

Cabinet Advisory Group: Expanding the Best

Report v1.0

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BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Expanding the Best (ETB) approach was endorsed by Cabinet in December 2011. This innovative approach seeks to look first at expanding high performing current school provision within two miles of a primary site and three miles of a secondary site onto a second campus, before consideration is given to establishing a new organisation.
- 1.2 The approach (Annex 1) outlines seven stages in the decision making process, from an initial expression of interest (stage 1) with eligible organisations (against the agreed criteria) invited to submit a business case that includes the results of consultation (stage 2), to a professional assessment (stage 3) and a member assessment (stage 4), before the final local decision (stage 5). For academies, the Secretary of State will need to confirm the decision based on the school's own application and the judgement of the Education Funding Agency, while for maintained schools a statutory process will need to be followed to formally expand the school (stages 6 and 7).
- 1.3 The Department for Education (DfE) reviewed the approach and provided a steer that single schools can operate from more than one site, but that:

“...to be regarded as an expansion of an existing school, rather than a ‘new school’, there needs to be sufficient similarity to the existing school in terms of the community being served, staff, pupils, governance and ethos to demonstrate that this is an expansion rather than a new establishment.”

- 1.4 In July 2012, three ETB opportunities were advertised and applied for. The sites and the proposing organisations are:

Site	Proposing Organisation 1	Proposing Organisation 2
Oakgrove Primary	Oakgrove School with Middleton Primary School	Walton High, with Milton Keynes Education Trust (MKET)
Brooklands Secondary	Walton High, with Milton Keynes Education Trust (MKET)	
Brooklands Primary (Site 2)	Brooklands Farm Primary School	Walton High, with Milton Keynes Education Trust (MKET)

- 1.5 After the initial expressions of interest were presented to the council, the ETB criteria were considered further. The Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Children and Learning considered that the criteria for schools to be judged by Ofsted as ‘outstanding’ did not take into account schools that are considered by Ofsted to be high performing and not warrant a further full inspection, or schools that are new and therefore do not yet have the data to support anything other than a ‘good’ overall effectiveness judgement. Consequently, the qualifying criteria were adapted.
- 1.6 All interested organisations were asked to develop a full business case.
- 1.7 Each proposing organisation's business case was reviewed by an independent professional consultant, including a desk based analysis and site visits to all organisations. An independent report was then produced with recommendations.
- 1.8 On 30 October 2012 a Delegated Decision was taken that the cross-party member assessment process should be managed through a Cabinet Advisory Group (CAG) with Terms of Reference as attached at Annex A.

- 1.9 The recommendations of the CAG will be reported to Cabinet to be taken into account as part of its decision whether or not to progress with the ETB approach for one, two or all three of the sites. If agreed, the recommendations will then contribute to the decision for confirming which proposing organisation Cabinet determines to support.
- 1.10 Depending on the status of the school (maintained or non-maintained), the next stage of the process will differ. Maintained schools will need to begin a statutory process to expand the school following the requirements defined in the Education and Inspections Act 2006. Academies (non-maintained schools) will need to apply to the Education Funding Agency with a business case for a significant change to their funding agreement.

2. CABINET ADVISORY GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Oakgrove School (in partnership with Middleton Primary School) is supported to expand to provide primary provision on Oakgrove.
- 2.2 That Walton High (with Milton Keynes Education Trust (MKET)) is supported to expand to provide secondary provision on Brooklands.
- 2.3 That Brooklands Farm Primary School is supported to expand to provide the second primary provision on Brooklands.

3. CABINET ADVISORY GROUP PROCESS

- 3.1 The CAG met on 6 December 2012. Members were nominated by the group leaders of individual political groups as follows:
- Cllr Andy Dransfield (Chair) (Conservative)
 - Cllr Gerald Small (Conservative)
 - Cllr Elaine Wales (Labour)
 - Cllr Alan Webb (Labour)
 - Cllr Robin Bradburn (Liberal Democrat)
 - Cllr Christine Zealley (Liberal Democrat)
- 3.2 Papers for the meeting included background information on the process and the site opportunities, the final report of the Professional Assessment and copies of each of the submitted business cases with supporting documentation.
- 3.3 Each opportunity site was considered separately.
- 3.4 Martin Baker, the independent advisor to the panel and author of the Professional Assessment report, provided members of the CAG with a summary of the professional opinion for each site, which included highlighting differences in the proposals.
- 3.5 Members of the CAG then had 20 minutes to ask questions of each proposing organisation. If desired (it was not a requirement) schools were able to use some of this allocated time to respond to the Professional Assessment; add any further comments for members of the advisory group to consider, and arrange for representatives from the community to present evidence of partnership working.
- 3.6 After all of the information had been received for each of the opportunities, members of the public and the proposing organisations were asked to leave for the CAG deliberation and agreement of its recommendations.
- 3.7 A summary of each opportunity site and the deliberation follows.

