

Written evidence submitted by Culm Co-operative Learning Partnership

Executive Summary.

My name is Julie Phelan and I am the Headteacher of Cullompton Community College in Devon. I am part of a group of schools currently consulting on conversion to Cooperative Trust Status. The proposed implementation date is 1st September 2013. The proposed name of the foundation will be Culm Co-operative Learning Partnership and the trust does not already act as a foundation for any foundation or voluntary school.

The proposed members of the trust are:

- Clyst Hydon Primary School (2 Trustees)
- Cullompton Community College (2 Trustees)
- St Andrew's Primary School (2 Trustees)
- Willowbank Primary School (2 Trustees)
- Uplowman C of E (VC) Primary School (1 Trustee)
- Bicton College (1 Trustee)
- Devon County Council (1 Trustee)
- The Co-operative Movement, initially represented by the Co-operative College (1 Trustee)

In addition, learners at each of the schools, parents, staff, members of the local community and local community organisations will be able to become members of the Trust. The Trust will have a Stakeholder Forum composed of members, which will be able to appoint 2 or 3 of the Trust's trustees. As the Trust develops, it will consider other schools joining the Trust. The rationale for acquiring the Trust, the contribution it will make, and the direction it will provide to the schools can be summarised as follows:

Our particular priority is to work better together to improve opportunities for success; success for pupils, staff and families.

We will do this by:

- Sharing good practice and developing opportunities for leadership at all levels
- Talking to each other and exchanging ideas in an open way
- Developing networks so that everyone feels part of the larger community of schools
- Finding out about what happens at each phase of education to help pupils make sense of progression from one stage to another and to enable continuity and preparation for lifelong learning

Key aims of our Trust are to work better together in order to:

- Improve opportunities for success
- Create communities where all citizens are equally valued
- Learn from, and with, each other
- Provide more varied opportunities for pupils
- Unlock potential through collaboration
- Increase parent and community involvement

- Develop mutually supportive networks and reduce isolation and duplication
- Enhance dialogue and understanding between different phases of education and so improve progression and continuity for pupils
- Prepare pupils for their lives as healthy, creative, skilled and aspirational citizens
- Encourage pupils and adults to be outward looking and forward looking, embracing innovation, initiatives and new approaches
- Remain part of the maintained sector and part of the Devon family of schools

The schools acquiring the Trust already work with other schools in the local area. This work will continue so that the entire area, and not just the schools acquiring the Trust, will offer community cohesion and development for all our local communities as well as continuing to contribute to the diversity of educational provision in the area.

Paragraph One - Background.

The schools consulting on becoming the Culm Cooperative Learning Partnership began by considering all forms of school partnership as part of a Local Learning Community exercise which started in September 2011. Sixteen schools form the Culm Valley Learning Community, including two secondary schools (1 of which is an academy, the other a community school), and 14 primary schools. At the start of the process 2 primary schools were academies, federated with each other but within a larger federation extending outside the learning community. In September 2011 all the schools in the Learning Community decided to jointly find out more about the various forms of partnership and alternative structures for organisation in order to be forward looking and respond positively to the changing educational landscape. In pairs or groups of three or four the Headteachers in the LC visited other schools and partnerships in Devon, and beyond, as part of a fact finding mission. Information from visits was written up and circulated within the LC. A conference was arranged to bring all the ideas together for Headteachers and Governors. The different forms of organisation explored included Cooperative Trusts and Academies (stand alone, convertor, sponsored and multi-academy chains). Following the conference schools decided upon various directions. The secondary academy joined with a local primary school to form its own multi academy chain, another primary school converted to join a primary academy chain already in existence in Devon, 3 primary schools formed one federation, while another 2 formed their own federation. A number of schools expressed an interest in finding out more about Cooperative Trusts. After further research and consultation the community secondary school and three community primary schools, together with a VC primary school, decided to move forward to consult on conversion to Cooperative Trust status and partnered with a local FE college, the Local Authority and the Cooperative Group to. If successful the launch of this Cooperative Trust will be 1st September 2013. The schools / partners moving forward on Cooperative Trust status consultation felt the need to work co-operatively under a formalised structure primarily to improve opportunities and outcomes for our children given the current educational climate of diminishing LA support.

The particular advantages of Cooperative Trust partnership were seen to be:

- Working within a set of cooperative principles and values in which we all believed
- Greater benefits (as outlined in the executive summary) for staff, children and families by working more closely and effectively together for educational purposes, to strengthen the community and for greater effectiveness in procurement and commissioning.
- Maintaining the autonomy of each school and each governing body, including individual school control of own budgets whilst benefitting from partnership.

Paragraph Two

Incentives to form meaningful and lasting partnerships.

Unlike conversion to Academy status there was no immediate financial benefit to convert to Cooperative trust status. However, the consulting schools were guided by the benefits described above. Some questioned whether partnership could be delivered effectively through the existing Learning Community arrangements. The feeling was that a formal conversion to Trust status entailed a greater commitment to self responsibility allied to principled and joint ownership of the Trust and that ultimately it was up to the participants to build the partnership and make it work. This was especially true as former structures of centralised LA support were eroded or allocated to external providers. We have touched upon the tensions between partnership and competition but for the sake of the community in which we live we believe that it is better to have several good schools sharing ideas and ensuring continuity of learning in the local community and between phases rather than operating in isolation as insular institutions.

Paragraph Three

Driving school improvement

The consulting schools and partners have a particular interest in driving up school improvement, especially in developing leadership and management and sharing quality first teaching and learning. We see strength in school to school support tailored to the personal needs of our community motivated by choice and mutual interest rather than from imposed sponsorship. We are positive and forward looking and anticipate that we will welcome additional partners in future and that we will be a formidable force for change and progress in education as the partnership develops. We will be members of a wider community of Cooperative Trusts in the South West, Nationally and Internationally and, as such, able to benefit from wider good practice at the cutting edge of education.

Paragraph Four

Conclusion

As the CCLP is in the consulting stage we are unable to report upon the actual strengths and weaknesses of being a Cooperative Trust partnership in practice. However, we are aware of

the potential for benefits and tensions. Even so, we anticipate that we will form a successful partnership because that is what **we** want. We have seized the initiative to work together and

therefore have made a commitment to make it successful because the future of our rural community depends upon it.