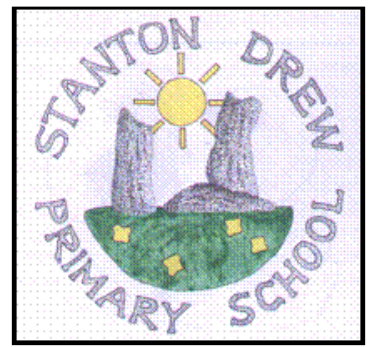




The Federation of Bishop Sutton and Stanton Drew Primary Schools



Wednesday 5th April 2017

Dear Parents and Carers,

As you will be aware, schools are very much in the news at the moment, with talk of funding shortfalls, academies, grammar schools, free schools, teaching standards, exam results... Amongst what often seems to be a gloomy picture, I am writing to tell you about a key new development, which I think will greatly enhance our schools and the education and opportunities it is able to offer the children.

It is the role of school governors to set the strategic direction for the school, and the governors of our Federation Schools have been monitoring developments closely - always with the key objective of ensuring that the school is well-placed to offer the best education to the children at the school - both now and in the future.

To date, the school has been well-served operating as part of Bath and North and Somerset Local Authority. However the government has made it clear that the future of schools under local authority control is limited (although it has shied away from legally forcing schools to separate from local authorities). With that background, B&NES has started to significantly reduce the support that it can offer schools.

Over the last 12 months, there have been a number of conversations taking place between governors and headteachers across the Chew Valley, at both primary and secondary level. (So that's Bishop Sutton & Stanton Drew, Cameley, Chew Magna, Chew Stoke, Chew Valley, East Harptree, Pensford, Ubley, Winford.) From these conversations it became clear that there was a strong appetite for the schools to work together to drive up educational standards as well as sharing resources. It also became increasingly clear that there are shared values between the schools; as well as the desire to offer an outstanding education, the small rural nature of the schools means that they can be very focused on the individuality of each child. Each school also plays an important part in its local community.

One way in which schools are able to work together is in a 'multi-academy trust,' or 'MAT'. A MAT is a single legal entity within which a number of schools can operate. A MAT will typically provide various services centrally for all the schools, with other services provided at a school level, in the way that best fits with the needs of the schools and their pupils, and the ethos of the MAT.

The governors from schools across the Chew Valley therefore concluded that it will be in the best interests of the pupils at the schools if the schools were able to join together in a MAT. However the combined schools within the Chew Valley are really too small to form a successful MAT on their own. A team of governors drawn from across the schools was therefore tasked with reviewing other groups of schools with which the Chew Valley schools could combine. The result of that review is that the schools are now looking at joining the Lighthouse Schools Partnership ('LSP'). LSP is a MAT based in Gordano, overseen by Gary Lewis whom some of you may remember as a former deputy head at Chew Valley School. LSP is proposing to expand significantly over the next two years, based around four

centres, or 'hubs'. The four proposed hubs will be Gordano, Backwell, Churchill and Chew Valley. The Federation Governing Body met last week and decided in principle to pursue this path; the strengthening of links with Chew Valley School being something which governors are keen to nurture and strengthen.

In each case, the hubs will be similar to the Chew Valley hub, with a secondary school and a number of primary schools. Lighthouse was selected for several reasons: It will provide excellent opportunities for the Valley schools to collaborate with schools that are rated 'good' or 'outstanding' by OFSTED; LSP has values that correspond closely to the values of the Chew Valley schools; the enlarged MAT will operate across both primary and secondary schools, allowing better transition for pupils as they move up; and importantly all the schools are based close to each other around the southwest edge of Bristol, which will make it easier to collaborate and share best practice.

There are many different ways in which MATs can be set up. The Lighthouse model provides a lot of autonomy for each proposed hub to run itself. For the Chew Valley schools, this means that each school can continue to be run by its governing body and headteacher, but the idea is they will have more time to focus on improving things for the children and be less distracted by some of the day to day administration. The governors and headteachers are continuing to develop more detail around how this will work but it is crucial that each school is able to retain its own unique identity, and is able to continue to play a key role in the local community.

When will this all happen and what will it mean for the children? It will be about a year from now before schools from the Chew Valley join LSP (although the decision to join needs to be finalised this summer). In the meantime, headteachers are already starting to put in place some of the ideas for collaborating to make the schools even better. Once the schools actually join LSP, there will be no immediate change for pupils, parents or staff, but each school will be able to call on a wider array of resources and the hub will be in a position to develop as it responds to the needs of the young people.

Obviously there may be further changes in the future based on future actions by the government for example. But going back to the opening point – the governors believe that this represents the best opportunity for ensuring that our Federation is well-placed to offer the best education to the children at the school - both now and in the future.

This is clearly a limited overview of a complex topic. We would also like to invite you to a Parents' briefing meeting on **Thursday 27th April** where there will be an opportunity for parents to ask questions and pass on comments. The first session will be at **Stanton Drew at 6pm** and the second at **Bishop Sutton at 7.30pm**. As things develop we will keep you informed. In the meantime if you have any questions, please contact either myself (via the school office), Dieter Cook or Andy Marriott.

Kind regards,

Jonathan Layzell

Chair of Governors