

6th July 2020

To all Stakeholders
Helena Romanes School & Sixth Form Centre
Great Dunmow
Essex



SAFFRON
ACADEMY TRUST

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Ms Caroline Derbyshire

Dear Stakeholders,

I write to confirm that the stakeholder consultation regarding the proposal that Helena Romanes School joins Saffron Academy Trust has closed.

Over 2000 people received notice of the consultation, of which five responded with comments and/or questions. The five responses are provided in the appendix to this letter in full (see below), although they have been anonymised.

Some 'common' questions and comments were made in the responses we received, which I will respond to as follows:

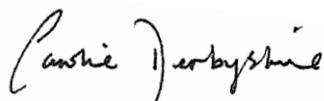
- HRS is already an academy, within a single academy trust.
- Within SAT, HRS will have a high level of autonomy over decision making under SAT's Scheme of Delegated Authority (SoDA). All Headteachers in SAT are part of the SAT Executive group, which meets regularly and makes decisions as a collective body.
- It will be visible that HRS is part of SAT: the Trust's logo will appear on signage and the school's letterhead, as well as the HRS logo. Being part of SAT will not interrupt the operational running of the school on a day to day basis.
- HRS will continue to receive its previous level of AWPU funding (Age Weighted Pupil Unit funding). Schools within SAT benefit from the Schools Capacity Fund (SCF) for capital projects.
- A 4.5% SAT Central Services charge will be applied, which will be off-set by the services provided centrally: i.e. finance, premises, school improvement and IT.
- The number of students in the Great Dunmow area is increasing. It is clear, therefore, that HRS has the capacity to sustain a successful sixth form. Saffron Walden County High School, which is one of the schools in SAT, currently has an Outstanding sixth form provision and will be working closely with the sixth form at HRS to improve its offer and outcomes.
- The TUPE consultation with school staff took place between 1st – 30th June 2020.
- The timing of the stakeholder consultation has not changed from the planning that began in 2019, prior to the pandemic. It has been an open process and was preceded by informal consultation with school staff and governors.
- The timing regarding joining SAT was at the request of the HRS Trustees.

- Saffron Academy Trust has an excellent record of school improvement. Since its schools have been part of the Trust, their Ofsted ratings have either improved or been maintained. All of our current schools are either Good or Outstanding. The school that is alluded to in one of the responses is not in Saffron Academy Trust.

Some further comments to do with the rationale and mutual benefits of joining SAT were already answered in the presentation that was published on the HRS website as part of the stakeholder consultation.

Following this consultation, HRS and SAT can see no reason not to continue with the proposal and look forward to HRS becoming part of our family of schools.

Yours sincerely,



Caroline Derbyshire
CEO Saffron Academy Trust

Appendix: Responses received to the Stakeholder Consultation

Response 1

1. What changes do you envisage happening to HRS as a result of this?
2. When will the TUPE consultation take place?
3. How will this affect the funding the school receives both short and long term? Will the trust decide the proportion for each school or will the AWPU always be shared equally between all schools?
4. Why is taking HRS on of interest to SWCH? What does it gain?
5. When might the leadership of HRS not be able to implement their decisions?

Response 2

Dear Saffron Academy,

In light of the letter received earlier this week, I would like to put forward some points regarding HRS joining the academy.

I would like to state first and foremost that I wholeheartedly do not agree with HRS joining the academy.

It is not in the best interests of the children to be part of an academy, and they are what the school is open for. With experience in education and successful business, I have noticed that those leading the academies are often not experienced enough in either the education or business side and therefore, this fails the academy and these failures to succeed are often hidden from the general public.

An example of this might be seen through a school in the Braintree area, which for years was rated outstanding by Ofsted, became part of an academy and was lead by someone who was head of an academy group, but has most recently found itself with an Ofsted rating of 'notice to improve', narrowly missing special measures, and has now had to find new leadership. This is a more local example of what academies appear to do across the country. The change of leadership due to the

failure in successful Ofsted inspection means the children have to, yet again, get used to a new leader within their school.

The above example does not take the children and their education, for whom schools are open for, into account but merely ignores the most important part of their reason for being open and instead is concerned with successful running of a business.

Independent schooling is something which people can pay quite a sum of money for, and where there are those state schools who are still independent of academies, they have a fantastic opportunity to sell themselves as an independent school who take pride in themselves and their students. They have the ability to make decisions for the students in front of them rather than concerning themselves with a group of students within an academy - these decisions may not always be suitable for those students in the individual schools but still have to be adhered to

Education is not a business but a chance to enhance our young people's knowledge and understanding of the world and equip them with life skills. Unfortunately, all too often, academies forget these basics of education and therefore the young people suffer - the schools become an exam factory which leads to children not knowing who they are at the end of their education.

