

The academies programme

Update 3 - November 2008

A message from the Director of Education and Children's Services

In April, Richmond upon Thames Council circulated a leaflet to all of the parents of pupils at Hampton Community College (HCC), Whitton School and Shene School to explain what the academies programme is, and give information about the preferred sponsors (Kunskapsskolan for HCC and Whitton, and Edutrust for Shene) and the next stages of the process. The leaflet was also sent to the parents of Year 6 primary schools that feed into the three schools.

In June, we issued a second update about the progress we had made at that point. We also sought the views of parents and other local people on what were then draft Expression of Interest documents, which set out the sponsors' vision for each academy and how they will operate. That view-gathering exercise helped to inform the next stage of the academies process, during which formal consultation will take place.

This third update explains what has happened since then, what the next stage of the process will involve, and gives answers to some of the questions you have asked so far.

Nick Whitfield

Director of Education and Children's Services

What has happened since June?

We have continued to work with the sponsors and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to plan how the academies will be run.

The Expression of Interest documents were considered by the Council's Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 9 September and agreed by Cabinet on 22 September. At both meetings, local people were able to give their views on the way forward.

We are now waiting for Jim Knight, the Minister who has taken on responsibility for the academies programme, to approve the Expressions of Interest, so that we can proceed to the next stage of the process: Feasibility. We expect him to sign off the documents in December.

What will happen in the Feasibility stage?

During Feasibility, detailed planning and design of the academies will take place, including the new buildings and, crucially, the curriculum. For example, we will work out, and share with local parents, the detail of how the Kunskapsskolan teaching methods can be adapted to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum. Parents will then be able to judge for themselves how children's learning will be different from what is currently being offered.

We will also undertake thorough consultation, involving public meetings and the issuing of statutory notices, during this stage. We are hoping that Feasibility will be completed later in 2009. Further ministerial approval is then required before implementation of the academies may begin.

The earliest that any of the three proposed academies may open is September 2009, and decisions as to whether that is achievable will be taken as soon as possible during the Feasibility stage.

Your questions and comments

General comments

You said: Academies are being overstated and alternatives are being ignored.

Our reply:

We have considered the main alternative of the schools continuing as they are at present, but we believe that the resources that the sponsors can provide would be preferable. In the past we have seen improvements at each of the schools that have not been sustained. Also, capital funding to expand the schools will not be available for many years unless they become academies.

You asked: How will the Council ensure that the decisions regarding the academies will be correct and not taken in haste?

Our reply:

We will not be rushed into opening any of the proposed academies, as we are fully aware of the importance of getting them right. Together with the sponsors, the DCSF and the schools, we will use programme and project management methods to design the detail of the academies.

The timescales will be agreed during the Feasibility stage and will be dependent on the amount of work needed to resolve issues regarding buildings, curriculum, staffing and so on.

We will not proceed to the Implementation stage until we are sure that all outstanding issues have been resolved and we are absolutely confident that the academies are in the best interests of local children.

We share local parents' wishes for the three schools to be improved to the point that excellent standards are not only achieved but sustained year-on-year, as they are at other secondary schools within the borough. We are therefore keen to get the detail absolutely right before we hand the schools over to the sponsors.

You asked: How were the sponsors chosen?

Our reply:

The sponsors were chosen from a shortlist of potential sponsors provided by the DCSF. Each potential sponsor was judged on how their vision would meet the requirements of the schools concerned, and how they would bring about the changes needed to improve educational standards to make the schools the natural preference for local parents. Edutrust and Kunskapsskolan were selected for the skills and innovative approaches they would provide to make that much-needed sustained improvement a reality.

General comments

You asked: Could a change of leadership be a risk?

Our reply:

Changing the leadership in any school can be a risk. During the Feasibility stage we will work closely with the sponsors and the schools' current management teams to ensure that the leadership of the academies, including the roles of the principals, will be able to achieve the improvement in standards required to transform the schools into models of excellence.

You asked: Will there be sixth form provision?

