



**The Challenge Academy Trust
(TCAT)
Consultation Response**



1) THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

A consultation document was prepared by the Headteachers, Principals and Chairs of Governors of:

- Beamont Collegiate Academy
- Bridgewater High School
- Great Sankey Primary School
- Penketh High School
- Penketh South Primary School
- Priestley College
- Sir Thomas Boteler Church of England High School

The document was launched on 12 January 2017 with the consultation closing at noon on 9 February.

Each school/college wrote a bespoke letter to parents and pupils/students setting out their current status and how this would change if they joined The Challenge Academy Trust (TCAT).

Parents and pupils/students were informed about the consultation via the letters and in many cases texts were also sent home. Letters were also emailed to most parents.

At Priestley students were also informed via the College student home page on the computer network.

Letters and the consultation document were placed on each school/college website and links also placed on the TCAT website.

The Warrington Guardian carried an extensive piece on the consultation in the edition published on Thursday 12 January and on their website.

Staff briefings were held in each school/college between the 20 and 26 January and additional sessions were provided for evening staff at Priestley on the 23 and 30 January.

Open consultation events were held at 7.00pm at Bridgewater High School on 23 January and at Great Sankey Primary School on 30 January. These were attended by 61 people including parents, staff, governors and Trade Union representatives together with other interested parties.

Consultation letters were also distributed to over 150 external stakeholders including:

- 22 Secondary local Headteachers
- 66 Primary local Headteachers
- Local MPs
- Local Councillors and officials
- Trade Union representatives
- Governors of each school/college subject to the consultation

People were able to respond to the document via the online response form, a hard copy of the response form, letter or email.

A pupil/student consultation event was held at Warrington Town Hall on 2 February. This was attended by 29 young people representing each School or College Council.



2) CONSULTATION RESPONSES:

There were a total of 323 responses received. This included 318 formal responses which answered the specific question "Do you support the proposal?" and 5 that did not formally answer the question. At the first consultation event it was suggested that an undecided option should be added and this was then included in the later printed versions and on the websites.

The breakdown of responses received is as follows:



Category of respondent	% supporting the proposal	% opposed	% undecided
School/College staff	89%	1%	9%
Parents/Carers	61%	20%	19%
Pupils/Students	75%	19%	6%
Other	100%		
Total	77%	14%	9%



3) POINTS/QUESTIONS RAISED REQUIRING A RESPONSE NOT ALREADY COVERED BY THE FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION SECTION IN THE CONSULTATION DOCUMENT.

Those who positively supported the proposals pointed out the following:

- Three people commented on the opportunities the Trust would create for the sharing of good practice across the schools and college
- Four people commented on how the plans would enable schools and the college to effectively collaborate and work to improve the outcomes for all young people
- Three people saw this as an exciting opportunity for collaboration whilst also ensuring each school and college was able to maintain its own individual ethos, values and identity
- Two people saw it as an exciting time for staff, pupils and parents by creating an effective partnership



Other points made were:

- It will allow for effective school to school support
- It makes good educational sense and the economies of scale will be beneficial
- It will have a positive effect on all aspects of school life for students
- A Head Teacher of a local Special School commented that it would strengthen provision across Warrington whilst also enabling positive working relationships to be maintained with their school
- Staff commented that it will be interesting to get experience of working with other schools
- It would help to provide continuity for the children
- One observer who attended one of the public consultation events commented on how impressed they were with the commitment of all those involved in developing the plans
- Some spoke about the excellent opportunities to raise aspirations and achievement
- One parent who is also a member of staff in one of the schools said that in both respects they fully supported the plans
- A parent who attended a consultation event commented that it was reassuring to hear the schools commitment to children with different needs such as autism

- One observer said that the proposals were detailed and well thought out and that it was evident that children were at the heart of the plans

Whilst students noted:

- It would be beneficial for students which will mean a better quality of learning for the next generation
- Three pointed to the saving of money which would benefit each organisation
- It will give students great opportunities and the resources they need to succeed. It will also give students a chance to meet new people.
- A student thought the plans will improve schools around Warrington
- Two said it would make schools better
- One commented that it sounds like a great idea to expand our and other children's learning
- Another suggested that it sounds like it will be exciting and more helpful for the future

A local employer commented that to develop a collaborative dynamic partnership between pupil centred organisations in an extremely challenging climate will provide invaluable opportunities and improve the sustainability of each and every one of the organisations.





exists across the majority of secondary schools is welcomed and the local authority is supportive of this proposal.

