we have only proposed the MAT and St Neots projects as we have already adjusted the leadership structure at BFS to create the capacity for them. Also, we believe that the changes will actually create capacity for further improvement in all its schools through efficiencies, synergies and other benefits that it has identified.
- vi) *Will the Trust be a new legal entity?*
No, the intention is for Elstow School to join the existing academy trust, and for the trust to adopt the structures of a multi-academy trust at the same time, with representation from both school at the Member and Trustee level, plus new, independent individuals to bolster the skillset and capacity.