Our reply:

We will explore the possibility of sixth form provision in the Feasibility stage – whether it is viable in light of current and projected demand, and, if there is sufficient demand, how it will be delivered. Those decisions will take into account the post-16 provision that is already available locally.

You asked: What provision for special educational needs (SEN) will there be in the academies?

Our reply:

The local authority will shortly be consulting on a new strategy for SEN provision and the conclusions drawn from that process will need to fit requirements of the academy process and vice versa. The strategy will include consideration of the provision at Whitton Gateway at Whitton School, currently used for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders, and at Richmond House at Hampton Community College, currently used for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social development needs. It should be noted that the academies have to abide by the SEN Code of Practice in the same way that state-maintained schools must do.

You asked: How will the 2009 intake be affected by educational changes and building works?

Our reply:

There will inevitably be slight disruption to pupils, but it is important to keep this to a minimum. In the first year of the academies' existence, it is likely that the Kunskapsskolan method of personalised learning will be introduced only for Year 7 pupils. Further improvements in standards will inevitably be gradual. Building work will largely take place during the holidays and will be very carefully managed to minimise disruption to the pupils and staff.

Hampton Community College

You asked: HCC's results have improved in the last two years, so why does it need to become an academy?

Our reply:

HCC was improving, but still underperforming with 43% of pupils attaining 5 A*-Cs in 2007, where the national average was 60.9%. Although there was improvement in 2008, we have seen similar improvements in the past which have not been sustained. We feel that the academy route will provide consistently excellent improvements in standards.

Whitton School

You asked: Whitton school was not failing, has never been in special measures, and its value-added rating showed it to be performing on a level with other Richmond Borough schools, so why does the Council feel that the academy route is right?

Our reply:

Whitton was not a failing school, but was under-performing with 41% of pupils attaining 5 A*-Cs in 2007, where the national average was 60.9%. Although there was improvement in 2008, we have seen similar improvements in the past which have not been sustained. We feel that the academy route will provide consistently excellent improvements in standards.

Kunskapsskolan

You asked: The Kunskapsskolan Expression of Interest represents a very broad statement of intent, but how will it be realised?

Our reply:

The Expressions of Interest are required to be only high-level statements, as the detailed design (of the buildings, curriculum and so on) will be developed during the Feasibility stage of the process. We share residents' concerns that the detail will have to be worked out very carefully, and we will not sign the funding agreement and proceed to implementation stage, unless we are satisfied that the concerns can be resolved.

Kunskapsskolan

You asked: Can the Kunskapsskolan learning model translate to a large community school?

Our reply:

This is a vital issue which will be addressed during the Feasibility stage. Kunskapsskolan, like any other sponsor of an academy, has to meet the needs of the National Curriculum and we will work closely with it, the school leadership teams and Kent County Council (in whose area Kunskapsskolan will be also be sponsoring an academy) to ensure this happens.

You asked: In a Kunskapsskolan school, is there a place for a teacher to work with a group of students throughout the year?

Our reply:

We have been to Sweden to view the Kunskapsskolan approach to teaching, and lessons are still taught in classes, as with the more traditional approach. There is an emphasis on mentoring, where pupils are encouraged to set their own targets, but support is always provided, thereby increasing the creativity of the pupils.

You asked: Does Kunskapsskolan use unproven methods?

Our reply:

Kunskapsskolan manages a number of schools in Sweden which, in most cases, are the most successful schools in the area they serve. The DCSF would not have permitted it to join the list of potential sponsors unless it was fully confident that Kunskapsskolan has the ability and resources to manage academies successfully.

You asked: Does the fact that Kunskapsskolan is sponsoring both the Hampton and Whitton academies mean that there is reduced local choice for parents?

Our reply:

We believe that Kunskapsskolan will improve the schools further so that parents in each of the two areas will have a natural first preference school on their doorstep.

Edutrust and Shene School

You asked: Does Shene School need to be closed and have a fresh start?

Our reply:

We are confident that Edutrust will provide a fresh direction for Shene, as if it were a brand-new school.

