



Rye Academy Trust

Consultation on Transfer:

Rye College and Rye Community Primary School to the Aquinas Church of England Education Trust (Aquinas)

Detailed below are the responses to questions received as a result of the consultation on transfer as at 21 September 2018 received via email or during the course of the parent, staff and public consultation meetings.

Q1 - The Rye schools have never been Church Schools. Has the conversion to a Church School and all the requirements that go with it for the SIAMS inspections been structured into the SIP? There is clearly a lot of improvement work required in the school as it is, will the SIAMS requirements overshadow or hinder the rapid progress required? While I am aware they do go hand in hand to some extent and the Church Ethos should only benefit the school and the pupils, can you assure us that it is not yet another target we will be required to meet at this already difficult time?

A1 – Aquinas has no intention of changing the designation of the Rye academies from community to Church. Consequently, the Rye academies will not have to meet SIAMS requirements and these will not form part of the SIP for either academy.

Q2 - How will the transfer process affect Rye Primary in terms of faith status (including recruitment and pupil intake), RE syllabus, collective worship, school rules and values - given that the Aquinas website states that provision is centred around Christian values?

A2 – The Rye academies' designation will not change on transfer and the admission criteria will remain unaltered except for any changes which may need to be made to ensure compliance with the School Admissions Code. Both academies will continue to follow the national curriculum in relation to the teaching of RE which will reflect a broadly Christian based curriculum with education on all the major world religions. As required by legislation, there will continue to be a single act of collective worship and the school rules and values will continue as is currently the case.

Q3 – How will Aquinas raise capacity within the Rye academies to secure improvement?

A3 - Aquinas will provide capacity from its centralised business function, Trust improvement team, increased staffing where necessary, effective CPD for teaching and associate staff and shared expertise.

Q4 – How will the geographical distance between Bromley and Rye be overcome so that the Rye academies benefit from being part of Aquinas?

A4 – The Aquinas business function is centralised and provided through systems which can be accessed regardless of locality. Similarly, educational support material is also accessed through the Trust-wide mechanism of 'BlueSky'. Aquinas central staff in both the educational and business arms

are always available on the phone to assist. Members of these teams will also come to Rye on a regular basis to support all functions of academies. However, Aquinas recognises that in order to ensure rapid and sustainable improvement at the Rye academies, school leaders need to be empowered in order to raise standards and teachers and associate staff at the Rye academies need to be supported in improving practice so that quality first teaching is the norm. This will be delivered through a programme of CPD and school to school collaboration locally and with the Bromley academies. There are many trusts throughout the country that operate across different geographical areas and we will model the best practice found from trusts that work in this way.

Q5 – The Aquinas infrastructure needs to be funded; how is this paid for and how will the Rye academies benefit?

A5 – Each Aquinas academy contributes 6% of its funding allocation for the running of the central function which includes finance, HR and payroll, health and safety, premises management, legal compliance, governance and school improvement. This contribution is less than the contribution previously paid to the council. In addition, Aquinas academies receive more central services which are of high quality. The Rye academies’ budgets have planned for this contribution and in the year of transition to Aquinas there will be an increase in costs as some contracts will be running concurrently. Thereafter, the move to Aquinas will be cost neutral but the Rye academies will benefit from increased services especially in relation to school improvement support.

Q6 – Will there be financial investment in Rye Community Primary School?

A6 – The primary will receive the financial investment necessary to improve educational standards. Unlike Rye College, the primary does not need capital investment for its buildings as it has the benefit of a modern school building. The staffing at the primary is also stable but where there is a need for additional capacity this will be provided. On this basis, the primary has recently recruited a full-time SENCO who will be part of the leadership team. Members of the academy leadership team deliver teaching to support educational improvement, following the Aquinas model of the very best practitioners and experienced staff delivering at classroom level.

Q7 – Why has communication with parents been poor? Lack of communication caused heightened parental concerns which resulted in parents lacking confidence in the school.

A7 – Aquinas will work with school leaders to improve home school communication so that parents can be fully updated on the work of each academy and any changes as they occur. Improved communication will include updates on the building work.

