



**Introductory meeting between parents and NET Academies Trust (NETAT)**

Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> September 2014, Abbotsweld Primary School

Present: 28 parents, Maxine Evans (Chief Executive, NETAT), Takako Yeung (Director of Operations and Development, NETAT), Ruth Bird (Chair, Interim Executive Board), Lesley Lynn (Headteacher), Stephen Rodwell (Academies Officer, NETAT), Tula Smith (Senior HR Consultant, Essex County Council), Fran Johnson (IEB), Tosca Boothman (IEB), Jacky Castle (IEB)

What follows is a summary of points raised during the initial meeting between parents of children at Abbotsweld Primary School and the academy sponsor for the school, NET Academies Trust. It was agreed that a follow up meeting with parents would be arranged for later on in the term.

- Introductions by NETAT representatives included an outline of the purposes of the meeting.
- Clarification was sought regarding the appointment of the new Executive Headteacher and the likely changes in senior leadership at Abbotsweld.
  - Typically, when an Executive Head is in place, one senior staff member, often called a “Head of Learning”, will be responsible for the day to day running of his or her school and will be the ‘face in the playground’ for parents. The Executive Headteacher (to be formally appointed on 1st January 2015, and introduced before then) will be responsible for the outcomes of pupils across all three schools. He or she will also be responsible for strategic thinking across the three schools.
- Questions were raised as to how NETAT and the School Leadership Team planned to engage parents and involve them in discussions both before and after the January conversion.
  - NETAT will seek to incorporate the advice and guidance of parents whenever possible into plans going forward. To this end, frequent communication with parents will continue via email, letters and further meetings, in collaboration with the current School Leadership Team and the IEB.
  - The new governing body will also include parent representation.

- Information was sought as to what changes might take place at Abbotsweld after the conversion date.
  - The new Executive Head will work with the SLT, teachers, parents, governors, pupils and NETAT staff, to make improvements in teaching and learning across the school. This is the chief priority.
  - Regular checks on educational progress will occur via the new governing body.
  
- Further questions were raised about the extent of change that will occur in terms of classrooms, staffing and the rebranding of the school.
  - It was emphasised by NETAT that guidance will be sought from current leaders about what is working and this will be built upon.
  - What is most important is that the best possible outcomes are gained for every child in the school. Therefore, there will be certain 'non-negotiables' in the classroom and staffing to ensure that the school has the right people with the right skills set in the right place.
  - Any subsequent decisions on school uniform or other branding changes will be made in consultation with the governing body, parents and staff. There are no changes of this nature currently planned.
  
- Parents emphasised the need for stability in teaching and enquired as to whether there were any planned changes to staffing before or after conversion.
  - On the conversion date (1st January 2015), all current staff contracts and terms and conditions will be transferred over to the new employer, NET Academies Trust, via the TUPE process.
  - After this date, NETAT will work closely with the school, the governing body and new Executive Headteacher to ensure continuity in teaching, recognising that a high turnover of staff can be disruptive to pupils' learning. Investing in the professional development of teachers and support staff at Abbotsweld is one way to promote continuity, and will form an essential part of the school's improvement plan.
  
- Parents asked how the Executive Headteacher would spend his or her time in relation to the three Harlow schools. Would they spend more time in some than others for instance?
  - The new Executive Head will spend significant amounts of time in all three schools with the precise timings to be delineated over time once he or she has better acquainted themselves with the desires and needs of each school. This sharing of time across the schools will undoubtedly change in some weeks if unforeseen events occur.
  - Once appointed, the Executive Head will be accountable for the performance of all pupils across the three Harlow schools.

- Further to that question, parents enquired about the planned distribution of finance between the three schools.
  - The distribution of finance will be also decided over time by the Executive Head in consultation with NETAT and the senior staff at Abbotsweld. Value-for-money will be continually sought to maximise the benefits observed in teaching and learning across the three schools.
  
- NETAT were asked whether there were any plans to combine the three Harlow schools and to use the space available at Abbotsweld for this purpose.
  - There are currently no plans to combine any of the schools within the Harlow cluster: Abbotsweld Primary School, Latton Green Primary School and Longwood Primary School.
  
- More information was requested regarding academies and whether they were subject to the same government requirements as maintained schools.
  - Academies have greater flexibility and certain freedoms that they can take advantage of, particularly in terms of what goes into the school curriculum. They are still required to follow government rules on admissions, special educational needs and exclusions.
  - Ofsted assess all schools by the same criteria and so academies still can, and often do, make use of the same government guidelines as maintained schools. An “Outstanding” school and an “Outstanding” academy will share many characteristics.
  
- Questions were asked about the process by which NET Academies Trust was chosen as the academy sponsor for Abbotsweld.
  - Essex County Council considered a number of sponsors who presented to the Council and IEB, detailing their plans and vision for the three Harlow schools. NET Academies Trust was asked to sponsor the schools based on this proposal.
  
- Parents asked whether the children had been properly informed about the conversion process and the changes that were due to take place.
  - Lesley Lynn responded that the pupils had not yet been informed but would be in due course.
  
- Concerns were raised about the way in which pupils are currently grouped (by ability) within lessons, and a discussion took place as to whether this was best practice going forward.
  - High-quality teaching will ensure that all children, regardless of their starting position, are intellectually stimulated and challenged, taking into account their varying individual needs. A major objective of the school improvement plan will be to raise the quality of teaching so that this good practice becomes embedded at Abbotsweld. Grouping children by ability can be effective with excellent teaching.

- Parents discussed the current provisions for pupils with special educational needs and asked if NETAT and its partners would continue to liaise with SEN Co-ordinators and the staff from Place2Be.
  - Having the proper support in place for SEN pupils is crucial and NETAT will seek the guidance of current leaders about how the school can best provide that support.
- Parents were thanked for their attendance and contributions and invited to send any further comments or questions to Takako Yeung:  
[takako@nationaleducationtrust.net](mailto:takako@nationaleducationtrust.net)

Our websites:

**National Education Trust (NET)** - [www.nationaleducationtrust.net](http://www.nationaleducationtrust.net)

**NET Academies Trust (NETAT)** - [www.netacademies.net](http://www.netacademies.net)