You asked: What is Edutrust's vision?

Our reply:

Edutrust's vision for the Shene academy is based on traditional educational values, drawing on its considerable expertise and experience. We will ensure that Edutrust outline its vision clearly throughout the development of the Shene academy.

You asked: At Shene School, will all this invested money benefit children from outside the borough?

Our reply:

Although currently many out-borough residents prefer Shene School for their children instead of their local schools, the academies programme will aim to raise educational standards substantially, leading to Shene School becoming the school of preference for Richmond Borough parents living in Barnes, East Sheen, Kew and Mortlake.

You asked: Is it right that Edutrust withdrew as the sponsor of another school?

Our reply:

Edutrust decided to withdraw from a school in Bradford once it became clear to it that the local community wanted the proposed academy to be an Islamic faith school.

You asked: Does Edutrust have a religious stance?

Our reply:

No. Edutrust has academies in a range of areas, attracting parents from many different backgrounds and faiths.

Communication

You asked: Why did the Council not consult thoroughly during the Expression of Interest stage?

Our reply:

We carried out an initial view-finding exercise during the Expression of Interest stage. The DCSF requires proper consultation on academies to take place during the Feasibility stage. We will therefore soon be consulting fully with the local community so that they will be able to make known their views regarding the design of the academies.

The results of the initial view-finding exercise showed that 73% of the replies received from stakeholders supported Kunschapsskolan's vision for the Hampton and Whitton academies, and 77% supported Edutrust's vision for the Shene academy. We are encouraged by this, but are mindful that a significant proportion of parents need to be convinced. We therefore aim to provide parents with detailed design information that will convince them that each academy will be a great success and lead to outstanding educational standards.

Public meeting dates

In conjunction with the sponsors, we will be holding a series of public meetings in the new year. The dates, times and venues of those meetings will be arranged and publicised in due course. We will circulate another leaflet in January to give you further details of the consultation process and an update on progress in general.

Information will also be posted on our website at www.richmond.gov.uk/academies
You can sign up here for regular email updates on progress.

For more information, please contact:

Matthew Paul

Deputy Head of Commissioning, Delivery and Service Improvement
Education and Children's Services

Regal House

London Road

Twickenham

TW1 3QB

Email: m.paul@richmond.gov.uk

Phone: 020 8891 7588

Please contact us if you need this leaflet in Braille, large print, on audio tape or in another language.

Phone: 020 8891 7500 Minicom: 020 8891 7539.

If you have difficulty understanding this leaflet please visit reception between 9.00am - 5.00pm at the address below, where we can arrange a telephone interpreting service.

إذا كانت لديك صعوبة في فهم هذا المنشور، فنرجو زيارة الإستقبال في العنوان العنصرى أثناء حديث بإمكاننا أن نرتب لخدمة ترجمة شفوية هاتفية.

Arabic

اگر در فهمیدن این نشریه مشکلی دارید لطفاً به میز پذیرش در آدرس قید شده در زیر مراجعه نمایند تا ترتیب ترجمه تلفنی برایشان فراهم آورده شود.

Farsi

ਜੇਕਰ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਸ ਪੱਤੇ ਨੂੰ ਸਮਝਣ ਵਿੱਚ ਮੁਸ਼ਕਲ ਪੇਸ਼ ਆਉਂਦੀ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਹੇਠਾਂ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਗਏ ਪਤੇ ਉੱਪਰ ਰਿਸੈਪਸ਼ਨ 'ਤੇ ਆਉਂ ਜਿੱਥੇ ਅਸੀਂ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਤੇ ਗੱਲਬਾਤ ਕਰਨ ਲਈ ਇੰਟਰਪ੍ਰਿਟਰ ਦਾ ਪ੍ਰਬੰਧ ਕਰ ਸਕਦੇ ਹਾਂ।

Punjabi

**Education and Children's Services, London Borough of Richmond upon Thames,
Regal House, London Road, Twickenham, TW1 3QB**