

## **Love Darell Newsletter #2: The meetings with Maggie Bailey of Every Child Every Day Academy Trust**

**Hello again!**

On Monday and Tuesday, Maggie Bailey of ECEDAT came to Darell to propose that her Multi-Academy Trust should run Darell school.

The impression after each meeting – both from those tempted by academisation and those with questions about it – seemed to be that she was a charming and driven Trust Director with certainly no shortage of ambition. It was clear that the Chairs of Governors at Hollyfield and Grey Court Schools were singing from the same hymn sheet on Monday evening and thought that the co-operation between their secondary schools is working for them. Frank Kitson, Chair of Governors at Grey Court, and Marcus Baines, Chair of Governors at Hollyfield, are both also board members of ECEDAT (see below about accountability).

It was less clear to some how the experience at Grey Court and Hollyfield would translate to a primary school.

*So what next?*

**Here are some questions that came up, and some information to form part of the consultation process...**

## Money



**From the meetings:** It was clear that *all schools are facing financial difficulties* and that Darell needs to be clever to make sure that the effect on children is minimised. No numbers were mentioned about ECEDAT or any alternatives, though these are of course early days.

**For the consultation:** How does ECEDAT compare to alternatives?

- Does it have a funding pot in place for Darell to make up the shortfall? And would this be used for academisation or for teaching?
- What would be committed to Darell in the short- and long-term?
- What future funding sources does ECEDAT anticipate?
- What would be the cost of joining a Multi-Academy Trust (legal fees, consultants' fees, etc)?
- How would we know that Darell's children would benefit?
- What are the equivalent numbers for the alternatives to ECEDAT?

Numbers and binding *commitments*, please, before we sign anything!

## Results

**From the meetings:** There was concern expressed over the *most recent test results at Darell*. Concern was *also* expressed because the results were not presented in the same way as previous years, giving context about staff disruption, proportions of children with special educational needs, etc.



**For the consultation:** What is ECEDAT's approach to results?

- What are ECEDAT's short- and long-term business plans, and how will they change if results do not result in increased pupil numbers?
- In terms of its employment contracts, could Darell teachers and support staff be obliged or expected to come in earlier and work later?
- Would the Multi-Academy Trust be entitled to move children and staff between its schools to improve its figures?

And how does this year's research by the London School of Economics, which shows that academisation tends to show a one-year "bounce" in results, followed by a drop, relate to ECEDAT *and the alternatives under consideration*?

## Working with other schools

**From the meetings:** There was a general agreement that *schools work better when they work together*.

In terms of which schools Darell would work **best** with, Maggie Bailey was asked about the advantages of having Darell run by a Trust made up of secondary schools, and she stressed the importance of asking sixth-formers to help Darell



children with maths, and to run clubs, and that in more general terms: “*We’ve got so much to learn, there’s loads we can learn from a primary.*”

**For the consultation:** The National Governors Association recommends “Federation First” – a way of keeping local control of a school to avoid “missing out on all the benefits of being part of a group of schools”.

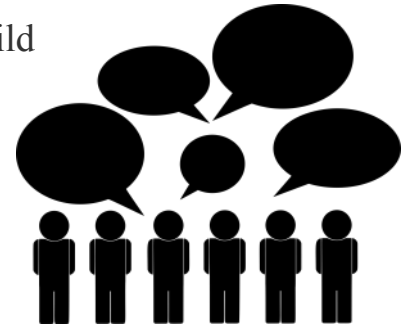
- What progress has Darell made in following the NGA recommendations with other local, secular, non-PFI primaries?
- What are the (costed or uncosted) pros and cons of a local primary federation?
- Has sharing resources and co-operating with Windham Nursery and Children’s Centres been considered?

All alternatives should of course be given fair and equal consideration. Another question is whether governors, parents and staff might prefer to watch how ECEDAT learns about primary education from another primary school first – *in order to make an informed judgement about what handing control of Darell to ECEDAT would mean for our school.*

The view was also expressed that, given how much upheaval there has been at Darell over the past few years, the best thing would be to avoid any further, major changes for, say, a year, and energies concentrated on maintaining our good Ofsted (especially as a poor Ofsted make handing over control of Darell inevitable...).

## Accountability / Transparency

**From the meetings:** Maggie Bailey said that the Every Child Every Day Academy Trust does not need a website because she could be personally contacted around the clock and that she would always give a reply within 24 hours – and that in terms of the Trust’s intentions, “*the words ‘every child every day’ really tell you everything you need to know*”.