4. OPPORTUNITY 1: OAKGROVE PRIMARY

4.1 The two proposing organisations for the Oakgrove Primary site were Oakgrove School in partnership with Middleton Primary School and Walton High with MKET.

4.2 The Professional Assessment recommended that the new provider should be Oakgrove School, with Middleton Primary School. The rationale provided was that whilst both proposals had very strong features, the proximity of Oakgrove School and Middleton Primary School sites to the Oakgrove Primary site is such that there is understanding of and current engagement with the existing community that provides a value added dimension to the submission from Oakgrove School and Middleton Primary School.

4.3 Walton High with MKET opening remarks included:

- We are a designated 'multi-academy trust' and as such can adapt to have multiple schools within the chain.
- The application to ETB has been strengthened by the recent sponsorship of New Chapter School (from January 2013 as a sponsored academy under MKET).
- We draw pupils from across the wider community of Milton Keynes and the school has learned to build links with new communities (New Chapter was given as the example), and are committed to community engagement.
- We have a strong sense of moral purpose.
- National policy changes impacting on LA funding mean that schools have a role in supporting the system to improve and develop.
- We should be seen as a strategic partner with support services that can benefit other local schools.
- We have a desire to work closely with Middleton Primary School and Oakgrove School, in the same way we have worked with MK Academy and St Paul's Catholic School for New Chapter.

A paper was circulated to summarise the business case.

4.4 Members of the CAG further questioned:

- Locality is key – is this really an expansion?

Walton High with MKET response: We believe that the ETB process was written as the national policy position was changing and that the DfE is keen for MKET to expand – as a Trust, not necessarily as a school on a second campus. Walton High is accredited to provide both primary and secondary school places.

- How are schools represented in the MKET structure?

Walton High with MKET response: The constitution of the MKET ensures all schools have representation at the centre of the organisation. Headteachers of each school will be central to trust decision making.

- Reference to the 'wider community' that Walton High serves – surely we need to encourage pupils to stay local?

Walton High with MKET response: Mostly it is Post 16 students who travel further distances, but since the Published Admission Number (PAN) of Walton High has increased more pupils travel from further away. New Chapter pupils are encouraged to apply to their feeder secondary (the MK Academy).

- Questions were asked relating to New Chapter's performance – is this a reflection of the way Walton High will work at a primary level?

Walton High with MKET response: The improvement at New Chapter has been impressive. There has not yet been time to see this improvement progress through to KS2.

- Relationship with the LA?

Walton High with MKET response: Positive, but robust.

4.5 Oakgrove School with Middleton Primary School opening remarks included:

- We are making a joint bid – we have high standards in both schools which are complementary.
- We consider the bid a natural progression for the 'millennium development' of Oakgrove.
- We are working hard in partnership to build a sense of community - we have a very close working relationship with parents and the community.
- We intend to work with the developers and local businesses.
- We have significant leadership expertise, including National Leaders in Education, National Leaders in Governance, Local Leaders in Education, and five Ofsted inspectors in the leadership team.
- We have considered succession planning and have the capacity to manage the expansion.
- We have a good working relationship with the LA, as an Academy the relationship has progressed.

4.6 Members of the CAG further questioned:

- Relationship with the LA?

Oakgrove School response: Relationship has not altered since the school became an academy, indeed there has been ongoing collaboration in a range of areas.

- Does the Academy share its data with the LA?

Oakgrove School response: There are no issues as far as we are aware but we will clarify this.

- What is the approach to SEN and inclusion?

Oakgrove School/Middleton Primary School response: Inclusion is very important, everyone is welcome. We do not have targets - instead everyone is entitled to Level 4 at KS2.

4.7 Following the withdrawal of members of the public, there was careful consideration of all the evidence presented for this specific opportunity. Members of the CAG then unanimously agreed with the findings of the Professional Assessment, and recommended that Oakgrove School (in partnership with Middleton Primary School) be supported to expand to provide primary provision on Oakgrove. However, it was stated that closer cooperation with the council needed to be embraced by Oakgrove School, particularly in the sharing of data.

5. OPPORTUNITY 2: BROOKLANDS SECONDARY

5.1 There was only one proposing organisation for Brooklands Secondary; Walton High with MKET.

5.2 The Professional Assessment recommended that the new provider should be Walton High with MKET. The rationale provided was that although there was only one proposal, it was demonstrably secure and robust by objective measures.

5.3 Walton High with MKET opening remarks included:

- We see opportunities for cross site working, shared teaching and joint training across both sites.
- We do not plan to bus students regularly between the sites.
- We expect central resources will be shared and that this will offer economies of scale.
- We want this school site to be seen by the community as its own school in its own right, although it will be under one leadership and governance structure.
- We are confident that we can offer the same high quality curriculum on both sites.

5.4 Members of the CAG further questioned:

- How far away is Walton High from the Brooklands Secondary site?

Walton High with MKET response: 2.5 miles. We may appear to be a distance from the new site, but it is within the criterion of two miles for primary sites and three miles for the secondary.

