

The North Halifax Grammar School



High Performing Specialist Science and Languages School

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Dear Stakeholder

Consideration of Academy Status for NHGS

Introduction

The Governors of the North Halifax Grammar School (NHGS), at their meeting on November 24th took a unanimous decision to register an interest in converting to an academy. It is now undertaking consultation with all appropriate stakeholders before taking a decision about whether or not to apply to the Secretary of State to convert. It is consulting with staff, representative groups, students, parents, other education providers and external organisations and the Local Authority (LA) on whether NHGS should become an academy. Responses to this consultation, in writing, should be sent to the Clerk to The Governing Body, The North Halifax Grammar School, Moorbottom Road, Illingworth, Halifax HX2 9SU or e-mail to mail@nhgs.co.uk heading it Academy Consultation. There will be a meeting for parents on February 2nd at 6.00 at the North Halifax Grammar School in which there will be a presentation and an opportunity to ask questions. The consultation ends on Friday February 11th 2011. The full GB will meet to consider the results of the consultation on Tuesday March 1st when a decision will be made to apply for academy status or not.

Recent history of School Governance

The 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) passed by the then Conservative Government included provisions to allow schools to 'opt-out' of Local Authority (LA) control. The Government wanted to diversify educational provision. Application for Grant Maintained (GM) status was triggered by a simple majority vote at two full Governing Body (GB) meetings or a petition signed by 20% of the parents. The Metropolitan Borough of Calderdale had published plans in 1989 for the re-organisation of secondary education in the area, which involved the creation of a multi-site, single institution for post-16 provision and the establishment of 11-16 comprehensive schools. If implemented, this would have destroyed the North Halifax High School (as NHGS was then called) as a selective, 11-18 school. In October 1989 the Parents' Association collected sufficient numbers to petition the Governors who then organised a secret ballot. The ballot was overwhelmingly in favour (82%) of applying for GM status and the Governing Body took over the school on April 1st 1991. The GB consisted of sixteen governors (nine first governors; four parent governors; two teacher governors and the headteacher). As a GM school the school became the North Halifax Grammar School and the Governors became owners of the buildings and grounds, employers of all the staff and its own admissions authority. GM schools were not funded through the LA and Governors could apply for capital monies to improve the school. This enabled the Governors to improve the buildings for the first time since it opened in 1959. By 1998 there were 1,196 GM schools in England, 19% of secondary schools nationally but in Calderdale 66% of secondary schools were GM.

GM status was abolished by the Labour Government with the passing of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. GM schools could choose to become voluntary controlled, community or foundation schools. The GB at NHGS decided to become a foundation school as it allowed them to continue to own the school buildings and grounds, employ the staff and control their own admissions. The GB of NHGS as a foundation school consisted of twenty governors (seven parent governors; five partnership governors; four community governors; two LA governors; two teacher governors and the headteacher). Thus NHGS became a foundation school on September 1st 1999. The funding for foundation schools was through the LA although post-16 funding was channeled through the Learning & Skills Council until it was abolished in 2009. In 2001 the Labour Government launched the Academies Programme which was designed to enable struggling

schools in challenging areas to have a fresh start with a new name, new management, an external sponsor and new buildings. A few were set up to meet a demand for additional places. Up until 2010 203 academies were opened in this scheme. They were funded directly from the DCFS.

Background to the Current academy Proposals

With the election of the Coalition Government in May 2010 the Academies Act, which received Royal Assent on July 27th, enables all maintained schools to apply to the Secretary of State to become an academy. A brief summary of the relevant sections that apply to NHGS is given below.

Section 1 of the Act states that mainstream schools must:

- have a balanced and broadly based curriculum
- have a specialism (if secondary education is provided)
- provide for the education for mainly local pupils, of all abilities unless it is a grammar school where it can continue to select pupils on the terms on which they presently do so.
- provide for the education for pupils with special educational needs as under existing legislation
- not charge for admission or attendance

Section 3 allows the GB of a maintained school in England to apply to the Secretary of State to become an academy. Section 5 states that before a maintained school can convert into an academy its GB must consult those they think appropriate on the question of whether the school should convert into an academy. Section 6 states that when an Academy Order is made it will specify a 'conversion date' at which time the school ceases to be maintained by the LA and becomes an academy. The school will need to go through due process to 'close' the existing school. Section 7 requires the LA to transfer any surplus funds to the new academy. Section 8 transfers to the academy various property or contractual rights or liabilities which were previously the property, rights or liabilities of the maintained school which the academy replaces. Section 13 states that the academy proprietors will have exempt charitable status and therefore will not have to register with the Charity Commission. Section 14 refers to the transfer of land held by the Governing Body of a foundation school to the new academy.

As far as the Government is concerned academies are independent schools, which are funded directly by the Government rather than through local authorities. They have greater freedoms than local authority maintained schools over the curriculum, pay and conditions of staff and the length of the school day and year in order to enable them to promote innovation and provide an excellent education for their pupils in the way they consider to be most appropriate. Initially only schools judged to be outstanding could apply to become an academy but from November 17th 2010 all schools that are ranked good with outstanding features are eligible to apply. NHGS has registered with the Department for Education and has a named contact who is supporting the school in its consideration of academy status.