Q8 – The existing Aquinas secondary academy had an Ofsted rating of ‘good’ when it converted in 2011, since then it has retained this rating but has not improved on it. How can the Rye community be sure that the Aquinas has the right tools and experience for moving Rye College towards a Good OFSTED rating at a rapid pace?

A8 - Since 2011 the Ofsted ‘good’ judgement criteria have changed, becoming more challenging; thus, the maintenance of ‘good’ judgement is in itself an excellent achievement in a dynamic educational environment. Please see the secondary academy’s website for its data which shows improvement despite the rigours of the new linear qualifications. The Aquinas trustees’ reports (www.aquinastrust.org) also demonstrates the year on year improvements that the academies have made.

Q9 - While the needs of primary and secondary schools’ bear similarities, they are also very different challenges.

A9 - Aquinas recognises that the challenges faced by primary and secondary academies are different. Consequently, Aquinas' improvement team involves experts from both sectors to support our academies. Nevertheless, quality first teaching is fundamental across all academies and thus a focus for Aquinas. This, coupled with effective professional development for teaching and associate staff, will enable more effective practice in the classroom which in turn will impact on standards.

Q10 - The Aquinas Trust has acquired primary schools at a fairly impressive rate with little let up in the growth over the last 7 years. The impact of such rapid growth and change would have little time to settle and be evident between acquisitions. Can you assure us that the further growth of the Trust to incorporate the Rye Schools will be manageable; especially given that we are a fair distance from the main cluster?

A10 – The growth of the Aquinas Trust has been planned very carefully to ensure that we have sufficient capacity each time we have expanded. A number of the academies that have joined us have brought additional capacity and it is this that has enabled us to grow in a consolidated manner. Aquinas has not grown in the last two years, but instead has taken this period of time to consolidate all of the back office functions required of the Trust to strengthen the school improvement team and professional development offer, all in preparation for growth in a different geographical area. Aquinas has no plans to expand in the short to medium term. Its focus will be the rapid educational improvement of the Rye academies providing much needed capacity in terms of both education and business functions.

Q11 – Have parents been involved in the 'journey' regarding the transfer to Aquinas?

A11 – Consultation has been undertaken with parents at the primary and secondary academies. In addition, parents have been introduced to Aquinas through Mr. Blakelock's regular parental meetings at the secondary academy. The Head of School at the primary academy and the Lead Executive of the Rye Academy Trust have also had meetings with parents to explain the move to Aquinas.

Q12 – What are the plans for pupils with mental health?

A12 – Both academies have detailed procedures to deal with issues of pupil mental health. The primary academy uses its mental health grant and follows East Sussex's guidance. Both schools use external resources to support mental health strategies as well as involving families and the community in order to develop resilience in all pupils.

Q13 – How will pupil premium funding be spent to provide impact?

A13 – Rye primary is using pupil premium effectively and showing impact. The Aquinas secondary has the knowledge and strategies to support the effective use of pupil premium which will be shared with Rye College. In addition, Rye College requires additional capacity to its pastoral system to support disadvantaged pupils. Ofsted has confirmed that the direction of Rye College is correct but now staff need upskilling and pupils need to be aspirational for their own progression.

Q14 – Will the model teaching as found at the studio school be used at the College?

A14 – The principles of teaching as developed by the studio school programme were excellent but not supported by the necessary funding. Aquinas is committed to improving the existing Rye academies through the use of a number of initiatives.

Q15 – Will the Arts still be a focus in the College curriculum?

A15 – The College will continue to focus on the core academic subjects but every child will be able to study at least 1 ‘Arts’ subject. Aquinas academies are committed to a broad and balanced curriculum offer for all pupils.

Q16 – Rye depends on the tourist industry and as such pupils at the College need qualifications to gain employment in this area; how will this be achieved?

A16 – The College must provide pupils with the core academic subjects as these are vital for their post 16 education. Once the current curriculum model has embedded other courses will become available. The curriculum model for each individual academy is set by its leadership team.

Q17 – Once the Rye academies have transferred, Aquinas will be the owner of all the land and buildings; what protection is there to prevent Aquinas from selling the assets?

