

## **Proposal for Dulwich Hamlet Educational Trust schools to join The Charter Schools Educational Trust**

### **Context**

*These questions and answers respond to the points raised via the survey published before half term, for parents and staff. We received 27 responses from parents, and 2 from teachers by 19<sup>th</sup> November, when the survey closed. Of these, 21 were from The Belham Primary School including 2 teachers, and 8 were from Dulwich Hamlet parents.*

*When you have finished, please click on the links at the end of this document which will take you to further helpful information provided by The Charter Schools Educational Trust.*

### ***Will there be automatic admissions from our primary schools that join the Charter Trust into The Charter Schools?***

No. There are no plans to change current admission arrangements.

All the schools, the Charter schools and our schools, have their own admissions criteria which are based on siblings and distance, after any specific social and medical and 'looked after children' considerations. Children with an Education and Health Care Plan have a different admissions route which goes via the child's Local Authority.

In addition, this just wouldn't be fair for other primary schools, whether they might wish to join the trust in the future or not. No changes to the current admissions policies of any of the schools are planned, and secondary transfer will continue via the Common Admissions Form.

### ***Will Dulwich Hamlet and the Belham be adversely affected by joining a Multi-Academy Trust?***

No. Both schools are already part of a multi –academy trust:- Dulwich Hamlet Educational Trust, and are 'state schools', outside local authority control.

Dulwich Hamlet Junior School became a single academy trust in 2011. If the schools join The Charter Schools Educational Trust, (referred to as The Charter Trust), Dulwich Hamlet Educational Trust will be dissolved and no longer be listed as a charitable company at Companies House or with the Department for Education. It will no longer be required, as a separate entity, to submit an Annual Company Report or Annual Accounts.

***Will Dulwich Hamlet, The Belham, The Charter Schools, or any other which may join the TCSET, lose individuality, autonomy, and identity? How will the Board of Trustees and each of the schools' Governing Bodies ensure the character of each of the schools?***

Dulwich Hamlet Educational Trust and the governing bodies at the Belham and Dulwich Hamlet, are committed to the unique identity and ethos of their separate schools. This is a principle firmly supported by The Charter Trust and all the schools within it.

All the schools are committed to the same vision to provide an outstanding education for children and young people in community focused schools. Parents and pupils have a strong voice in how the schools should operate. This will continue. Becoming part of a larger trust ensures that that our ability to promote our vision and values is strengthened not diminished.

A key principle of The Charter Trust is that each of the schools maintain their own character. Our schools will be encouraged to innovate and share their learning across the Trust and our leaders will continue to be empowered to lead in the best interests of the pupils and the school.

By working in close collaboration based on a shared mission and values, all the pupils in the Charter Trust will benefit from our best collective practice.

We all have a common commitment to developing the whole pupil, (focused on the emotional and social growth of the child as well as their academic development), promoting creativity and innovation, as well as raising standards.

In practical terms there will be very little visible change in the way that all schools operate. Our school values and ethos will also be maintained, building on the outstanding education for which we are known.

Schools will retain their own uniforms, and unique websites which express their identities.

Autonomy for Head teachers to lead in the best interests of pupils is within the Charter Trust scheme of delegation. Each school's governing body will continue to have oversight and responsibility and accountability for school based matters. The Charter Board of Trustees' responsibilities are similar to those we have in place at DHET, focusing on the strategic leadership of the Trust. The Charter Trust Board meets four times a year and forms the board of directors of the charity, overseeing the day-to-day running of the Trust. It approves policies and procedures, and holds the Chief Executive Officer, who is Cassie Buchanan, to account for performance and outcomes across all the schools in the Trust.

***How will the future Trust Board be comprised? Will the Hamlet and Belham governors change if we join?***

The current details of the Charter Trustees are published on their website, along with attendance at meetings and their involvement in any other public organisations. We are currently in discussions about the future composition of the Board.

Trustees are appointed to the Board by the 'Members' who meet once a year. They set the overall purpose, ethos, and strategic direction of the Trust, and have the power to make key appointments to ensure that these are upheld.

The Trust board conduct regular self-reviews and skills audit ensuring that it has the key skills and knowledge to hold the Charter Trust Executive Team to account. Trustees and governors are unpaid volunteers –they do not receive remuneration for their service to schools. Each school's governing body, (which will not change if we join), is made up of parents, staff and community representation – this 'local' governance is essential to ensuring that schools retain their sense of individual identity and autonomy.

The Charter Trust, like all multi-academy trusts, is a charity and private companies do not play a part in governance at any level.

***Will there be a shared vision and what will be the key priorities for the coming years?***

We all have a clear shared mission to provide our community of young people with outstanding educational opportunities. The key priorities for The Charter Trust over the coming year(s), are to develop the existing practices and to support the smooth transition of Dulwich Hamlet and the Belham into the family of schools, whilst starting the journey of growing a like-minded educational family.

Lyndhurst Primary School in Camberwell is another local school, with which some of our Belham and Hamlet parents are familiar, and is currently in discussions about joining –which we would fully support.

Beyond this, the focus is on developing the trust-wide professional learning and development pathways and programmes for all staff. This will further strengthen the quality of education in every school in the Charter Trust and help retain talented staff.