It is evident that the MAT intends to continue to work with other schools outside of TCAT either by providing support or by learning from best practice approaches in order to build capacity across the Warrington Education System as a whole.

The authority is also supportive of an all phase approach to the MAT and the benefits this brings in relation to shared accountability for a child/ young person's education from 3 to 18. It is assumed that you will be willing to share any exciting new approaches to cross phase working including development of a continuous curriculum for the benefit of other schools.

It is good to see that this cross phase approach has not extended though to admissions arrangements which might impact negatively on specific groups of the local community, which may for a variety of reasons choose not to join TCAT.

The local authority is aware, and indeed has supported the application to establish a cross phase Teaching School within TCAT.

The local authority assumes that there will be significant opportunity to develop future leaders from within TCAT but also wonders what the intentions may be in terms of attracting talented professionals from outside the borough too.

Inclusion and inclusive practice is currently a strong theme that runs across all schools and the College included in TCAT and the local authority hope that each institution will continue to play a significant role in partnership with the local authority in maintaining a high quality offer for learners with special education needs and disabilities and vulnerable groups across the town, through continued participation in key groups.

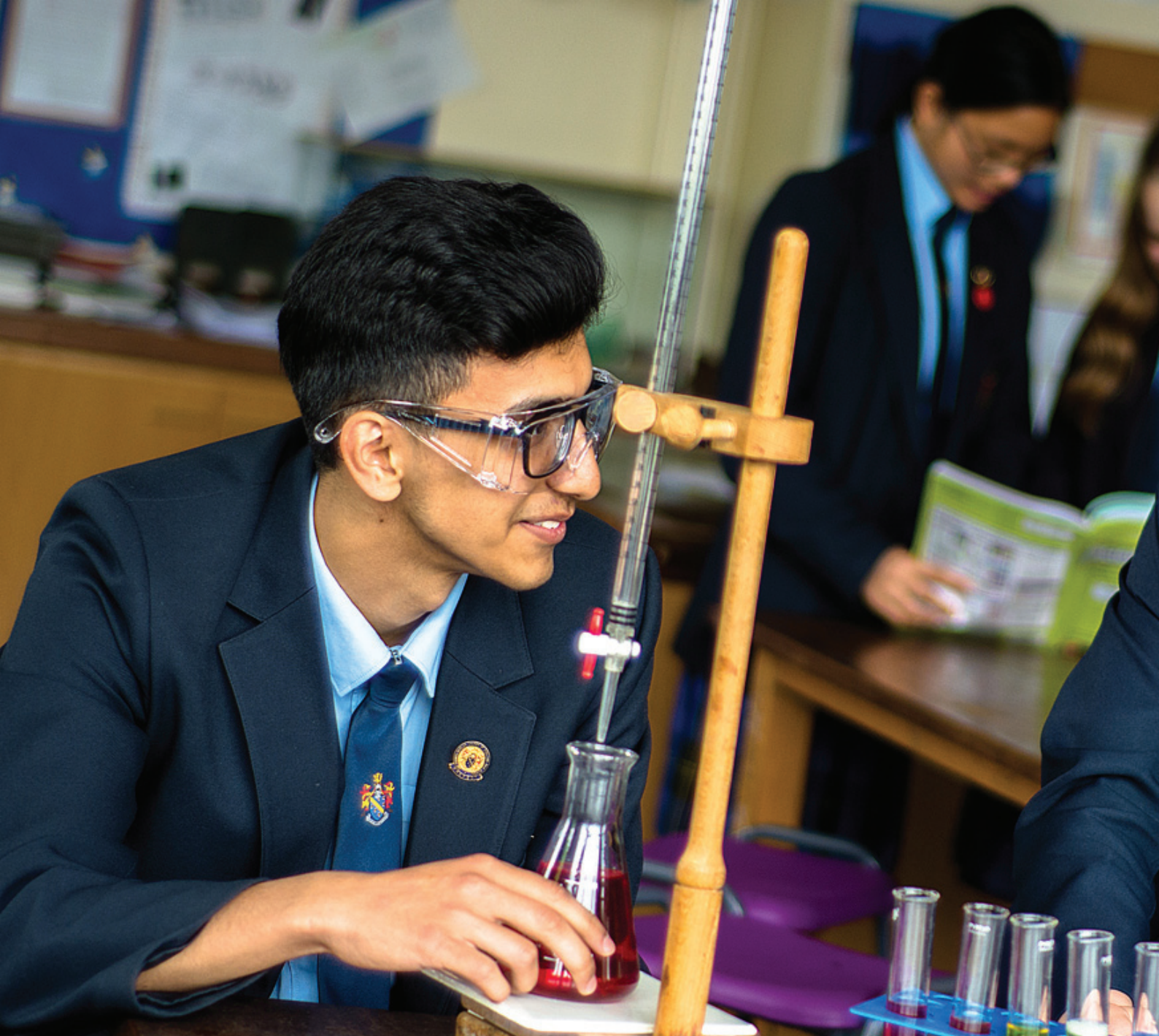
Finally, Warrington Borough Council would like to wish you and all schools involved success with this exciting and innovative proposal.