- Will this be an expansion onto a second campus or another school in the chain?

Walton High with MKET response: This would be considered as an extension of Walton High (not another school within the trust). However we would put in place local governance arrangements, which would effectively be a sub committee of the main Governing Body.

- Why is MKET applying for multiple sites?

Walton High with MKET response: The education landscape is changing and funding should be concentrated on the children – we wish to avoid some of the costs associated with larger chains with high overhead costs outside of Milton Keynes. We care about children across Milton Keynes and the wider community of Milton Keynes.

- Does MKET have an insight to some of the issues with split sites?

Walton High with MKET response: Yes, we are aware of typical challenges, however we believe that these are manageable.

5.5 Following the withdrawal of members of the public, there was careful consideration of all the evidence presented for this specific opportunity. Members of the CAG then unanimously agreed with the findings of the Professional Assessment, and recommended that Walton High with MKET be supported to provide secondary provision on the Brooklands Secondary site.

6. OPPORTUNITY 3: BROOKLANDS PRIMARY SITE 2

6.1 The two proposing organisations for the Brooklands Primary Site 2 were Walton High with MKET and Brooklands Farm Primary School.

6.2 The Professional Assessment recommended that the new provider should be Walton High with MKET. The rationale provided was that while Brooklands Farm Primary School is already serving the community well, has strong leadership and high aspirations, it has not yet had the opportunity (due to the fact that it has only recently opened) to demonstrate sustained levels of high performance.

6.3 Walton High opening remarks included:

- We have primary experience with New Chapter Primary School.
- We plan to move teachers between the sites and share experiences to improve the quality and understanding of teachers.
- We want there to be strong links schools between Walton High & New Chapter with students being able to spend time in each school.
- We expect there to be advantages also for staff - the opportunity for career progression, experience in a challenging school.

6.4 Members of the CAG further questioned:

- Admissions – how will feeder schools work with this arrangement? Will schools within the trust begin to feed into Walton High?

MKET response: No, the children will feed through to the secondary provision on Brooklands.

6.5 Brooklands Farm Primary School opening remarks included:

- We believe in community cohesion – The Headteacher was recruited to be a community leader and a champion of the community. We envisage one head across both sites.
- We have support of parents - 70% of all parents at the school responded to the consultation.
- We do not want to see a split in the community of Brooklands – with one provider offering primary and secondary education and us providing a second primary school. We are concerned about the impact on community cohesion.
- We want to ensure consistency across primary education in the area with an entitlement to a Level 4 - more if you can achieve it.
- We have experience of building a new school from scratch and we know the local community.
- We have personal experience within the leadership team of working on a split site school.
- We are part of the MK Teaching Alliance – with a project underway at present with Oxford Brooks University.

At the beginning of the session the Chair of the Governing Body sought to clarify the quality criterion (see 1.5). It was confirmed by the chair that although the school was not judged outstanding by Ofsted, it is the best it can be, given the school's age, which was accepted by the Cabinet Member as good enough to progress to the business case stage.

6.6 Members of the CAG further questioned:

- What about Governance?

Brooklands Farm Primary School response: The local community and parents are represented on the governing body. An ethos drives the school not just the leader.

- Succession planning?

Brooklands Farm Primary School response: This is firmly in place and tested.

6.7 Following the withdrawal of members of the public, there was careful consideration of all the evidence presented for this specific opportunity. Members of the CAG unanimously decided to disagree with the findings of the Professional Assessment. Instead the CAG chose to recommend that Brooklands Farm Primary School is supported to expand to provide the second primary provision on Brooklands.

7. ANNEX 1 – Terms of Reference for the Cabinet Advisory Group

Purpose

An Advisory Group established to advise Cabinet on the local decision relating to ‘Expanding the Best’.

Membership

Number of members	6, plus additional independent members
Substituted members allowed	No.
Political balance	Two members from each of the political groups, including the Cabinet Member for Children and Learning, plus a number of independent non-political members, to be appointed by the Cabinet Member for Children and Learning.
Appointments/Removals from Office	By Group Leaders of individual political groups.
Restrictions on Membership	No.
Chair	Cabinet Member with Portfolio.
Quorum	Four, including the Chair.
Number of ordinary meetings per Council Year	Meetings will be called as required.

Remit

To advise the Cabinet Member for Children and Learning on the most suitable candidate for expanding current provision onto a second campus. It will:

1. Consider the results of the professional assessment.
2. Consider presentations from proposers.
3. Consider the proposers’ record of working in partnership through representation from the local community.

Meeting Protocols

1. The Cabinet Advisory Group will meet separately to consider each of the site opportunities.
2. Advisory Group meetings will be held at least a month before the Cabinet is due to make a decision on Expanding the Best, so that any recommendations by the Group can be properly considered by the lead Cabinet Member and by officers prior to the Cabinet meeting.
3. Although Advisory Group meetings will be held in public, the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972 in relation to excluding the press and public will be applied where appropriate.