

# Consulting on a greater future for education in Great Yarmouth

Consultation summary and response  
October 2017

# Background to the consultation

In September 2017 the Inspiration Trust launched a consultation on the future of secondary education in Great Yarmouth, particularly with regard to Trafalgar College and Great Yarmouth Charter Academy.

## The proposals

The proposals put forward were to merge Great Yarmouth Charter Academy and Trafalgar College. The merged school would eventually operate from the Salisbury Road site under the Great Yarmouth Charter Academy name.

The outcome for pupils would be a single larger and better resourced academy for Great Yarmouth that could offer an even stronger education for the borough's young people.

This would involve new buildings and a redevelopment of the Salisbury Road site to provide classrooms, sports and cultural facilities, and social spaces for up to 1500 students.

Our existing approved plans for Trafalgar College include a sixth form from September 2021 to match pupils' progression through the school. As the new merged school will have Year 11 students from day one, the consultation also covered whether to apply to bring forward the sixth form start date to 2019.

## Technical detail

These proposals would be enacted by a series of technical changes following an application for significant change to the Department for Education.

The proposed changes were:

- Closure of Great Yarmouth Charter Academy. A

merger of two schools requires one to close, with the merged institution adopting the Department for Education URN of the second school. We are proposing that the merged school adopt the URN of Trafalgar College.

- Variation of the Trafalgar College supplemental funding agreement to rename the school to Great Yarmouth Charter Academy and designate its location as Salisbury Road, Great Yarmouth.

- Variation of the Trafalgar College supplemental funding agreement to increase the pupil capacity to 1500, including a sixth form of 140 from September 2019.

- Variation of the Trafalgar College supplemental funding agreement to include a Christian religious designation and to request the Secretary of State make a matching Order, in line with the Great Yarmouth Grammar School Foundation's charity scheme.

- Variation of the Trafalgar College supplemental funding agreement to revise the land terms to mirror those of the Great Yarmouth Charter Academy supplemental funding agreement.

- Variation of the Trafalgar College supplemental funding agreement to revise the governance terms to mirror those of the Great Yarmouth Charter Academy supplemental funding agreement.

# How we consulted

We used a number of methods to consult with parents, the local community, and other local stakeholders.

## Consultees

We consulted with a range of stakeholders, including:

- parents of children who attend the academies
- parents in the area
- primary, secondary and special schools, and sixth form and further education colleges in the area
- local authorities
- relevant religious authorities

## Consultation approach

We wrote to existing parents at the academies with details of the consultation, through documents sent home with pupils.

We published the consultation details together with frequently asked questions on the Inspiration Trust, Great Yarmouth Charter Academy, and Trafalgar College websites.

We also published links to this information on our Facebook and Twitter accounts, and responded to

questions posed on social media.

We held two parent consultation meetings, one at each academy, where parents from each respective school were able to hear more about the plans, ask questions, and meet key staff including the Trust chief executive.

We provided a press release to local newspapers, radio, television, and websites, resulting in significant media coverage.

We wrote directly to local schools, local authorities, and councillors, and to the Church of England and Roman Catholic dioceses.

We encouraged comments by email and by post, and we responded to questions raised during the consultation by these methods as well as noting comments made.

We published updated frequently asked questions on our websites based on issues raised at meetings, by email, and on social media during the consultation period.

# Summary of comments received

We received a wide range of responses from parents and other local stakeholders. These are summarised below.

## Responses received

### Individuals

We received a number of individual submissions, mostly by email. Where we were able to identify their interest, these were from:

- Existing staff member: 51
- Parent of existing pupil: 16
- Local resident: 3
- Local councillor: 2
- Other / unclear: 9

Of these 63% were in favour of the merger, 2% were neutral, and 35% were opposed.

Issues of concern raised in order of frequency were: location of the merged school; standards and ethos at Charter Academy; religious designation; impact of sixth form on existing provision; overall pupil numbers; future of STEM focus; and special educational needs.

### Group submissions

- Petition to “Stop the proposed high school merger in Great Yarmouth”: 643 signatories, of which 583 were from NR postcodes and 60 from other areas. The petition did not raise any specific points.
- Presentation by pupils: 23 signatories. This focused on objections relating to friendship bonds

and family atmosphere at Trafalgar.

- Round-robin email: 7 submissions. This focused on objections to religious designation; location; and differences in ethos between the two schools.
- Round-robin letter co-ordinated by Trafalgar College PTFA: 50 submissions. This focused on objections to location and catchment; suggested alternative proposals; academic standards; admissions; governance; religious designation; and the consultation process.

### Organisations

- Alderman Swindell Primary School. Objecting.
- East Coast College. Objecting to sixth form provision.
- East Norfolk Sixth Form. Objecting to sixth form provision.
- Lowestoft Sixth Form. Objecting to sixth form provision.
- NASUWT. Objecting to sixth form provision.
- National Union of Teachers –East Norfolk Sixth Form branch. Objecting to sixth form provision.
- National Secular Society. Objecting to religious designation.
- Norfolk County Council. Supporting the overall merger proposals, but objecting to sixth form changes.
- North Denes Primary School. Supporting.

