

## Academy Questions

The following 36 questions came from 5 stakeholders. Responses from the Governing Body follow each one.

### Person 1

1. Why were no questions allowed from the floor, at the briefing evening?

**The purpose of the evening was to provide initial information and to give parents and carers time to consider and submit any questions.**

2. Why were parents not directly sent the letter of invite, why was it only accessible after going through hyperlinks or via the website?

**The invitation to parents followed the usual procedure used at Marriotts for communication with parents: the letter was on the website and a text message alerted parents.**

3. The Head stated teachers and staff terms and conditions would be protected, will they still receive increment on allowances and pay in line with the national pay grades, or will they only be protected at the point of transfer?

**We anticipate that all teachers will continue to have nationally agreed pay and conditions, just as in a Local Authority school.**

4. The CoG stated that many potential sponsors were considered, who were they? And what was the board of governor's reasons for rejecting them?

**A number of sponsors were considered and rejected for a variety of reasons. We wish Marriotts to remain a school for the community, with no selection. Each sponsor had its own ethos, and we wanted one to preserve the best of Marriotts yet help the school move forward. We are confident that The Meller Educational Trust, supported by the University of Hertfordshire, best provides what we need.**

5. Did any potential sponsors visit the school?

**David Meller (of The Meller Educational Trust) and Ross Renton (from the University of Hertfordshire) have visited the school.**

6. Were all potential sponsors, given access to the board of governors?

**The governing body selected the preferred potential sponsor, then asked David Meller and Ross Renton to speak to governors and answer their questions.**

7. Have any of the board of governors, been penalised for speaking out in opposition to the academy conversion?

**One governor has been suspended for six months for the following reasons:  
*The governor has acted in a way that is inconsistent with the school's ethos or religious character and has brought, or is likely to bring, the school, the governing body or his or her office of governor into disrepute.***

***The governor is in breach of his or her duty of confidentiality to the school, the staff or to the pupils.***

8. Did any of the sponsors or LA, apply any pressure on the board to select them?

**No. After discussions with the DfE, the Governors approached the potential sponsor, and the LA acted as a broker between the school and the potential sponsor. The LA has made it clear it will support the school fully if the decision is taken not to become a sponsored academy, but it has advised governors that the DfE has an expectation that all schools that are either in an Ofsted category or whose GCSE results are below floor targets will become sponsored academies.**

9. Will you consider making all minutes concerning academy status available?

**Apart from part 2 minutes (which always remain confidential), governing body minutes are in the public domain.**

10. Did the board of governors make the decision to convert to academy before the latest Ofsted inspection?

**Governors have examined the possibility of becoming an academy since being placed in an Ofsted category in February 2012. No decision has yet been taken.**

11. What date was the decision to convert actually made?

**No decision has yet been taken. The decision will be made after the consultation period has ended.**

12. What date was it decided to go with the selected sponsors?

**Governors decided their preferred potential sponsor on 13<sup>th</sup> Dec 2012**

13. Why has it taken so long to consult?

**The DfE must support the preferred sponsor and be convinced that the school's finances are sound. We were given permission by the DfE in July 2013, and began the consultation straight after the summer break.**

14. The CoG stated in a newsletter in March, that the board were in the early stages of investigating becoming an academy, at that time, had any decisions been taken by the board? Or had any letters to the DfE confirming that the board were proceeding with academy status been sent?

**No decisions had been made by the GB in March. The Newsletter was to keep parents informed.**

**No letters have been sent to the DfE confirming that the GB were proceeding with academy status as that decision has not been made.**

15. In an article in the Comet newspaper, it was alleged that the sponsors were on the interview panel for the new head, whilst the school was still under LA control, is this true?

**The preferred possible sponsor was not a member of the Headteacher interview panel and had no input into the selection. The candidates spent five minutes with the sponsor asking questions to ensure they were comfortable with his vision.**

16. If so, why was this allowed to happen, and were governors denied places on the interview panel to allow for the sponsors?

