



MINUTES OF THE MEETING: Wednesday 11th January 2012
Holy Trinity International School Free School application

Meeting Chaired by: Dr Nicholas Tate – Chairman of IES
Mrs P Leek-Wright – Headteacher

Mrs P Leek-Wright opened the evening and welcomed the large number of parents present. She reassured parents that with the Free School application the school's academic standards and pastoral care would not be compromised. It will be our aim to maintain in every way the current successful ethos of the school. The purpose of the meeting is to give parents the opportunity to ask questions and clarify any concerns they may have.

Mrs Leek-Wright introduced Dr Tate, the full-time executive Chairman of IES. Dr Tate has been the headteacher of two schools, most recently The International School in Geneva. During the 1990s he was the chief adviser on curriculum, national tests and qualifications to the Secretary of State for Education.

Dr Tate then addressed parents:

An application for Free School status is being submitted. This means that, if successful, HTIS will become an Independent State School. The school will be funded by the Department of Education, not the local authority. We would not have to follow the National Curriculum. The Free School would be run as a Charitable Trust and a new charitable company set up alongside our existing Trust. There would be a Board of Governors which would include two parents and the Headteacher. The Board would play a key role in the governance of the school.

Under the Government's Free School scheme, the first schools were opened in September 2011, there will be a further batch in September 2012, and HTIS is applying for Free School status from September 2013. The majority of Free Schools are built from scratch, however there are some schools which, like HTIS, are independent and applying to change their status. An example is Batley Grammar School which was founded in 1612 and became a Free School in September 2011. Mrs Leek-Wright and Dr Tate will be visiting this school shortly to see how it has managed the change. HTS was founded in 1903 and we wish to ensure its continuance into the future.

The Government's Free School initiative is designed to make good education accessible to a wider range of people. In our case this would be to families who are currently unable to afford an education at HTIS. Only the Prep and Senior school would become a Free School (4 – 19 years). The Nursery would continue being a private Nursery from 0 to 4 years old. HTS looks as if it would be the first Free School in the area.

We aim to provide a smooth continuum of education for pupils all the way from 4 to 19. We are planning to cap class sizes at 20 for Reception, Year 1 and Year 2, and at 22 from Years 3 up to Year 11. We plan to expand the Sixth Form significantly. Although numbers will rise the school will remain a small school by the standards of many other local schools.

We are committed to maintain the school's ethos and family atmosphere, including the courtesy and respect that all members of the community have for each other. The school's distinctive international curriculum will be maintained and strengthened.

WHY BECOME A FREE SCHOOL?

HTS has always been a school to which many parents have wished to send their children to be educated, however due to the economic climates many are unable to afford to afford the fees or, once here, to keep up with them. HTS therefore has been funding huge numbers of Bursaries and Scholarships, and thus running at a deficit each year. Free School status would extend opportunities to others and help to secure the long term future of the school.

Funding for a Free School is based on the average costs per pupil for their education within local maintained schools. We would therefore receive an agreed amount per pupil, as well as a capital grant.

Our application is to be received by 24th February 2012. In support of this, Evidence of Demand Questionnaires will need to be completed and will be available to parents from 12th January 2012. Questionnaires will also be made available for completion by other local families (within the Worcestershire area) who wish to bring their child here.

For pupils already at HTIS at the end of July 2013, they will be given priority places.

For those children currently in Nursery / Kindergarten, they will also be given priority for a place in Reception at HTIS.

The Free School application will be a thorough and long process. It will involve a scrutiny of our submission and an interview by officials at the Department of Education. Dr Tate is hopeful that our application will be granted as he thinks we have a very good case, but this is in the hands of the Secretary of State and we will

not know the outcome until summer 2012. If our application is not agreed IES will aim to continue to run HTS in a more financially beneficial way, as the deficit is not sustainable for the future. We have no plans to close the school.

If our application is granted for Free School status, this would involve a 7 year contract, with notice of its termination to be given 7 years in advance.

