

## Local Authority Governors



### Councillor Miranda Williams

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Dear colleague,

### Managing the changing educational landscape

I am writing to you in your capacity as a Local Authority nominated governor for a school in Royal Greenwich. In the context of a changing educational landscape, several schools are considering the transition to academy status, including groups of schools who are considering converting as a group to become a multi-academy trust (or MAT as they known). The Governing Body is the Accountable Body for a school and decisions about a school's governance are made by the Governing Body not the Local Authority. However, I thought it would be useful to set out the Local Authority's position, including a little background on the national as well as the local picture.

#### National landscape

- The current government is determined to accelerate the conversion of schools to academy status. The Prime Minister has stated explicitly the intention that all schools will be academies by the end of this government's administration.
- All new schools must be academies. This is termed the "academy presumption". New academies are commissioned by the Secretary of State (via the free schools process) with the local authority playing no role. Capital funding for school places reflects this with funding for new schools held by central government and grant to the local authority for expansions of existing schools only.
- At the same time, there is growing recognition within the current government that schools do not thrive as isolated, single institutions but function best within some kind of grouping which provides accountability, challenge and support. Such groupings of academies are called "multi-academy trusts" (MATs). Similar arrangements for local authority maintained schools are "federations".
- Although revenue spending on schools is said to be protected, the rising pupil population means that, if overall spend remains the same, the per pupil spend must reduce. It is highly likely that the move to a national funding formula for schools will

shift money out of London. Financial pressures mean that it makes sense for schools to work together to maximise economies of scale (moving to joint appointments, sharing expertise and procuring services).

### **Local landscape**

- The Local Authority has taken a pragmatic view on academies recognising that the structure of schools has less impact on children's learning than the quality of leadership, teaching and learning. Our priority is for every child to attend a good local school where they will make good progress educationally and socially and be well prepared for adult life.
- Nine of our thirteen secondary and post-16 schools in Royal Greenwich are academies. Three of these are in multi-academy trusts and two are working in less formal partnerships with other schools. None of our primary schools are academies. Sixteen are in partnerships formalised by governors through federations and seven others are in less formal partnerships.
- Partnerships between schools (both formal and informal) have been highly effective in Royal Greenwich, especially in the primary phase with 94% of primary schools now good or outstanding (ninth best in the country) and standards of education consistently better than the national average for children aged 5 to 16 and the achievement of 19 year olds closing the gap on national.
- With a rapidly growing population in Royal Greenwich we need more school places. To create those places, we have capitalised on our success by expanding good and outstanding schools. As a result, the vast majority of new places are in successful schools.

### **Further challenges**

- Our challenge now is that the number of school places we need to keep pace with our growing population cannot be met any longer only by expansions of existing schools. We need new schools to meet our statutory obligation to provide sufficient school places for our residents. However, both the legal framework and funding framework prevent us from creating new schools, leaving the only route through new academies.
- The Local Authority wants to work with our schools and with the DfE to secure places in schools which share our priorities and ambitions for Greenwich children. This could include our good and outstanding schools bidding to open new schools, recognising that the only route to do this is through those schools first making the transition to academy status.
- The Secretary of State has the power to require schools which are deemed to be underperforming to join a multi-academy trust. Of course, our aim is that no Greenwich school underperforms but, when they have faced challenges, our schools

have benefited from capacity created by school partnerships. This could be provided through local multi-academy trusts, committed to serving the local community.

### **The role of the Local Authority Governor**

Improving standards of education and the outcomes achieved by Greenwich children is a priority for the Council. To fulfil our statutory obligation to promote children's educational achievement and well-being, the Local Authority seeks strong cooperation with schools based on well established collaborative working across the family of Greenwich schools and shared values.

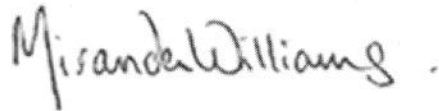
As a governor, the decisions you take must be in the best interest of the school, the education it provides and the children it serves. In considering any proposal about school organisation, there are some areas on which you will want to be reassured:

- School place planning and the school's commitment to responding to the community it serves and a growing population;
- Admissions including
  - Fair admissions policy giving priority to vulnerable children, including looked after children and children with special educational needs
  - Responding positively and flexibly to families newly arrived in the borough
  - Admission of pupils who are hard to place through the Fair Access Protocol;
- Procedures to safeguard children's welfare with commitment to and capacity for a multi-agency response to child protection and safeguarding, including early help and prevention;
- Collaboration with the Local Authority and across schools to provide for children with special educational needs and disabilities;
- Contribution to the drive to raise educational standards and improve outcomes for children, including:
  - Effective leadership and governance
  - Suitably qualified staff
  - Systems for self-evaluation and improvement
  - Data sharing;
- Collaboration across the family of Greenwich schools and with the Local Authority to raise standards of education for all children, specifically to engage with school to school support for schools where the outcomes achieved by children and / or the quality of provision cause concern;
- Collaboration in planning and providing a broad curriculum for children from 3 to 19 years old to ensure they all have access to appropriate and good quality learning while avoiding duplication which reduces effectiveness and efficiency.

Schools in Greenwich certainly have the capacity to shape their own destiny and it is right that governing bodies and school leaders scan national and local developments to help shape the future direction of the school. Some schools are already in well-embedded partnerships and some are considering the potential of cross school collaboration. We are in the positive position of having no Greenwich school facing external pressure to move into new governance arrangements unless they want to or until they are ready.

I hope you will find this helpful. Of course, I am happy to discuss any queries which are school specific or which you feel I haven't addressed here.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Miranda Williams". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small dot at the end.

**Cllr Miranda Williams**  
**Cabinet Member for Children's Services**