THE INTERIM DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION COMMENTED

The proposal to establish a Multi Academy Trust which builds on the excellent collaboration that





The following questions/concerns/issues were raised during the consultation process and our response to point is given:

FROM PARENTS:

One parent was concerned that if the change occurred mid-academic year there would be a negative impact to their son's and other students' teaching at what is a critical time in their studies.

Response: Moving to become an academy or joining a Multi Academy Trust is not like a restructuring or merger process where staff may be required to reapply for their roles in the new organisation. There will be no changes to

teaching or business support staffing made as a result of any school or college becoming an academy and/or by them joining TCAT. Teaching in each organisation will not be disrupted in any organisation as a result of this process.

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A parent raised concerns relating to their experience working in another Multi Academy Trust where they felt systems were bureaucratic and the Principals had little autonomy to make decisions. They also felt that any supposed benefits would not be realised as money would be spent on the pay of top level management.





Response: TCAT is committed to the principle of earned autonomy where schemes of delegation will ensure local Headteachers/Principals and Governing Bodies will retain responsibility for the day to day running of each school/college where there are no concerns about performance and/or financial management. The TCAT Executive Team will consist of the current Headteachers/Principals with central costs kept to a minimum.

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One parent was concerned that all members of TCAT would be responsible for the debts/liabilities of each of its members.

Response: As the MAT will be one legal entity, it will not be possible to provide an absolute guarantee that there will not be financial contagion between academies within the group. This is because it is not legally possible to completely ring-fence the academies' budgets if one of the academies got into financial difficulty.

However, we will ensure that robust financial procedures are put in place to ensure that any issue is spotted early and acted upon decisively to minimise any risk. The MAT will also be heavily regulated by the EFA, who have extensive powers to prevent financial issues occurring and, in extreme cases, transfer financially risky academies out of the Trust.

The partner schools are in the process of carrying out a thorough due diligence process on each other's finances. Whilst there cannot be an absolute guarantee that there will not be issues in the future, the trustees of the MAT and individual institutions will only go ahead with the proposal if they are confident that the financial health of the MAT is secure.