A17 – Aquinas is prevented from realising assets without the approval of the Department of Education. Furthermore, the lease of the College and primary sites from East Sussex County Council does not permit resale. So Aquinas has the responsibility of maintaining the sites but cannot sell the asset.

Q18 – Are local contractors being used to do the work at the College?

A18 – Aquinas is required to follow procedures for the use of public money, ensure that best value is obtained and the appropriate tender procedures are followed. Within this framework local contractors will be invited to bid where possible.

Q19 – Does Aquinas have a mobile phone policy?

A19 – The preparation and implementation of mobile phone policies for application within school is left to the leaders of each academy. Both Rye academies have such policies. The academies can only apply these policies during school hours and have no authority over the use of mobile phones outside of school.

Q20 – How do Aquinas Advisory Councils (AAC) operate?

A20 – AACs replace local governing bodies in the Aquinas structure. They provide advice, support and capacity to the leaders of each academy. They protect the unique characteristic of each academy and undertake some delegated functions in relation to exclusions, admissions, appointment of staff and staff grievance and disciplinary procedures. The AACs consist of 6 Trust appointed representatives, 2 staff representatives, which include the head of school and an elected staff representative and 2 parent elected representatives. The Trust representatives are appointed for their expertise and Aquinas will be looking to recruit individuals from the community to serve on the Rye academies’ AACs. The recruitment process will occur during the course of the current academic year as initially there will be a Rye committee overseeing the academies.

Q21 – Will Aquinas engage with the community?

A21 – Aquinas is very keen to engage with the Rye community. Post transfer, Aquinas will have a public meeting to facilitate the engagement which will be publicised as widely as possible.

Q22 – Will the work at the College include a refurbishment of the Milligan theatre?

A22 – The work will include considerable work on the theatre.

Q23 – Have staff responded positively to the transfer to Aquinas?

A23 – Yes, staff at both academies have been working with Aquinas prior to the commencement of the consultation. Kathy Griffiths, CEO of Aquinas, has also held meetings with staff prior to the end of the last academic year.

Q24 – Will the nursery transfer with the primary academy?

A24 – Yes

Q25 – Will it be possible for all pupils at Rye College to have the use of a locker?

A25 – Aquinas, together with the leadership of the College, will be looking into the provision of lockers and, if at all possible, we would like to put this in place.

Q26 – Will the quality of teaching at the College and, in particular Maths, improve?

A26 – The maths results of the College have been disappointing for a number of years; however, a rigorous programme is in place at the primary academy which will be followed through at the secondary which will support the new GCSE qualification that pupils will have to achieve.

Q27 – When will Ofsted review the standards at both academies again?

A27 – The next formal inspection will be in 30 months as Ofsted recognises that academies need time to implement and secure improvement, but Ofsted will undertake monitoring visits. However, Ofsted inspections will not be the focus of school improvement for the Rye academies. They will follow the SIP agreed with Aquinas' improvement director. The standards and teaching at the Rye academies will be scrutinised in detail by Aquinas' improvement director and Education Scrutiny Committee to ensure that both academies are progressing as appropriate.

Q28 – Will Aquinas establish a 6th form at Rye College?

A28 – It is well accepted that the existence of a 6th form improves academic achievement throughout a school; thus, in the long term, Aquinas would be delighted to open a 6th form, but this is not a priority or focus at the current time. For the next 3 to 5 years, Aquinas will be focussed on improving the standards at both academies.

The meeting noted that approximately 30% of students attend the College from the Hastings area.

If you have not yet had an opportunity to ask a specific question you are very welcome to do so and we would welcome your views and comments on this proposal and invite you to respond by 9th October 2018. This consultation response will be updated as further questions are received until the end of the consultation period:

- **In writing to:-** Consultation re Transfer of Rye College and Rye Community Primary School, Aquinas, Magpie Hall Lane, Bromley BR2 8HZ; or
- **By email to:-** info@aquinatrust.org inserting Consultation re Transfer of Rye College and Rye Community Primary School.

Please provide details of your name and contact details to assist us in collating the responses. Whilst all responses will be acknowledged, it will not be possible to correspond with individual respondents.