# Our response

We have carefully considered the points raised during the consultation and are now recommending a revised set of proposals in light of the comments received.

## **Merger of the two academies**

We recognise that there is considerable strength of feeling, particularly from Trafalgar College pupils and parents, that the proposals should not proceed.

The Trust remains committed to the original vision put forward for Trafalgar College and if pupil numbers allowed we, too, would prefer for it to continue as a standalone academy. However, we have a duty to act in the best interests of all young people in the town and cannot ignore that the forecast growth in pupil numbers that the school was predicated on has not happened, and current revised predictions would suggest a serious and destabilising number of surplus places in the future.

Norfolk County Council make statutory returns to the Department for Education forecasting pupil numbers. The most recently published figures suggested a need for an extra 295 places in the Great Yarmouth area by 2022/3. Trafalgar at full strength would provide more than double this.

Spreading too small a number of children across all schools in the borough would make it extremely challenging to offer the breadth and quality of education that our young people deserve at several schools in the borough, not just those operated by the Trust.

We recognise that parents feel strongly about the character and curriculum at Trafalgar. Our intention is that the science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) focus at Trafalgar will continue in the merged academy, particularly with regard to the sixth form. The Trust as a whole supports a rigorous, academic curriculum for all pupils at all our schools.

Some parents said they were reluctant to lose the 'small school' feel of Trafalgar. We must note, however, that Trafalgar currently only has two year groups both operating at around half their planned capacity. The culture and operation would inevitably change over time as additional year groups joined. On the original plans, Trafalgar would have more than five times the current number of pupils when full, significantly altering its character.

An alternative proposal put forward was to proceed

with Trafalgar but with reduced capacity. We do not feel that this would be viable, with pupil numbers insufficient to offer a broad range of curriculum options, enrichment, and student support. Particularly at GCSE level, offering a diverse range of subject options requires a sufficiently broad pupil base to make staffing classes practical. Certain subjects, particularly languages and the performing arts, are enhanced by pupils being able to work and practice with their peers. It would be short-changing students to proceed with a school that would be forced to be overly prescriptive with subject options. Operating Thamesfield Way as a satellite site of a merged school would create significant logistical difficulties and is also not considered viable in the medium or long term.

The difficult truth is that present and currently forecast pupil numbers are not sufficient to support two schools at a scale to support the quality of education our young people deserve. We cannot ignore this reality.

Slower than expected economic growth, a lack of housebuilding, and other social and administrative factors have meant that pupil population growth has been downgraded from past predictions.

In turn, this has caused us to reassess the best way to ensure a high quality education for as many children in Great Yarmouth as possible.

The principle of the merger was supported by Norfolk County Council as bringing "the capacity of schools more in line with the current needs identified through Norfolk County Council pupil forecasts."

■ We therefore have concluded, having carefully considered the responses to the consultation, that we will continue with the proposals to merge Great Yarmouth Charter Academy and Trafalgar College.

## **Location of the merged academy**

Some parents of children at Trafalgar College raised questions over the use of the Salisbury Road site for the merged school, claiming that it was outside of the area envisaged by the free school bid.

The free school application for Trafalgar did not

specify a site for the school but that the proposed location was “Great Yarmouth, within 1 mile of bridge”. The bid did not specify which bridge, but the middle of the Salisbury Road site is less than 1 mile as the crow flies from both the Haven Bridge and the Breydon Bridge.

Some parents claimed that the merged school would be “outside their catchment”. However, neither Trafalgar College nor Charter Academy operate a list of catchment or feeder schools, and families have been free for some years to apply to any school of their choice regardless of their previous school or home location.

We note that some respondents referenced catchment maps published on the Norfolk County Council website. These are inaccurate, and do not reflect the content of our admissions policies. We will raise this issue with the council.

While distance is theoretically used as a tie-break criterion, current pupil numbers mean that neither school is oversubscribed. The same is true at other nearby schools: following the Year 7 application round for September 2017, Caister Academy had 57 spare places, Cliff Park 75, and Lynn Grove 49. This suggests there would be no detriment to choice as a result of the new location, with parents well able to make an active and real choice between several local schools.

We do recognise, however, that the geography of Great Yarmouth and the patterns of public transport make access to Salisbury Road from some areas more challenging, particularly Bradwell, Belton, and Gorleston, and to a lesser extent Southtown and Cobholm. While school transport is the responsibility of Norfolk County Council and not individual schools, we will examine the feasibility of subsidised travel from these areas; this will be dependent on pupil numbers and costings.

■ We therefore have concluded, having carefully considered the responses to the consultation, that we will continue with the proposal to designate Salisbury Road as the location for the merged academy, operating under the Great Yarmouth Charter Academy name.

### **Sixth form provision**

We received representations from existing local sixth form providers expressing concern at the plans to bring forward sixth form provision from 2021 to 2019. These largely drew on the recent Norfolk & Suffolk Area Review of Further Education; we note however that this report looked exclusively at standalone colleges and did not examine high

school sixth forms.