Charity law states that the trustees must ultimately spend the money for the purpose it was given. Therefore, if the trust is seen to be spending money which was given to Academy A for the purpose of propping up Academy B, and there isn't a short to medium term plan to repay that money, then the trustees would be exposed to claims of misspending public funds.

We therefore believe the risk of financial contagion to be minimal.





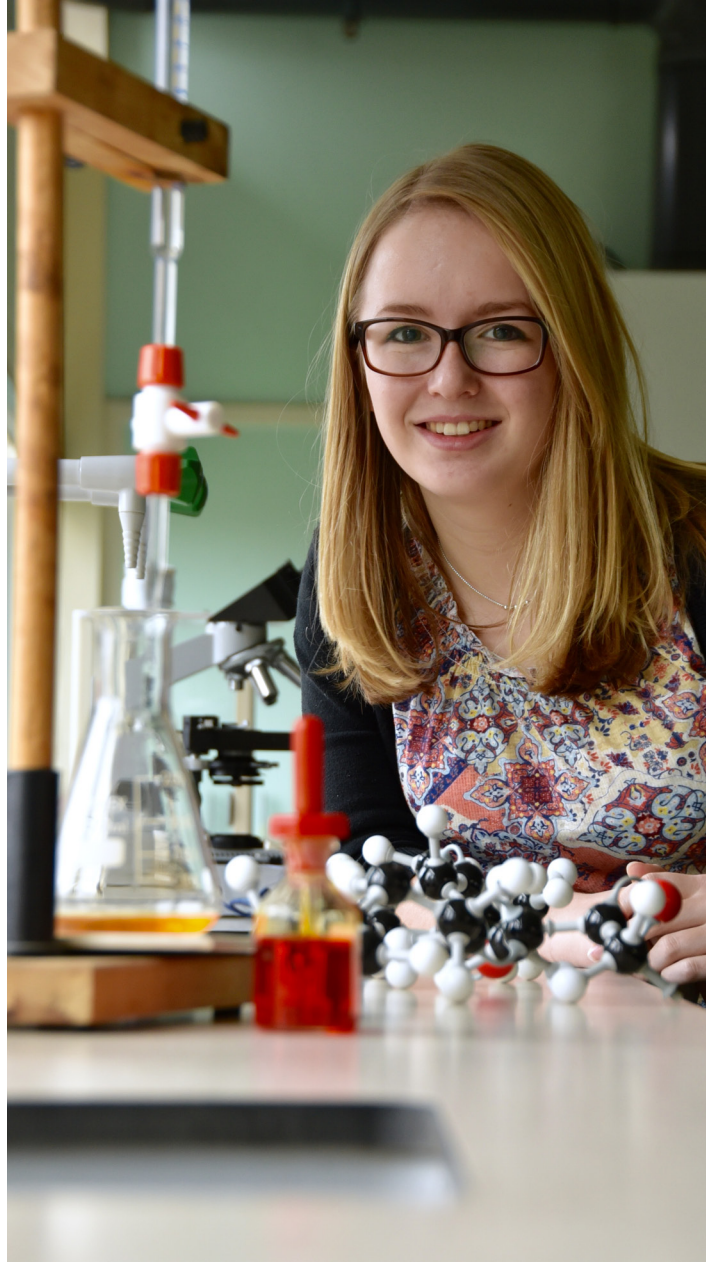
A parent was concerned that by coming together in Multi Academy Trust this might change the demographics in the schools. They were also concerned that schools' reputations could be put at risk.

Response: There is no intention to change admissions arrangements and therefore there will be no change to the demographics in each school or college as a result of them joining the MAT. Each school/college will continue to be managed as a separate entity and the key driver for the establishment of the Trust is to ensure all pupils/students benefit from the very highest standards of education.

One parent raised a number of questions associated with the concept of the proposal being a merger including are the values of each organisation aligned, what benefits is each school/college bringing to the Trust and how will it free up resources?

