

Dear Round Hill School Governors and Mr Nash,

We are writing as concerned parents with a child at Round Hill school, regarding the governors' meeting planned for next Tuesday 12th February. We first found out about this at a Parents' Forum last Thursday and were really surprised to discover that an important vote relating to Round Hill school's progression towards joining a local Multi Academy Trust, The White Hills Park Federation Trust, is due to take place then.

We have been assured that it is not a final vote, but are also hearing from other sources – primarily contacts, friends and relatives working in education – that if the Board of Governors decide to proceed to the due diligence stage on Tuesday, it will be very hard to change the 'yes' direction and decide to pull back at a later date. Yet there has been no parent consultation and parents do not realise this.

Therefore we would implore you to please consider delaying this important vote so that parents and other stakeholders can be fully informed and consulted first. Does the vote really need to be made at this particular point in time? Would a short delay unduly affect the process?

Before continuing further we just want to say that, like **all** of the parents we know, we cannot praise Round Hill enough in the way it is being run: we think it is an excellent school and we love being part of its community. Since [redacted] began school in [redacted] has thrived in so many ways – personally, socially and academically. [redacted] is really enjoying [redacted] time at school and learning, which makes us very happy. We have been hugely impressed with the Round Hill ethos – the warmth and dedication of [redacted] class teacher [redacted] staff team, and Mr Nash, who is a fantastic head teacher. The atmosphere in the school seems a positive, friendly, happy, relaxed and stimulating one. We think you are doing a wonderful job educating our children and serving the local community, and are truly and deeply grateful for the work done by all the staff and also the Governors. Thank you.

We also have every respect for the Governors and Head's work in exploring MAT options, especially in the current climate of cuts, and trust that you are doing what you feel is best for the school.

However, there has been a near total absence of communication and consultation with parents on the issue prior to this important Tuesday vote (short of a low key mention in Autumn parents forum, attended by a handful of parents), and especially for Foundation parents – some of whom may still know nothing, with only a week to go before this vote. Many found out last Friday through word of mouth; yet only [REDACTED]

We heard that other Year groups were told in a July 2018 newsletter about the initial talks with WHPFT, but then heard nothing afterwards.

Yet aren't parents essential stakeholders in the school to be consulted on this important decision? If parental consultation is planned for after the initial vote, will it be too late then to influence the Governors decision on the direction of travel? It would be good to be reassured if this is in fact not the case. It seems from some conversations we are having that many parents currently believe that the final vote after an expected consultation is the one that will count, and are not rushing at this point to put their opinions into the governors. We think people will be extremely shocked to realise they may only have options to input to small details later, not the actual decision itself to join a MAT, where no real consultation is to happen. It is planned that there will be a joint statement from some parents later in the week after a planned meeting we will be attending and this is to be discussed, so far the main suggestion from an initial smaller meeting yesterday has been to ask for a delay in the initial vote.

Additionally, we do not currently know how much staff opinion is being taken into account. There could be many changes for them – e.g. will new staff be working under different pay and conditions, with for example, poorer maternity leave or pension options, thus creating a two-tier system? Will there be a higher risk of redundancy and altered sick pay rights and processes for existing/new staff? What advantages would a MAT bring for staff and are they felt by them to be enough to balance out the risks? If RH staff are unhappy with changes, now or in the future, it will have a massive impact on the school. Have staff views been comprehensively sought and listened to in advance of Tuesday's meeting, anonymously if necessary? (Do staff feel able to express an opinion or has a MAT option been presented as a decision as good as taken?)

Furthermore, if RH joins this MAT then how will representation of the Head, staff, parent and Governors views fit into the Trust? It seems they are bound to be diluted and that the school will lose a lot of control to a larger entity. I have gathered from the July meeting minutes that shockingly there is not even a guarantee for the Round Hill chair of Governors to be given a place on the board of Trustees of WHPF, as it grows. Is that correct? If it is, how can Governors themselves rest comfortably with that arrangement?

The financial risks also seem to be high, with less accountability and oversight. For example, as RH signs over all its land and material assets to the trust, what is to say that if WHPFT (which we heard is currently in deficit?) hits financial problems, could the RH playing fields be sold for prime housing development to keep the MAT afloat? What guarantees and security for the future of the school and its staff and pupils can you give us? A recent Public Accounts Committee report (2017-19) concluded that many Academy Trust schools are falling short in terms of standards of governance, accountability and financial

management.<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cm Pubacc/760/760.pdf>.

It may well be that the Trust in its current form is ethical and well run, but people move on and Trustees, Directors and situations change. There is no guarantee it will stay that way.

Having spoken to lots of the other Round Hill parents we know since Thursday, we have learnt that many people are concerned as we are – first about the lack of information regarding the talks and the process, and secondly, and most importantly, what academisation could potentially mean for the future of Round Hill's children, parents and staff. It seems like such a huge risk to take with a school that has, for 70 years, worked well and continues to work well in the community.

Since there is so little time before this important vote, please will the Board seriously consider our request to postpone the vote? This delay in proceedings would allow parents vital time to consider and research the issues and to learn more from the school and the Trust itself. Could the school offer an open meeting where the pros and cons of joining WHPFT can be presented and discussed in detail, with equal weighting, and then, once fully informed, parents/staff would be able to be meaningfully surveyed so that they can give their views to the board of governors in good time?

Surely, to consult before the initial vote would be a much more democratic and robust way of ensuring that the future decision takes into account the views of all stakeholders. By rushing ahead without their input and support, we strongly believe you risk causing enduring division and distrust of school management and governance, for once academisation goes ahead it is all but fixed.

There is not space or time for this email to express all of our worries and queries about academisation: this email is very long already. We hope you will consider our plea to

postpone the vote. If after consultation it is still felt that an MAT is the best place for RH then we would accept that decision, but please give everyone a chance for a say.

Yours respectfully,

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