BENEFITS OF A FREE SCHOOL

There would be more security for HTIS, a more viable 6th Form, and from September 2014 we would plan to introduce the International Baccalaureate Diploma programme into the 6th Form. This programme is being adopted by more and more independent and state schools worldwide and has widespread university recognition and support. We would be the first maintained school in the area to offer this programme. We anticipate boosting our 6th Form for September 2012 by introducing a financial incentive to encourage Year 11 students to continue, by offering a 75% discount on fees for entry into Year 12.

HTIS will continue to be part of the IES Network through the extra-curricular activities that IES offers such as the “Blue Week” and it is hoped that more pupils in the future would be enabled to take part in these international excursions.

From September 2014 HTIS will be part of the Local Authority’s admissions scheme. We will be proposing, however, a wide catchment area. HTIS is already a mixed ability school and the extent to which this is the case is likely to increase over time. The Department of Education will regulate us and there will be many procedures and policies that we will need to follow. There will be a great deal of work involved over time in this transition by staff.

We ask parents to help and support us in our application.

We will be setting up a steering group which will incorporate staff, parents, myself and Mrs P Leek-Wright and the Chair of Trustees in support of our application.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q: Are HTS confident of our application being passed and what is Dr Tate’s personal opinion of this?

I can make no promises about success, but assure you that we will endeavour to make a very strong case.

Q: If unsuccessful, what is the future of HTS?

We must reduce our deficit to an acceptable level and this of course is dependent on the state of the economy. We would need to plan how we can attract more 6th Formers from abroad, with the attraction of the IB. We need to liaise with Homestay families to encourage international students. My mission is to continue to work with HTIS and to do everything I can to make it an on-going success.

Q: Are parents going to be advised at every stage of the application?

We will endeavour to keep everyone informed of the progress of the application. Details will be included in our regular Newsletters, on the website and in letters to parents.

Q: Regarding the deficit, will funding help to clear this?

We are assuming that rental will be paid to the HTS Trust and that slowly over time this will reduce the inherited deficit.

Q: What incentive will there be for current Year 11 students to continue?

We will offer a fee reduction for students entering Year 12 in September 2012. As previously stated the IB will be implemented in September 2014 for the 6th Form. We will continue to provide A Levels up till then.

Q: What is the response from teachers to the Free School?

Mrs P Leek-Wright confirmed that staff are supportive of the application, as they acknowledge the educational advantages this could bring.

Q: What can you offer other families with students in different Year Groups who continue to pay fees?

It is essential that we have a strong viable Year 12 for September 2012, as this is where we lose numbers from the transition of Year 11 to Year 12 – hence a major fee reduction. There will be no general fee reductions in other year groups.

Q: Evidence of Demand Questionnaire - what is this?

This is to show the interest from current parents who would wish to continue bringing their children to HTIS and also that of prospective parents who wish their child to join us in September 2013. This will enable the Department of Education to ascertain that we would receive sufficient numbers to fill each year group.

Q: How will prospective parents get to hear about the Free School?

We have an advert about Free Schools which will be sent out via local media, newspapers, local radio and also by the hand delivery of letters/questionnaires to the local community.

Q: What will be the criteria for the admissions policy?

The policy will stipulate class sizes. Once year groups are oversubscribed criteria for giving priority to those on the waiting list will need to be developed and approved by the Department for Education. We are assuming that criteria will relate to area of residence, siblings already at the school, etc. There will be a priority for existing pupils.

Nursery children will also have priority going into Prep.

We will not be able to select students using an interview process or assessments; from Sept 2014 we will have to be part of the local authority's admissions process though with our own admissions policy as approved by the DFE.

We will not be able to admit pupils on the basis of ability or attainment, except where necessary in Years 12 and 13.

Q: What about students who have been excluded from local state schools, do they have to be admitted by HTS?

This may be required in certain circumstances.

Q: What about parents who have children in Nursery, will they be guaranteed places for Reception?

Our understanding is that we can give priority to pupils coming up from our Nursery, but we cannot guarantee places as demand may exceed the number of places available. We will be setting out criteria for our admissions which will be approved by the Secretary of State. Those students within Prep and Senior school who are here at the end of July 2013 will secure a place.

