

Bolham Primary School Consultation Meeting
9th February 2022
7pm

Attendance:

Gary Chown, CEO Ventrus Academy, Denise Woodgate, Headteacher, Stephen Moakes, Chair of Governors, Juliet Hillier, Staff Governor, Kay Bishop. Mrs Dent, Mrs Tarr, Mrs Atkins, Mrs Botting, Mrs Coutts, Ms Chapple, Mr Cottingham, Mrs Cole

Minutes:

Amy Green, School Administrator

		Action
1.	<p>Welcome</p> <p>DW welcomed everyone to the meeting. Participants were informed that the meeting was part of an ongoing consultation until the 1st March regarding the governing body's proposal that the school joins Ventrus Multi Academy Trust and converts to academy status and would provide people with the opportunity to learn about the decision making involved behind this proposal and the Ventrus Multi-Academy Trust.</p> <p>Stakeholders were informed of the opportunity of individual appointments with Mr Chown, CEO of the Ventrus Academy and Mrs Woodgate, headteacher on the 16th February from 3pm.</p> <p>DW informed attendees that a copy of the minutes from this meeting will be available on the school website and a hard copy will be available on request from the School office.</p>	<p>Copy of minutes on school website - AG</p>

2	<p data-bbox="357 199 911 237">Stephen Moakes, Chair of Governors</p> <p data-bbox="357 286 1163 369">There were no questions submitted in advance of this meeting.</p> <p data-bbox="357 421 1163 593">SM provided an overview as to the process the governing body had taken following the headteacher's announcement that she would retire at the end of July 2022 and the challenges facing small schools.</p> <p data-bbox="357 645 1163 902">SM explained that the Governing Body have been looking at the best interests of the school and staff and were interested in a future that could give the school financial security, give staff CPD and support their needs and would support the children and wider school community.</p> <p data-bbox="357 954 1106 1037">SM outlined the three options the governing body then decided to consider</p> <ol data-bbox="405 1088 1086 1261" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="405 1088 1086 1171">1. Continue as a stand- alone DCC maintained school<li data-bbox="405 1178 957 1216">2. Join a local federation of schools<li data-bbox="405 1223 869 1261">3. Join a multi- academy trust <p data-bbox="357 1357 1163 1440">Three organisations were then shortlisted to present to the governors their vision and values.</p> <ul data-bbox="357 1491 876 1619" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="357 1491 710 1529">• Tiverton Federation<li data-bbox="357 1536 869 1574">• Alumnus Multi- Academy Trust<li data-bbox="357 1581 876 1619">• Ventrus Multi - Academy Trust <p data-bbox="357 1671 1163 1977">Governors then had the opportunity to ask questions and consider the different options before making and an informed decision as to the strategic direction of the school. The governors were keen to ensure that Bolham Primary School will continue to retain its own unique identity and have its own headteacher in the future.</p>	
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	<p>Following the presentations, the governors considered all the information. A closed ballot took place and the Ventrus Multi Academy Trust was the preferred option.</p> <p>The Bolham School staff are represented here tonight by their Staff Governor and staff have already had an informal meeting with Gary Chown, CEO of Ventrus.</p> <p>There were no questions raised.</p>	
3.	<p>Gary Chown, CEO Ventrus Academy</p> <p>GC introduced himself and his objective to allow stakeholders to learn about Ventrus Multi Academy Trust, how it operates and its values and vision.</p> <p>GC stated that he has been the CEO of Ventrus for 10 years.</p> <p>A powerpoint, which can be located on the Bolham Primary School's website, was used to inform stakeholders of the following:</p> <p><u>Ventrus Multi Academy Trust School location</u></p> <p>Currently all school are in Devon and there are 14 primary schools and 1 secondary school. GC explained that it makes sense that all the schools are in Devon as it allows for face to face meeting where possible. The Ventrus Trust is currently in an active dialogue with other secondary schools and that GC expressed a belief that all schools will become academies at some point, so Bolham is in a good position to make the decision themselves.</p>	

Ventrus Values and Vision

GC stated that collaboration is one of the defining characteristics of the Trust, and this is especially important for small schools as they don't always have the opportunity to share and collaborate.

The values of the trust are shared as a collective group of schools but they are in a different guise in each school.

GC stated that it is very important to the Trust to create a culture where people are happy to challenge and collaborate.

Ventrus work hard to build a culture for people to work together and collaborate. They help schools grow, and grow great teachers and leaders through qualifications and talent spotting for fresh ideas. Part of their strategic plan is for filling schools with great staff via their recruitment.

GC explained that Ventrus have no intention to overbrand a school. They don't however hide from being a Trust. They want to work with the schools within their community and help improve them.

Ventrus hold a headteacher meeting every two weeks. There are also formal networks for other staff within the schools via year groups or subjects. There is a huge amount of networking and asking for and giving help. Staff development is really important to be able to build teams of skilled people and staff are given support to ensure improvement.

GC concluded that Ventrus provide a high quality of education and want to give the children at Bolham the best.

Testimonials from current Ventrus staff were shared with stakeholders

4.	<p>Questions were taken from stakeholders</p> <p>Mr Cottington - We currently love the connection teachers have with the children and the activities they take part in together. How do you see their engagement with other activities to help them grow?</p> <p>GC - We have no reason to take away any of these traditions. The new Head may make changes but Ventrus would give children the richest education and opportunities available to them.</p> <p>Mrs Botting - Does the consultation process work both ways? Are Ventrus looking at us in the same way we are considering them? Also, what do you see in Bolham that works with Ventrus and are there any weaknesses or targets for improvement?</p> <p>GC - Ventrus need to look in to the financial strength of the school, the building/estate and any HR issues. The board don't have a policy not to take on schools if the findings of these have some issues. The only red line where they have walked away from a school is when they have felt the staff/head/Governing Body are not fully engaged with the process.</p> <p>Small schools have lots of challenges but there is a moral compass and if Ventrus can sustain work being done they will help Bolham to improve. If the Governing Body and the Trust both feel that the coming together will make things better for the children then it's a positive outcome.</p> <p>Ventrus plus a new Head will build on what has already been achieved. Ventrus are hoping to recruit a successor in plenty of time for a smooth transition.</p> <p>Mrs Coutts - What is the plan/schedule?</p>	

	<p>GC - On the 14th February the Department for Education will hopefully issue an academy order, if they say 'yes' if it's a suitable move. If that doesn't happen then that ends the process. If it is a 'yes', GC reports to the Trustees.</p> <p>In April there will be a funding agreement received from the Secretary of State for Education which will be signed by the Trust and Governing body. This is the final step and it then becomes legally binding.</p> <p>The period of thinking and learning is now. Now is the time to explore options and ask questions.</p> <p>The aim is for the school to become part of Ventrus on 1st May. Ventrus would then be responsible for the appointment of the new Head and would work with staff and the Governing Body to appoint. Ventrus would be accountable for the school from this date. DW would then hand over to the new head. If they can recruit by May half term that would allow time for a handover and a positive transition between the DW and the new headteacher.</p>	
5.	<p>DW closed the meeting and reminded stakeholders of the opportunity to meet with DW and GC on Wednesday 16th February from 3.00pm and to email the office for an appointment.</p> <p>If stakeholders wish to submit written feedback they were asked to email it to Stephen Moakes, via Chair@tiverton-bolham-primary.devon.sch.uk</p> <p>Meeting ended at 8pm.</p>	