



Foundation and Aided Schools National Association

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TRUST AND FOUNDATION SCHOOLS PROGRAMME

CASE STUDY TEMPLATE

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What is the overall vision of your project?

What are the expected outcomes?
How will your organisation benefit from Foundation Status?
How will standards be raised in the school?
What are your aims?

Our vision in becoming a foundation school is to build independence of mind and action behind our desire to raise standards and pupil achievement across the whole curriculum. We strongly believe that we can achieve this more effectively by working collectively and cooperatively with the schools in our area and with business partners within the newly formed North Bedfordshire Schools Trust (NBST).

We believe that the days of schools operating in isolation are long gone, and that 21st century innovative education can only be a success if we work together. We believe that we should always be looking for new ways of working to ensure excellent standards for all our schools.

In order to become a Trust school, the school has to be a Foundation school. So, although the NBST was only really an idea when we changed to Foundation status, what we learned during that process has been very helpful to share with other schools that have been going through the process of a change to Foundation status in order to join the Trust

Foundation status will be able to give us

- Greater sense of autonomy
- 'Can do' approach to school improvement
- More options for external service provision
 - Cost effectiveness
 - Tailored to our needs
- Stronger financial control
- In line with the two other middles and Upper school in our pyramid
- Greater say over Admissions

During the period of our consultation, Bedfordshire was also facing the prospect of moving from its current three tier school structure to a two tier one. Schools in our area of North Bedfordshire were, and still are, performing well above the County and national standard and together we also felt a strong desire to maintain this position. There was strong parental resistance to change to the school structures. As all 19 schools in our area were already members of the North Bedfordshire Education Improvement Partnership, we pulled together and began to crystallise a new vision for schooling in North Bedfordshire by becoming a Trust school.

What successes have you had so far?

Any immediate ones?

In relation to standards, organisation, curriculum, staffing, partnerships for example?

We are now a Trust school and across our Trust we see the benefits as bringing greater trust amongst the members and an openness of mind which will not allow any one school to become, or adopt, a position of isolation. There is renewed enthusiasm behind agreed goals which are set both at school and cluster level and also strategically by the Trustees.

(NB Clusters are based on the feeder lower schools and their middle school, as well as the three middle schools and the upper school.)

We are already benefiting from access to bids/funds otherwise unavailable to us. For example our school is having a network installed thanks to a Trust bid for monies to implement a Virtual Learning Environment in our Trust schools. This means we can install interactive white boards in all classrooms and the staff are very excited about this.

Together with the two other Middle schools we have just submitted a bid for Specialist Arts status; this was a strategic decision for the Trust and followed hot on the heels of the DCSF decision which opened up such a process to Middle schools.

The nature of the Trust will bring an improved 4-19 curriculum horizontally and vertically. We are doing this by sharing teaching staff across phases, for example our school provides a specialist modern foreign language teacher to teach years 3 and 4 in our cluster Lower schools. We will benefit from a KS3 English teacher coming from the Upper school in 2008-9 and we also provide MFL in the form of German and Spanish to pupils at years 7 and 8 with help from the upper school staff.

Trust schools were already working together in an EIP so some partnerships were already quite well developed. Our middle school works with its 5 feeder lower schools on areas of curriculum continuity and transition from year 4 to 5. We championed this level of cluster cooperation and opened up meetings to governors. Meetings between cluster schools happen regularly throughout the year and we implement shared curriculum projects, help support each other as well as celebrate successes. We are also members of the Middle-Upper cluster group which again looks at transition issues but also has also championed projects such as data sharing and compatibility and the specialist Arts status bid. These cluster groups are now formally identified as part of the Trust organisation.

Our Trust partners include Unilever Research, Bedford College and Capita Sims. Each has brought unique expertise to the Trust and these companies will be essential to the development of excellence in Science, data management and vocational education. In addition, the Trustees from these companies are all fantastic leaders in their own organisations and have brought a wealth of leadership experience to the Trust. Our Trust Chairman is Ian Pryce, the CEO of Bedford College.

What challenges have you faced (are you facing) in becoming a Foundation School? - and how are you tackling these?

In relation to our move to Foundation status, the challenge was engaging the school staff, governors, parents and local community in the consultation. It was our first major consultation process and we learned a few good things about how to consult better! This has served us well, when we followed with community-wide consultations on a review to our admissions policy and, of course to join the Trust.

The current challenge is to obtain our FMSiS accreditation which is essential to allow us to move away from being centrally funded. We employed a Bursar just as we went foundation and she has been tremendous in helping the whole school and governors become more financially aware and accountable. Our aim is to be directly funded from April 2009.

The other challenges have been the uncertainty in Bedfordshire about the structuring of schools. Bedfordshire remains one of the few counties with a three tier school structure. In 2006 the County Councils plans to move to two tier were voted out; however, the issue is back on the table in 2008 as the LA have unveiled plans to make some schools two tier in Bedford in order to access building schools for the future funding. Further to this Bedfordshire will move to two unitary authorities from 2009, adding greater change to the position of Education.

However, the good news is that the Trust partnership, whilst only new, is and will continue to provide a large strong base from which we can view and respond to such changes. We are also very determined to set our own agenda for the Trust and to leverage our size effectively to this end.

Do you have any tips for others considering Foundation Status?

We would have more meetings between governors and staff at an early stage in the process. The governing body relied too much on the Head Teacher to do an effective communications job. We would also have talked to union reps at County level. We subsequently advised other schools to do this and several unions were represented at a meeting of schools in consultation on foundation and Trust status. This was very useful and good for building relationships. I would advise early meetings too with parish Council(s) and other community groups with a stake in the school.

We found it quite hard to come up with well worked through examples of how being a foundation school could make a difference, however, just taking this step to go foundation is a strong statement about how the governors feel about the school, their pride in it and their willingness to become a fully accountable and responsible partner in the lives of the staff and pupils.

In the consultation process, we responded individually to all questions raised. We would suggest that a general letter goes out to parents and community users of the schools to keep everyone appraised during and after the process. We don't (yet) have a website, but a webpage for foundation status consultation would have been really useful.

We became a foundation school on 1st Sept 2006; on that date we also had a new Head Teacher, a new school bursar and a new Chair of Governors. I would recommend that schools going foundation aim to have continuity of leadership throughout and after the process and if changing in September, to have in place a team to meet over the summer to ensure that things are all in place for the start of the new school year.

We could have engaged more with our feeder lower schools. Now it would seem quite inconceivable that our school would take a step of going foundation without lots of discussion with our partner schools.

We would have benefited from more support from the LA. Although being a foundation school does not change their level of responsibility for the school as an asset, if they had embraced our wish to move to a more independent status and had in place a mechanism to provide help on HR, safety, finance etc issues, it would be better.

Please include a quotation from a leader/governor

“Working together with other schools has opened my eyes to wider issues of governance and school leadership. Being foundation and sharing this position with schools who are our partners in the Trust has been very empowering. We have meetings now which would have seemed impossible only 2-3 years ago.

However, at the heart of all that we are doing organisationally for our school and within the Trust, the children are, and will remain the focus of all our efforts.”

Chair of Governors

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