Questions were asked about ECEDAT’s being very much led and directed by an individual, Maggie Bailey. What happens when she leaves? Who are the Trust members, past and present (a lot of resignations seem to have happened already)?

How does it feel to be a teacher in a school where the successes are ascribed to the “leadership” (and what about the failures?!)?

**For the consultation:** How would the Every Child Every Day Academy Trust be accountable to staff and parents?

- Will ECEDAT publish the minutes of its governing decisions?
- ECEDAT is legally obliged to publish some of its financial data: what else will it volunteer to make public?
- If Darell decided to no longer be accountable to democratically-elected representatives, what would be the precise process for when things go wrong?
- What are the specific details of ECEDAT’s finances, and its short- and long-term plans?
- Some examples: what would the Trust be legally free to change about Darell without consultation: • its name? • its uniform? • its staffing?

Specifics, please, on ECEDAT’s governance and whether it would be contractually obliged to listen to staff and parents – *and how it compares to federations and other alternatives.*

## How binding?

**From the meetings:** At both meetings, the issue of withdrawal from ECEDAT came up, and whether the Multi-Academy Trust would be given control of the school and its land for 125 years. ECEDAT's answer was that a "divorce" would be easy after six years if the arrangement did not work out. Is it the case that the school would not be able to return to local governance and the only option would be returning to another MAT?



**For the consultation:** How free would Darell be to leave ECEDAT?

- What would the likely costs be in terms of lawyers and consultants?
- With ECEDAT in control of the school, rather than its governing body, who would decide what happened next?
- Would Darell be forced to become part of another Academy?
- Could that be a Chain Academy?

Risk assessment, please.

## Consultation

**From the meetings:** Asked whether staff and parents would be *part of the decision* about the future of Darell, Maggie Bailey said that a collection of parents' feelings would be made, and staff would be free to voice their concerns. Asked whether she would personally be happy with a consultation process that did not ballot staff and parents, she declined to answer.



**For the consultation:** Some binding “referendum” of staff and/or parents would, it is generally felt, risk divisiveness and undermine the governing body’s duty to represent everyone with an interest in the future of Darell. No thank you!

*So: how do we make sure that our school is not one of those organisations that holds a so-called “listening exercise” about a huge decision, then just pushes through an outcome regardless of what anyone has said?*

Since the governing body actually made a formal application to hand control of Darell to ECEDAT months **before** the consultation process is set to begin, how can we make sure that it does not look like one of those “*consultations in name only*”?

It is scarily easy to find examples of academisation that have been pushed through and which have resulted in demoralised staff and parents no longer willing to volunteer and support a school. The standing of these schools in their community drops or plummets – and none of us wants that to happen to Darell.

- Should an **advisory** ballot of staff and parents make sure that everyone’s voice is seen to be heard? This would work best if the options presented were not binary.
- If not, how can the governing body reassure staff and parents, present and future, that this is not a **political move**?
- And if not, how do we include the many stakeholders who do not feel confident in making public statements?

- What is the governing body's plan to replace the consultation group from which four parents have resigned?
- And in terms of decision-making, how precisely do the voices of parents and staff influence the school's future?

Over the past 112 years, staff and parents have made Darell what it is. If they no longer feel part of its future and their enthusiasm is crushed, the school could suffer. So, as always, specifics please...



## Good governance

**From the meetings:** There was no chair of either meeting with ECEDAT. At meetings of the now-disbanded Consultation Group, there was no chair, no agenda, and no minutes were taken. The formal consultation begins on Monday.



**For the consultation:** What is the nature of the consultation?

- Who is being consulted?
- How will the final decision be taken?
- When does a decision need to be made?
- Who decides?
- Is there only one option?
- How will communication happen?
- What would it take for the pre-consultation application to join ECEDAT to be paused?
- What are the pros and cons of *all the alternatives*?

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It's also super-important to say how much enthusiasm and energy was shown by parents and staff before, between and following this week's meetings. People care so much about this school and want to be sure that whichever path we eventually take, it really is the best for Darell.

**Many thanks if you've read this far: you are living proof of the passion and commitment on the part of governors, parents and staff, past and present, that have made Darell unique! In summary, then, those consultation questions again, as a document to download:**

[PDF: Questions for the consultation about the future of Darell Primary & Nursery School](#)

**Let's do this!**