Points raised included concern over the numbers of sixth form age students; the size of the sixth form in relation to overall year group sizes; and the quality and breadth of provision.

Norfolk County Council also objected to bringing forward the start date of the sixth form.

Our proposal remains for a high-quality STEM focused provision and as such we believe the proposed year group size is well suited to this specialist provision, and that it would not significantly impact on other providers. This is unchanged from the original free school bid, which has already been granted permission by the Secretary of State.

Having considered the submissions and in particular data on student numbers, we are persuaded that the current 2021 start date fits better with an anticipated upturn in sixth form student numbers. This will also allow more time to work with local colleges to ensure the sixth form offer is complementary to current provision in the area.

■ We therefore have concluded that we will withdraw the proposals to bring forward sixth form provision to 2019, and will instead continue with the already approved provision from 2021.

### **Religious ethos**

We received comments from the National Secular Society and from parents about the proposals to continue Charter Academy’s designation as a school with a non-denominational Christian ethos through to the merged academy.

These included claims that this would risk “religious discrimination and proselytization”, despite there being no evidence for this in recent practice at Great Yarmouth High School (Charter Academy’s predecessor school), or at Lynn Grove Academy (which shared the high school’s sponsor as a voluntary aided school, the Great Yarmouth Grammar School Foundation).

Both Charter and Trafalgar share the same cross-Trust admissions policy, which does not include religious belief as an admissions criterion. Neither use faith as a criterion for staff recruitment or promotion. Both follow the locally-agreed religious education syllabus, and parents retain the legal right to withdraw children from religious education.

On a practical level, we consider that in terms of religion there is very little difference in the day to day operation of the two schools.

We do feel, however, it is important to recognise

the history of Charter Academy's predecessor institutions, and that is appropriate to reflect both schools' heritage in the merged institution.

The 2011 Census found that within the borough, 61% of people identified as Christian; 30% of no faith; and 7% did not answer the question; with the remainder distributed among the other major religions. We feel that the designation reflects the views of the majority of the population, while continuing a light-touch practical approach ensures that those with other beliefs are not excluded.

■ We therefore have concluded, having carefully considered the responses to the consultation, that we will continue with the proposal to apply a Christian religious designation to the merged academy.

### **Funding agreement changes**

We did not receive any specific consultation responses relating to changes to the land terms and governance terms in the funding agreement for the merged academy.

These were in large part ancillary to the substantive changes and follow on from the proposals above.

■ We therefore have concluded that we will continue with the proposals to amend the land terms and governance terms in the funding agreement for the merged academy.

### **Conduct of the consultation and other points**

Some respondents raised points around the conduct of the consultation and other ancillary issues not directly related to the proposals.

These included understandable concerns from union representatives about future employment, which will be considered as part of detailed planning and staff consultation should the proposals proceed.

It was suggested that Section 10 of the Academies Act should apply to the consultation; however, this relates to new academies and the extension of age ranges at existing schools - neither of which applies in this instance.

It was suggested that a separate consultation should take place under the Schools Admissions Code. We are not proposing to amend the admissions policy for either school, and school mergers are not covered within the code. As a result, we believe the consultation procedures under the significant change mechanism are the most appropriate in this case.

It was suggested that the Local Governing Body

of Trafalgar College had been dissolved prior to or during the consultation. This is incorrect. Trafalgar College has been part of a joint local governing body with the Trust's Great Yarmouth primary schools since opening, and this remains the case. Great Yarmouth Charter Academy has a separate local governing body.

It was suggested that the proposals for the merged school and for the bringing forward the start of the sixth form should be treated as 'new' applications rather than significant changes, as the criteria for these has changed since permission for Trafalgar College was granted. However, we note that the Government chose not to apply these changed criteria retrospectively to existing schools, and that the Department for Education's significant change process is explicitly designed to consider changes of the nature being proposed. We therefore consider it is appropriate for the application to continue under the significant change mechanism.

# Revised proposals

Following the consultation, we have amended the proposals and now intend to take forward the revised proposals below. They are subject to the preparation of a full business case which will be submitted for approval by the Inspiration Trust board, before final submission to the Department for Education as a significant change application.

## Revised proposals

- Closure of Great Yarmouth Charter Academy. A merger of two schools requires one to close, with the merged institution adopting the Department for Education URN of the second school. We are proposing that the merged school adopt the URN of Trafalgar College.
- Variation of the Trafalgar College supplemental funding agreement to rename the school to Great Yarmouth Charter Academy and designate its location as Salisbury Road, Great Yarmouth.
- Variation of the Trafalgar College supplemental funding agreement to increase the pupil capacity to 1500.
- Variation of the Trafalgar College supplemental funding agreement to include a Christian religious designation and to request the Secretary of State make a matching Order, in line with the Great Yarmouth Grammar School Foundation's charity scheme.
- Variation of the Trafalgar College supplemental funding agreement to revise the land terms to mirror those of the Great Yarmouth Charter Academy supplemental funding agreement.
- Variation of the Trafalgar College supplemental funding agreement to revise the governance terms to mirror those of the Great Yarmouth Charter Academy supplemental funding agreement.