***What will be the key benefits?***

We believe that there will be benefits to pupils, staff, local communities and for school systems, administration and finance in joining The Charter Trust.

Our pupils, who already receive an excellent education, will benefit still further as teachers develop increased knowledge and understanding of what makes best practice. Staff will gain wider development opportunities and build upon the existing partnerships between the schools, by enabling further mutual support and challenge, in this growing group of local schools.

There will be more opportunities for collaboration, coordination and understanding, on a range of matters from curriculum and staffing to the sourcing of services. A larger business team will work together to support our schools ensuring that school leaders have more time to focus on the quality of education and well-being of pupils. Greater purchasing power for contracts means cost savings through economies of scale, with the financial benefits that provides.

A larger body of schools will give us greater capacity to share our ethos and vision with our local community, and help other pupils not yet part of the expanding trust, benefit from localised collaboration.

The Charter Trust offers us a strong framework and opportunity to work with other locally minded schools, and provides resilience to weather the changes in the national education landscape.

***How will we know money is being well spent and the new trust will seek value for money?***

There will be as many checks and balances on how the schools spend their finances as there are currently. School Leaders will be responsible for setting the balanced budget for their school, supported by the Charter Trust's Chief Financial Officer and the Chief Executive. The Charter Trust believes head teachers know their schools best, so this support will focus on achieving value for money in services and resources as well as ensuring spending addresses the goals of the school's development plans.

At Trust level, achieving value for money is a key focus of the central services team. The Charter Trust central team includes skilled and strategic leaders for finance, estate management, IT development, human resources and governance.

***Will each school lose its financial independence and its ability to manage its own finances?***

Our schools will have the same level of financial independence as they currently enjoy. Central costs, and individual school contributions towards these, should be lower.

There are common 'Financial Procedures', which ensure strict adherence to the very best financial management operations across all schools, and each school will be expected to run

their own budgets and provide value for money, with finances spent on pupil educational experiences and outcomes.

Each school contributes a 'top-slice' to pay for central costs such as school improvement and business services. This includes the CEO, central team, auditors, lawyers and HR services. Because costs are spread across a larger number of schools than currently, this will result in cost savings for the individual schools. The school budgets remain at school level and individual schools' finances will not be re-allocated by the Trust.

Funding for specific children and programmes are not included in the GAG and go directly to the schools. This includes funding for all children with special needs, funding to support attainment of children from disadvantaged backgrounds (pupil premium), and additional funding for sport (PE Sports Grant).

### ***What does joining The Charter Trust mean for Hamlet and Belham staff across both schools?***

Staff will have a new employer: 'The Charter Schools Educational Trust'. Under employment law (TUPE) there will be no negative change to existing pay and conditions. There will be increased opportunities for staff development, staff progression and staff retention. We hope that there will be a significant impact on recruitment and retention, as new teachers recognize the greater personalised professional opportunities for remaining within a larger organisation, rather than looking outside for career advancement.

Teachers can observe each other across the key stages and across subjects. Teachers will be actively involved in developing subject networks across the Trust where best practice will be shared and joint professional learning and projects can take place. This could include effective classroom questioning, how to stretch and challenge high attaining pupils, innovative use of the latest IT and online learning, to explorations of research into emotional wellbeing. This empowers and upskills teachers.

Our commitment to staff well-being is shared by the Charter Trust and we will continue to focus on allowing teachers to enjoy their classroom teaching, and we will ensure that staff voice is always listened to.

We support career development and promotion from within, to offer a wide range of opportunities for all our staff and this will continue.

***How will the trust support new recruits into the profession?***

The current schools are firmly committed to bringing on the next generation through teacher training programmes such as Schools Direct and Initial Teacher Training Programmes. This will continue.

Our NQTS (newly qualified teachers) will benefit hugely from the expertise of the middle and senior leadership teams, and will have even more learning opportunities across a wider range of school settings, as well as meeting on a regular basis for learning opportunities and social support.

***Will the staff be expected to work in other schools or provide cover in other schools?***

Nobody would be asked to work in another trust school if they did not wish to do so, although having the ability to move staff between schools, can provide a great opportunity for career development if it was needed.

***Why did the merger not take place three years ago? What changed?***

Sometimes, timing is all. As before, the trustees, governors, and executive staff are conducting 'getting to know' and due diligence activities. Personnel have changed and with the appointment of Cassie Buchanan, and the joining of The Research School, the London South Teaching School Alliance, whose function is to provide professional development to teachers and schools, and Charles Dickens Primary School. This coupled with the imminent retirement of Sonia Case, our current Executive Head Teacher, makes the time now right.

***Has the decision to join the Charter Trust already been made by the Trustees?***

***What is the alternative?***

No decision has yet been taken but the Trustees are supportive of the principle of joining the Charter. Trustees want to secure the best long-term future for our two schools. A final decision will be taken in the light of the current discussions and consultations. If DHET does not join the Charter Trust it will continue as a two school MAT and seek to recruit a new Executive Headteacher in 2021.

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Further information can be found by clicking the links below:

[The Charter Schools Trust Guide for Parents](#)

[The Charter School Trust Offer](#)