Response: Creating a MAT is not like a merger or takeover as although there is one funding agreement and overarching Board of Trustees each organisation will set its own budget and continue to retain its own Governing Body. Through the due diligence process the strengths and areas for development of each organisation have and continue to be assessed and the Governing Bodies are clear that each school/college is bringing strengths and areas of expertise to the Trust that will benefit the whole Trust.





A parent was concerned that if the Trust were to grow it would be hard to ensure consistent systems across the Trust.

Response: Any growth of the Trust would be carefully managed and only allowed if the Trust is confident that new organisations would be a good match for the Trust and that it has the capacity to take on additional schools. Many Trusts successfully organise schools in clusters to ensure high standards are maintained across a Trust.

A parent felt that the decision had already been made without parents being notified they also believed that many people who will be affected have not been notified.

Response: A significant amount of work had to be undertaken to ensure proposals were robust before the consultation could take place. This included an extensive process of due diligence undertaken by managers and Governors, including parent Governors from each institution. The consultation is a genuine opportunity for all to raise their points prior to Governing Bodies making final decisions on the proposals. This document clearly sets out the strategy that was used to ensure the consultation reached everyone likely to have a view and/or be impacted on by the proposal.



A couple of parents raised the point that this looks like a cost cutting exercise and that the education of the pupils/students should be a priority.

Response: The governors and leaders of each organisation seeking to join the Trust are clear that the main motivation for the development of the Trust is to improve the education and outcomes for all young people. At a time when all schools and colleges are facing significant financial pressures it is right that opportunities are taken to make efficiencies to prioritise investment in teaching and learning.

A parent thought that some of the potential savings identified could be delivered via the Local Authority.

Response: It is only by achieving academy status and by coming together in a MAT that joint purchasing of certain services can be secured and for Priestley it is only by becoming an academy that VAT savings can be generated. The Government White Paper for the next 5 years "Education Excellence Everywhere" clearly states that by the end of 2020 all schools will be academies and that by 2022 local authorities will no longer maintain schools. It also points out that MATs are the only structures which formally bring together leadership,





autonomy, funding and accountability across a group of academies in an enduring way, and are the best long term formal arrangement for stronger school to school support.

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One parent was concerned that pupils attending primary schools in the MAT would be required to progress to secondary schools within the MAT.

Response: TCAT is not in favour of a system that requires pupils/students to progress to schools and colleges simply because they are in the same MAT. Schools and colleges within TCAT hope to learn from each other to ensure transition arrangements are positively enhanced, but not at the expense of parental/student choice.

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FROM STAFF

One member of staff was concerned about the long term implications the creation of TCAT could have on their job.

Response: At a time of significant reductions in budgets no one can give a guarantee that jobs and roles won't change over the lifetime of this Parliament; however Governors, managers and trade unions are fully committed to ensuring that the conditions of service of all employees will be transferred and protected through TUPE.

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A member of staff enquired if there was a difference from being in a MAT to a school under Local Authority control, and what would happen when key leaders move on.

Response: A MAT's sole priority is education and Local Authorities are no longer in a position to sustain significant school improvement functions. The MAT is being set up with clear lines of accountability and is not reliant on one or two individuals. This means that individual schools and colleges will be less vulnerable if key individuals move on. TCAT aims to build leadership capacity which in turn will provide continuity when leaders move on.





FROM PUPILS/STUDENTS

The majority of these questions were raised during the pupil/student consultation event.

How will you manage all the schools?

Response: Each Headteacher/Principal will still run their school/college as they do now alongside their Governing Body. The Central Executive team will meet to work together to improve their own institutions performance and also with their own Governors, the Trustees and Members. There will be a Chief Executive Officer who will answer to the Board of Trustees and the Regional Schools Commissioner.

Would students still have a voice on the Governing Body at Priestley and other schools?

Response: Yes Priestley plans to have two student representatives at its Governing Body meetings. If other schools have student representatives too we are sure this will remain the same.

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Will we have a finance officer?

Response: There will be a Finance Director who will work with finance managers/officers in each school/college to ensure money goes back into each school/college and first and foremost to the pupils/students.