Q: Will teachers and their salaries be affected?

No, it is not the intention to alter teachers' salaries.

Q: Why are we capping class sizes below the permitted figure of 30?

We would like to preserve the ethos of the school. HTIS offers something very distinctive and unique by keeping our class sizes small. We will have to run the school very efficiently in order to achieve this.

Q: What happens, if our Year 7 target numbers for September 2013 are taken up entirely by existing students?

If this is the case we would be unable to take any external students and so they would have to go on a waiting list. The school, however, is very much under capacity at the moment and for it to become full we would have to have taken in a lot of new students.

Q: If we are unable to be selective for the new intake of students, how we will maintain the behaviour and ethos of the school?

It is perfectly possible to run very successful mixed ability groups, which can function in a variety of different ways, and HTIS will continue to uphold a high standard of expectation for each and every student.

Q: Are the Local Authority able to make recommendations as to our admissions policy?

We would not be governed by the Local Authority but we would have to be compliant with its admissions procedures and would be keen to cooperate with them in every way possible. We would be able to govern how many students HTIS can accommodate.

Q: What are the advantages of the IB Primary Years Programme (PYP) and the Diploma Programme (IBDP)?

The PYP in Prep and IB in 6th Form would provide students with a very challenging high quality curriculum. Research shows that PYP students in international schools around the world generally outperform in the core subjects students following other curricula. Extensive North American research also shows that students following the IB Diploma Programme are generally better prepared for University, do better in their post-school studies and end up earning more. This will be a distinctive part of HTIS which no other maintained school locally offers.

Q: Can we devise our own admissions policy?

We can incorporate priority for existing students, for our own Nursery children, for siblings of HTIS students, propose catchment areas, etc. The criteria have yet to be finalised and would have to be approved by the Secretary of State.

Q: Why have the Evidence of demand Questionnaires not been sent out sooner?

We wanted parents to have the opportunity to discuss concerns prior to them completing the Questionnaire.

Q: If the current parents of students within HTIS decide against the application for Free School and prospective residents say yes, what will happen?

If there is a good response by prospective local parents, we will continue to pursue our application for Free School status.

Q: Could the Government put a limit on Free Schools, therefore turning our application down?

We are not aware of other schools locally who have applied for Free School status. The decision is the Government's, however.

Q: Will Nursery have different policies to the Free School?

Nursery will still be run as a private Nursery.

Q: What assurances will be made as to standards of behaviour at HTIS?

The standards will be maintained and continued. HTIS has staff committed to maintain the school's high standards of education and behaviour. .

Q: What improvements will be made in the financial management of the school?

The school is managed well financially within its resources, but, due to the economic climate, is only able to keep up numbers by subsidising large numbers of Bursaries and Scholarships.

Q: If we are still part of IES, will we be able to make a profit?

No, a Free School is not a profit making organisation.

Q: Why could we not consider double entry for Year 7, which RGS currently do?

We may have to consider this, but our current calculations have not been made on th basis of single entry.

Q: As to the Policy for Admissions and Special Needs, will we have an influx of Special Needs students?

If we had students with Special Needs we would receive additional funding to cover their needs. Dr Tate mentioned his very positive experiences in his last school where all students benefitted from education in a school community that had a diversity of children in it.

Q: Will we be allowed to run at a deficit?

No. We will have to ensure that we do not.

Q: By introducing the IB PYP in Prep and the IBDP in the 6th Form, what provision will there be for students in Years 7-11?

The IB has its Learner Profile with ten learner outcomes to achieve. We will use this as the basis of our curriculum from 4 to 19 even if students in Years 7-11 do not follow the IB Middle Years Programme. We plan to continue to offer GCSE at age 16 within a curriculum influenced by the IB Learner Profile.

In conclusion Dr Tate thanked parents for attending in such large numbers. It showed the importance they attached to their children's education and their concern for HTIS. He urged everyone to complete and return the on-line Questionnaires.

Mrs P Leek-Wright