**See the answer to 15. The interview panel had the standard number of governors and LA representative, and the preferred possible sponsor was not a panel member.**

17. How many of the present board of governors are appointed or employed by the LA or one of the potential sponsors?

**3 governors are LA governors and one parent governor is employed by the LA. There are no governors who are employed or appointed by the Meller Educational Trust.**

18. Will the board of Governors in the new Academy be selected by the sponsors or appointed/elected as at present?

**It is anticipated that the current governors will remain if the school becomes an academy.**

**The process to appoint/elect any new governors will be decided by the sponsor.**

19. The head stated that there would be no selection for new students. Does that mean that Stevenage children will get first choice of Marriott's over children from outside the Borough?

**As an academy we would use the existing Local Authority admission procedures. There is no plan to select or give priority to students outside Stevenage. We wish to be a school in the community for the community.**

20. Why did so many teachers and Heads of department leave at the end of the summer term?

**In July 2013, 10 permanent teachers left, for a variety of reasons including promotion and retirement. In addition 5 temporary teachers came to the end of their contracts. None of these teachers left because of discussions over academy status.**

#### **Person 2**

1. Following on from yesterday's meeting, Herts CC HR, mentioned that staff would automatically be TUPEE'd over, my question is, are all staff guaranteed a job or will there be job cuts/redundancies before the Academy transfer?

**If Marriotts were to become an academy, the TUPE would be just the same as when staff moved to the PFI system when we moved sites in January 2013. Staff would have the same legal protection. It is possible that the academy might review staffing at some point in the future just as any school or academy regularly does, but the same legal protections apply. The Headteacher is about to undertake a staffing review for maximise efficiency and effectiveness, but this is not connected to any academy proposals and will take place whether or not governors agree to Marriotts becoming an academy.**

#### **Person 3**

1. Unlike some others schools that have converted to academies we have:
  - A brand new building
  - A brand new head
  - A robust School Improvement Plan
  - And we have just been through an Ofsted inspection

The school community has been experienced a lot of change and upheaval over the last two years. Perhaps a period of stability is needed now.

Bearing that in mind, and that there is nothing to stop us working in partnership with the university and others now, what is the perceived added value of this school converting at this time?

**The value in converting to sponsored academy status now would be in the additional support the proposed sponsor would bring and the close relationship and support the university is offering. When staff and governors visited Harefield Academy, it was clear that David Mellor not only provided business and work-related contacts simply not available to students in other schools, but also exceptional sporting contacts and opportunities. The University of Hertfordshire is also proposing to work with the Meller Educational Trust in a way simply not available to other schools. As a sponsored academy with this sponsor, Marriotts would preserve all it values and stands for. It would remain a school for the community serving the young people of Stevenage. The change to sponsored academy status would not bring upheaval but modest change which would help drive school improvement.**

#### **Person 4**

1. Our daughter has moved up to Marriotts this term, at no point during the selection process or presentations at the school was academy status ever mentioned - Why not? It seems obvious this has been on the table for some considerable time and may have been a material factor in school selection so should have been mentioned.

**At the time of the 2012 Open Evening Marriotts was at a very early stage of considering conversion to academy status. Almost every secondary which had not converted was also considering the option – and please remember that two-thirds of Hertfordshire's secondaries are already academies. Had we mentioned it at the 2012 Open Evening we could only have described it as an option.**

2. At the conclusion of the process should we consider that whatever decision is made is not right for our daughter's education what procedures are in place for transfer to another school?

**Although we would like your child to remain at Marriotts, if you feel it appropriate to remove your daughter from Marriotts, you should use the County admission system.**

3. The school seems to be making improvements by being "council run" - why would academy status be any better? Evidence suggests that many academies are not doing as well as local authority run schools.