Would there be any redundancies for staff if we are sharing teaching?

Response: There will be no redundancies due to the formation of TCAT, and teachers will not be "shared" unless their specific job role requires it.

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Would the schools and college lose their individual identity?

Response: One of the core values of TCAT is to allow each school and college to maintain its own identity and ethos and links to its local communities through a local Governing Body.



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Will private student data be shared with others in the Trust?

Response: No as each school/college will abide by data protection regulations, though as now we all have a responsibility to share some data with government agencies and the local authority. We also have certain responsibilities relating to safeguarding matters.

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This is a time consuming process could Headteachers and Principals take their eye off of the ball?

Response: Yes it is time consuming but each organisation has worked to ensure that the focus remains the success of those pupils and students currently in their care. The formation of TCAT will deliver further improvements for all pupils and students.



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Is TCAT planning on expanding in the future with other schools?

Response: Over time we anticipate that a number of additional schools will seek to join TCAT but this will only happen after an extensive period of due diligence and if the Trustees and Executive team believe it is in the best interest of the TCAT organisations.



Would we have the opportunities to meet up with other students more often, like in competitions or other events?

Response: Yes all of the schools and colleges are keen to ensure students from across the Trust have opportunities to meet and take part in jointly organised activities and events such as music performance and sport enrichments.

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If there's going to be 6000 students, to make sure everyone's voice is heard, will there be a new council?

Response: Each school/college will continue to be run as a separate organisation and the pupil/student voice will be just as important as it is now, however yes we will certainly look into the creation of cross Trust councils.

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Why these schools and not other schools in Warrington?

Response: The schools and college looking to form TCAT have been working together for

some time to develop a shared vision based on common values. We all want to challenge each other to improve the provision and outcomes for our pupils and students. We have let all schools know of our plans and we know other schools share our vision but may need more time before they commit to joining TCAT. We will continue to work with all schools in Warrington regardless of whether they are part of TCAT or not.

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Does being in TCAT mean we will have unqualified teachers?

Response: All schools that are already academies and Priestley can employ unqualified teachers but choose not to. This will not change in TCAT.

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Will we have to wear the same uniform?

Response: No, every school's own identity will be maintained. Each school will continue to set the highest standards whilst keeping their own unique identities.





Would anything be put in place to help with choices, moving from primary to secondary?

Response: The Trust aims to ensure that progression from primary schools to secondary schools is as smooth as possible but parental choice will be maintained and there is no intention of linking progression to organisations within the Trust.

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If the whole idea is to share the ideas and resources, what is the actual need to do this?

Response: All schools and colleges are facing budget pressures and there is a real need to ensure they become more efficient to protect expenditure on teaching and learning. Through the Trust significant saving can be delivered.

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Will we have all teachers coming together to improve our learning, or will they still meet as own school?

Response: Teachers from across Warrington already come together in some subjects to improve teaching and learning. Through TCAT more formal structures will be in place to help teachers come together to improve learning but their own school/college will still remain the focus and starting point for professional development.

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Will idea sharing disrupt our learning patterns or processes?

Response: No, much of the work on sharing ideas and improving teaching and learning will happen through professional development days/sessions.

Will this change our learning at primary schools?

Response: Every organization joining TCAT is looking to enhance teaching and learning by sharing best practice and through professional development, so hopefully everyone will see positive changes in learning.

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Are our questions going to be put on the FAQ on the website?

Response: We will share your questions and our responses to them through our published response on the website once the consultation closes. A number of questions are already addressed in the consultation document.

CONCLUSION

The Governors and staff of each organisation seeking to become part of The Challenge Academy Trust are grateful to everyone who took part in our consultation process. We are pleased that we have been able to positively respond to a number of issues that are obviously of concern for a minority of parents, students and staff. We will ensure that we keep these in mind as we take the plans further forward.

We are pleased that 77% of those who responded to the survey were in support of the proposal and are encouraged by the messages of support we have received.



TCAT