In addition to this there is a lack of transparency of the governance of the academy trusts. Executive pay awards are not controlled by the education skills funding agency, simply by the groups themselves, which has led to some quite scandalous pay awards to leadership groups to the detriment of the fabric of school buildings, teaching and learning resources, and ultimately impact negatively on children's learning.

On another note, currently if I need support for my child or need to raise a concern, the school has very good processes in place and I know who to turn to and there is a personal approach. Once part of an academy, these personal touches disappear as staff are used across academies and the relationships with children dwindle.

Running an independent state school is without doubt challenging with the funding implications they face, but this should not be the reason to join an academy. There are so many ways for schools to make the most of the skill set and generosity of the local community - at no point have I, as both a local business owner and parent, been asked to contribute to the school either through financial or offering free education sessions within my skill set. This is where independent schools who charge fees make the best of their students and families and there is no reason why local state schools cannot ask the same of parents and local businesses.

Simply because the growing trend is to be part of an academy does not mean it is right for every school. In fact, this is an opportunity for any independent state schools to sell themselves since it is an more unique 'selling' point when encouraging prospective parents and students visit.

I am saddened that HRS has even considered entering an academy and it will be a sad loss to the town.

Having said all of the above, I am well aware how these things work and feel all that I have mentioned is useless since this is most likely a done deal - the "consultation" process is only there because it is compulsory rather than a chance for people to get their message across.

I hope you respect my honest and open opinions - they have come from the heart and are genuinely felt.

Response 3

I have two different areas of concern where I would like to raise questions with regard to the potential transfer of HRS to the SAT.

Firstly, I have a child in HRS Year XX, who is possibly planning to stay at HRS for 6th Form. My questions here are around the intentions of SAT towards the HRS 6th Form:-

- Noting that the HRS 6th Form has had low pupil headcount for a number of years (not least as a chunk of HRS' Year 11 cohort has moved to SWCHS rather than stay at HRS for several successive years), does SAT intend to maintain the HRS 6th Form in its current form (subject offerings etc) or at all?
- If the HRS 6th Form is retained, will it be entirely standalone from the SWCHS 6th Form, or will there be lessons on both the HRS & SWCHS sites?
- Will the subject offerings remain unchanged?
- Will there be any other operational impacts e.g. cover teachers from SWCHS / AHA, exchanging subject teachers between HRS / SWCH / AHA etc?

Secondly, I would like to understand the financial impact on HRS & its pupils. How would the spend per HRS pupil compare within the SAT vs outside it?

Response 4

I currently have a child in year XX at Helena Romanes and my younger child is due to start in September 2020.

The consultation we feel as parents has come at the wrong time, we are currently in the grips of a worldwide pandemic. There are no opportunities to discuss and ask questions of the leadership teams involved. An email notification and consultation process although done with the best intentions is not ideal or as transparent as parents we would expect. We know nothing of the other schools or teams involved in this change. Meetings are not possible due to Covid-19 restrictions and the process although 3 weeks is at a time that no one is able to talk, research or thoroughly look into these proposals.

Why is this academy transfer needed?

Why now?

Are parents actually involved? Or is this consultation a tick box exercise at a time we have no chance or choice to approach those in charge of this proposal.

What are the opportunities spoken about in the email?

Why does Helena Romanes need to join other schools? What is the ultimate goal?

If this is going to be transparent a lot more information is needed not just what the leadership teams wish us to know.

Again I would like to say that this is really bad timing. The timing should be considered to give all parents the opportunity to discuss openly the concerns they have. An email response although suited to the current climate is not a transparent and fair approach.

Response 5

I am writing to give my perspective on the letter issued today on the proposed transfer of HRS into the Saffron Academy. Having already encountered two of my children's schools converting to an academy in a MAT, I feel like the consultation period is of limited value, as it would appear that the decision in both cases had already been taken before informing the families affected. However I feel compelled to voice my opinion that in this case it really does demonstrate a lack of will to engage with the children and their families. How can you offer any kind of open and public discussion under the current circumstances?

I don't believe that publishing any comments you receive offers the relevant opportunity to scrutinise and question the decisions that are being made. If I were a parent of a child in HRS I would feel very disgruntled at the attempt to push this move through at such a difficult time.