Recommendation

NHGS has prospered as an autonomous school initially as GM then as a foundation school. Converting to an academy would certainly be consistent in the approach that the school has taken over the last 20 years to these kind of Government initiatives. The Leadership Group (LG) at NHGS will consider the response to the consultation and make a recommendation to the GB ahead of its meeting on March 1st 2011. The LG has provided some answers to frequently asked questions in the context of NHGS and there is a link to the DfE website <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/academies> where there is much more detailed information available particularly on their FAQ section <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/academies/academiesfaq>

Yours sincerely



Graham Maslen
Headteacher

ACADEMY STATUS AT NHGS: FAQ

- 1. Will becoming an Academy School change the status of NHGS as a selective grammar school?**

A. No. Specific assurances are given in the legislation to existing Grammar Schools. No School may, on becoming an academy, become more selective in its intake but those Schools which are Grammar Schools will face no threat to their Selective Status.
- 2. Do the provisions for balloting about selection contained in the 1998 Education Act apply to academies.**

A. The provisions for petitioning parents of feeder schools remain with a 20% trigger for a full ballot. The only change is that NHGS was considered a group (with the Crossley Heath School) but will now be considered a 'stand alone' grammar school.
- 3. Will the School be required to incorporate the word 'Academy' within its name and title?**

A. Any name change will be for the Governors to decide but there is at present no suggestion to change our current name. The School has an established reputation within the local and wider community under its present identity and Governors will need to decide whether a change in name will be beneficial or merely generate uncertainty or confusion.
- 4. Will NHGS be required to maintain its specialism?**

A. NHGS has been a specialist Science school since 2004 and a specialist Languages school since 2008. There is another year in our responsibilities as a HPSS and if the funding continues we will honour our obligations. The school will remain as a specialist science school for the time being as it is a requirement under the Academies Act. However the specialist school model of school improvement is not being supported by the current Government it will be for the GB to decide if it wants NHGS to continue as a specialist science & languages school in the future.
- 5. Will NHGS be required to support another school?**

A. NHGS will be required to support another school. It does not specify whether the school is secondary or primary. Clearly NHGS has developed very good relations with schools in the North Halifax Federation and we have worked well in supporting primary schools with science, mathematics and languages. We would hope to continue to do this in the future.
- 6. Will the quality of the School's own standards be compromised by the requirement to help another school?**

A. Specialist school funding has specifically supported the work of NHGS teachers in other schools and the future level of funding will determine whether that commitment continues. The additional resources have not led to a decline in standards at NHGS, rather the opposite, as NHGS teachers have gained valuable experience at teaching primary school pupils and working with primary school colleagues.
- 7. Will there be any changes to the curriculum?**

A. A review of the KS4 & SF curriculum offer was undertaken in 2008-09 and there are currently no plans to make changes to the curriculum. However changes to post-16 funding may require changes to the nature of the SF curriculum in the future.

8. Would there be any change in the length of School terms or of the teaching day?

A. We undertook a review of the curriculum and the school day in 2007-2009 and changes were implemented in September 2009. The Governors reviewed the annual school calendar in the Autumn term 2010 in the context of proposals by the North Halifax Federation. The GB decided to retain a similar pattern to the current academic year for 2011-12. There are no present plans for changing either the length of terms for pupils or the structure of the School day and no change will be made on either of those issues without consultation with pupils, parents and staff. Central to any judgment we make, will be the quality of our provision and the best interests of students.

9. Do we know the precise financial benefit to the School from taking Academy Status?

A. No. The Government is clear that becoming an academy should not bring about a financial advantage or disadvantage to a school. However, academies have greater freedom on how they use their budgets, alongside the other freedoms that they enjoy. Schools will gain additional funding from that proportion of current Local Authority expenditure relating to service provision in different forms on which the School, as an Independent School, would not draw. The ready reckoner on the DfE website suggests that the school would be awarded £530,000 in the current financial year as an amount of funding in lieu of LA central services. As a foundation school we already pay for personnel, payroll, insurance etc but we will need to pay for other services such as educational psychology and other welfare services if NHGS becomes an academy. Under the school funding settlement for 2011-12 funding will be protected at no more than 1.5% less per pupil than 2010-11 funding. However the mainstreaming of grants such as the specialist schools grant into the dedicated school grant means that we currently do not know the level of funding the school will receive for 2011-12. The direct capital grant has been reduced from c.£130,000 in 2010-11 to c.£25,000 for NHGS for 2011-12. We also know that the DfE has instructed the Young Peoples Learning Agency (YPLA) to reduce post-16 funding to the average level of funding for further-education courses over the next three years. There is also a reduction in 'entitlement' funding for post-16 students. These changes together with other identified changes means that the post-funding for NHGS could be reduced by up to £250,000 over the next three years even if numbers stay at their current levels.

10. Will the School opt out of the present Teachers' Pay & Conditions arrangements?

A. If the GB decided to apply to become an academy there would be no change in the Pay & Conditions arrangements of both teaching and support staff at NHGS from 1 September 2011 but the GB may wish to consider new freedoms and flexibilities if they are seen to benefit students in the future.

11. When would NHGS become an academy and what is involved in converting to an academy?

A. If the GB decided to apply to become an academy and the application was successful NHGS would become an academy on September 1st 2011. NHGS would need to establish their trust as a company by registering with Companies House; establish a new bank account for the trust to ensure that the academy will be able to receive funding; and transfer, renew or procure new contacts, service level agreements and licences and purchase insurance as appropriate.