**Hertfordshire is one of the country's highest achieving counties, and two-thirds of its secondaries are already academies.**

4. What exactly do the sponsors bring to the table?

**The preferred sponsor brings business, enterprise and sporting connections and opportunities for students that are available in few secondary schools. Moreover, the University of Hertfordshire plans to work with The Meller Trust to create opportunities in teaching, learning and access to higher education that do not exist in other schools. The combination of David Meller's business links and the University's academic strengths make this a very exciting development for the school.**

5. If the Academy route is the chosen path how will this affect the school curriculum and the school calendar?

**Any decisions about curriculum and the school calendar will ultimately be the responsibility of the sponsor but the preferred sponsor believes in giving the Headteacher autonomy to make school based decisions. The calendar particularly in terms of school holidays will remain broadly in line with all Stevenage schools as is the case for all Local Authority schools.**

6. Is the decision solely down to governors?

**Governors make the final decision as to whether to request an academy order is written, naming a preferred sponsor. However, under certain circumstances, the Secretary of State and Department for Education have the power to write an Academy Order and compel a school to become an academy with a sponsor they select.**

7. If the decision is made not to become an academy, is the status quo maintained or does something else happen? Conversely if the decision is to adopt academy status what happens next?

**If the decision is taken to remain a Local Authority school, we carry on as we are unless the DfE directs otherwise (as outlined above). If the decision is taken to adopt sponsored academy status the legal process begins and the conversion would take place probably in April or September 2014. It is the experience of students, parents and staff in almost every academy in Hertfordshire that in the period following conversion the only changes noticed were positive ones.**

8. If academy status is taken who has the greatest say in the direction of the school, the Board of Governors or the Sponsors?

**This very much depends on the sponsor, and that is why we have been so careful to select a preferred sponsor who wishes to retain the character of the school and retain a governing body. Legally, the Trust Board can direct the school, but that is not how other schools in the Meller Trust (e.g. Harefield and Hertswood Academies) operate.**

9. In Academy status who owns the "asset" (i.e. the school) is this still under HCC jurisdiction?

**The "asset" remains in the ownership of the Authority and a long-term lease will be granted to the Academy Trust.**

10. Is this just not simply a step to privatising the education system?

**Academies and their assets are not owned by individuals. However, the wider philosophical question is one to be taken up with politicians. Our role is to do the very**

**best for our young people regardless of the political context, and we believe the proposed sponsored academy conversion will accelerate school improvement.**

#### **Person 5**

1. Why were we not informed of the intention to become an academy at the Year 6 open evenings, or ahead of the secondary school application window, when it was made clear on the back of the Ofsted inspection in Early 2012 that this had to happen?

**At the time of the 2012 Open Evening Marriotts was at a very early stage of considering conversion to academy status. Almost every secondary which had not converted was also considering the option – and please remember that two-thirds of Hertfordshire's secondaries are already academies. Had we mentioned it at the 2012 Open Evening we could only have described it as an option.**

2. Academies are given the freedom to 'opt out' of the National Curriculum - to what standard are our children going to be taught to?

**Academies may opt out of the National Curriculum, but most do not. We have no plans to opt out, especially as our progress and attainment are measured in performance tables and by Ofsted in exactly the same way as those of non-academies.**

3. How is the success of the Academy going to be measured academically, and how will potential employers be able to correlate the educational standards?

**As stated above, academies are measured in exactly the same way as non-academies. The Department for Education, Ofsted and performance tables measure levels of progress in literacy and numeracy, GCSE, BTEC and A Level progress, value added etc.**

4. With the sponsor being chosen, who already has a commercial interest in other educational establishments, within what time-frame is he expecting a return on his investment, and if Marriotts continues to fail, what is the contingency plan should the investment be withdrawn?

**Marriotts is a rapidly improving school. The preferred sponsor has no commercial interest in other educational establishments. He and his Trust do not invest money or seek any financial return from being a sponsor. The Meller Trust is a charity, not a business, so there is no question of any investment being withdrawn. Two-thirds of the secondary schools in Hertfordshire are already academies, with many of the remaining third seeking academy status. These academies are funded by central government directly. Local Authority schools receive funding from the government via the Local Authority. Our preferred sponsor wishes to work with academies solely for the benefit of young people.**