

Questions and Answers from the consultation sessions with Paul James from River Learning Trust.

How will Middle Barton School fit into the RLT Governing Body? What voice and voting rights will we have?

Middle Barton keeps its own Governing Body and there are no local governors on the Trust Board as they have to keep the best interests of all schools at heart. The voices of schools are heard via the Governance Board, Resources Committee and Education Board.

The responsibilities for governors decisions remains very similar to a maintained school.

Where will the school's money come from if we join RLT?

Funding is still received from the government, it would just come to school via the Trust rather than via the County Council. The amount of money received for the school by the Trust would remain the same, and in the same way as currently happens with the LA, the Trust would keep a portion (the 'top slice') to cover the centralised services it provides.

What exactly does Middle Barton School receive for its top slice? How is the top slice annually reviewed?

School would receive support in the following areas:

Finance (School Finance & Resources, School Trips, School Dinners, Fundraising)

Operations (Health and Safety, Facilities & Site Management, Business Continuity, Risk Management, Asset Management, Supplier / Contract Management, Procurement, IT Systems, Lettings & Hirings)

HR Activities (Policies Processes and Legal updates, Safeguarding, School Workforce Census, Absence Management and Wellbeing, Recruitment, Payroll, HR Administration, Appraisals, Staff Induction)

General (Communication & General Admin, School Publicity, Admissions, Safeguarding)

In addition, we would be allocated a support and challenge partner (SCP) who works 2 days per week for a hub of schools. The SCP supports and challenges Headteachers to raise standards (improvement planning and implementation), arranges peer reviews (2 per year) which include external Ofsted trained input, ensures effective self-evaluation and follow-up (inc. from peer reviews), leads hub based moderation activities, ensure benchmark testing implementation, brokers additional support / expertise from within and beyond the Trust as required, attends governing body meetings as required.

The governors are would also be supported and have access to (inc. some training) the Trust's Head of Governance and compliance.

The size of the top slice is discussed annually by the Trust– and includes input from Education Boards (Heads) and Resources committee (Governors) and any changes then signed off at Board level.

Can we have a copy of any proposed service level agreement (SLA)? What remedies may we have recourse to if the SLA is not met?

The Trust do not have an SLA and have no intention of having one, because that is not the relationship that they have in the Trust. They consider their schools 'all part of the same organisation' and it is not about the school 'buying services'. Even though it could be argued that the school is buying certain services, it is an important cultural distinction that they do not view it this way. As such, when things aren't working they consider the principles of the trust (a commitment to excellence (so to continuous improvement), learning (for adults, too) and relationships (open, honest and respectful)) to be essential as everyone works together to solve issues, as all schools are part of the same thing. If situations get really serious our local governing body has access to the Board and then, if needed, the Regional School's commissioner. But RLT firmly believe schools have to join a Trust 'wanting it to work' – as there is never enough time or money to do everything as perfectly as we'd want. So at times life is bumpy, which is why culture and relationships within the organisation are crucial.

How does RLT deal with a member school going into deficit?

They would hold financial review meetings and make a recovery plan. But the aim is to never let schools reach this situation in the first place.

Does RLT bid for capital funds from the Condition Improvement Fund or does it receive a formula allocation for capital work? How is the decision made as to which member school receives RLT capital funding?

RLT are of sufficient size to not have to bid to the CIF – they are allocated from the SCA (School Condition Allocation) fund and received £1.2million for 17-18 (Apr to Apr). Allocations to schools are based on need not a straight per pupil funding although, of course, secondary schools can expect to get more (e.g. Cherwell with 1,900 pupils got the largest allocation) and this year c£200k has been allocated across the 7 primary schools and c£1million to the secondary schools (also noting that the secondary schools 3% of income clearly contributes, more to the central pot and this is actually to the advantage of primary schools in terms of central team capacity).

Would we lose our partnership links with CNPS?

No. These relationships are free to continue as they are now. An added bonus for us is that Chipping Norton School is already a part of the RLT (and Marlborough School are consulting to join)

Why isn't the partnership sufficient for peer learning?

RLT support and challenge partners would offer a more structured challenge to our staff. Additionally, our school is in competition with partnership schools when it comes to roll, which does add the element of competitiveness and sometimes this can create an informality to arrangements and discussions.

What are the benefits of joining the RLT for teachers?

Teachers will receive structured peer-peer support, as well as access to CPD training. A benefit for the school would be access to NQTs from the teacher training (SCIIT) program that is run by RLT at Cherwell school, which may be beneficial if we were in a position in the future to employ another NQT.

If we were to join RLT could you sell off our field to build some houses?

No. The lease for the school buildings and land is transferred to RLT from Oxfordshire County Council for 120 years. The County essentially becomes a 'landlord' to RLT. All ownership of the buildings and land remains with the County.

How will joining RLT affect Pre-School?

The lease for the land and buildings includes the land pre-school sits on. This would be included in the 120 year lease that is transferred to RLT. Any third party arrangements such as the pre-school, will most likely transfer to the trust 'as is' and the Trust become, in essence, the landlord: any fees previously paid by the Pre-school to the LA would transfer to them. Essentially, as the academy leases the land from the LA, the pre-school becomes a sub-tenant. Trusts would not seek to make any changes as it would not be in anyone's interest to do this and they would want to see the same relationships continuing.

Would joining RLT mean we have to start using another new assessment system?

In order to enable cross-RLT data analysis and fair comparisons between schools there would likely be some alignment of assessment systems. However, this would all be happening at the teacher level, and information parents would receive at parent's evenings and in the end of year report would be familiar and clear.

Will we keep our strong community focus and feel?

Yes. RLT positively encourage schools to retain and develop their own character, unique to their own situations and environment. There would be no change of name, uniform, logo etc.