

16th January 2011

Dear Richard,

I am writing to you because we were advised to share our thoughts and feelings about Congleton High School applying to become an academy.

I have been in education for 22 years now and feel very grateful to have the opportunity to work at CHS where I feel that I can make a difference to the education of the students in my care. I hope that the governing body, head and my colleagues are aware of the work that I do and feel justified in appointing me. I certainly appreciate the faith that was shown in me when I was appointed.

My focus in being a teacher is always to be able to provide the best possible education for my students so I can see why having access to more funds is an attractive proposition for CHS. It would be hard to argue that increased capitation and resourcing was not a good thing for the school and taking back the portion of our funding that the LEA retain is initially an attractive proposition. I have complete confidence that everyone wants what is best for the children of CHS but I also believe that most of us did not get into education for what we could get out of it. As teachers, support staff and governors, we all give more of ourselves than what we are financially recompensed for. It seems to me that we should consider not just our children here at CHS but all the children in the LEA. While we do not make extensive use of the support services that other schools in more disadvantaged areas do, it is reassuring to know that they are there. By definition the schools that can choose to become academies are often the ones with the best results, are we not in danger of leaving East Cheshire with a core of schools with complex issues and not the balance that they currently have?

I would prefer that we try to use our influence to improve the service that we receive from Cheshire East from within the collegiate relationship that we share our local schools. I do not seek to defend Cheshire East blindly but I am passionate about the rights of all our children to a first class education.

This is a really difficult letter to write because I believe that Mr Hermitt and the governing body will provide leadership and continue to manage the school in a way that will continue to make it an outstanding school. My concerns are about what it means for the LEA as a whole and also what it might mean in the future. There are groups of people already involved with schools in this country whose agenda seems against everything that we believe in. I cannot be sure that you and the other governors, who I have tremendous respect for, will maintain control of the school in the long term.

Lastly I am very pleased that the school took the brave step of appointing me, a top performing teacher against a selection of less experienced candidates and I believe that I have justified the investment made in many ways. Many people feel that as an academy decisions may have to be made that are not in the best interests of the education of the students. How can we make sure that this is not the case?

Yours sincerely

Tania Paling



ACHIEVING SUCCESS TOGETHER

CONGLETON HIGH SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY
Box Lane, Congleton, Cheshire, CW12 4NS.

Ms T Paling

19th January 2011

Dear Tania,

Thank you so much for your very thoughtful letter of 16th January. I am pleased that you feel able to share your concerns with the governors.

Much of your letter concerns how the redistribution of funding of schools becoming academies will affect the LA and other schools in the area.

As you know very nearly all of a school's funding is based on the number of students in the school, so as numbers go up and down so does the funding (although there are safeguards against funding for any school reducing too much in any one year). Although nationally the education budget remains the same in some areas of the country funding will go up as their school population has increased and in others it will go down. I can't speak for the whole of Cheshire East but in the old Congleton Borough area most schools are faced with a declining school population. In some schools this has been quite significant and staffing reductions have occurred as a result. This only really began to bite at our school in the intake this year and the governors and the leadership team had a very difficult job in meeting the budget and minimising the impact upon staff (we are legally obliged to keep within budget – if we don't we get replaced with administrators who take the hard decisions we should have taken).

Unfortunately, the prospects over the next few years aren't helpful. We know from our feeder primaries that this decline in rolls will continue until at least 2015, after which there is some signs that they might start increasing again. Of course things might turn out differently, but this is the best information we have upon which to make decisions, and on this basis it would appear that over this period the total amount of money available for school education across the LA as a whole will reduce significantly. In very stark terms this means that there will be fewer people employed in education in this area than there are now, and the question is where the reductions will occur. If we become an academy and if there is extra funding as a result it will mean that fewer of the reductions take place at this school. This is a very uncomfortable fact but as a governor and employer with a legal duty (and I would argue a moral duty) to provide the best education for our students and care and consideration for our staff I feel I would have failed in my duty to see reductions in staff at our school knowing that some at least could have been prevented had we chosen to become an academy.

I can't say precisely what the overall impact on the LA will be but over the years I would expect the LA to reduce substantially its administrative costs but still provide many of the services it now does perhaps at a more competitive cost as many academies will continue to buy back the services they really need.

You raise the larger question of what happens to schools in our area with complex issues. This is really a matter for the government which says that it intends to provide extra funding to schools dependent on the number of its students receiving free school meals, so the more children in that category the bigger the funding. Incidentally this will help our school because although around 8% of our students are eligible for free school meals we currently get no funding for the extra support they need. In the end though it is a government responsibility to ensure schools are funded fairly.

Finally you have a concern that some academies have attracted governors whose agenda is unsuitable, and can we prevent this happening here. I would agree that this has happened in the past especially where, frankly, the wrong sponsors have been involved. I can assure you that should we become an academy trust no sponsors will be involved and the structure and method of election and appointment of governors will be almost identical to now. This will mean that there is no more chance of the governing body being made up of unsuitable people than there is now, and in my view that chance is very low.

Governors are rightly not involved with the performance and capabilities of individual members of staff. However the results in your area speak for themselves and long may it continue!

Yours sincerely

Mr R Hinckley
Chair of Governors.

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