

Councillor Questions and Responses

Question from Cllr N Ireland

As the parent of two children who excelled recently at Budmouth College, and the representative of both staff at the school and the parents of children attending Budmouth who reside in Crossways Ward, I am extremely concerned that a setting, which was admittedly struggling following the departure of the last permanent Head Teacher but has now turned the corner and is well on its way back up to the almost stratospheric levels it had previously attained, is seemingly being forced into becoming an Academy.

I also note that the Multi-Academy Trust which is intending to take over the school, which has admitted it has a daily shortfall in meeting its running costs and states in its last Annual Report the intention to only expand by assimilating existing Academies or Free schools, has recently taken over two 'failing' schools and now got Budmouth in its sights.

An FOI to the Interim Executive Board of Budmouth College confirmed that the outstanding debt of the school would be met by Dorset Council upon academisation, and that debt was confirmed by the Finance Officer of the IEB as currently being circa £400k.

It seems perverse that the council tax of Dorset Council residents should be spent on handing over a historically successful school with valuable assets to a private concern.

Can the Leader confirm that the debt of Budmouth will be met by the taxpayer and also that the cost of the recently announced redundancies (and those yet to come before September 2019) will also be accrued to that debt?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Early Years

Budmouth College is currently a foundation school. Foundation schools are not under the direct control of Dorset Council. The running of the school, including finances, building assets and other key decisions such as curriculum and employment of staff were the responsibility of the college governors.

Budmouth College was directed by Ofsted to academise under the Education and Inspection Act due to their poor inspection outcome in July 2018. Although the revisit in January 2019 identified some improvements, it is very rare that an order to academise is revoked.

Section 5b Academies Act 2010 states the local authority must take reasonable steps to convert the school to academy. Dorset Council are legally bound to cooperate, our powers are limited and any attempt to stop academisation would likely be overruled by the Secretary of State. Essentially,

the decision to academise Budmouth College was not the Council's decision to make or change.

The decision to choose Aspirations Multi Academy Trust was made by the Regional Schools Commissioner, with input from the interim executive board, who have replaced the governors and are overseeing the transition of the school to the Academy.

Because Budmouth College has Foundation status, the local authority has a duty to pick up the debt of the school at transfer. Regarding the cost of the restructure, this is subject to a cabinet decision in June.

In the spirit of cross-party co-operation, I would like to extend an invitation to Cllr Ireland to meet with Officers and myself, in order to provide a fuller briefing on a broader perspective regarding academisation of Budmouth College.

Question from Cllr C Sutton

I recently met with a group of parents who are extremely concerned at what they see as the forced academisation of Budmouth College in Weymouth and the potential impact that this might have on students. My children also attend Budmouth, and I share many of their concerns. My questions are as follows:

1. If the school is taken over by Aspirations Academy Trust, how will this impact upon Dorset Council's ability to help Budmouth drive up both educational and welfare standards, including for SEND students?
2. The evidence suggests that Academies do not out-perform Local Authority controlled schools, but they clearly have less democratic control. Why would Local Authorities wish to advance this agenda if there is no demonstrable evidence that it improves standards?

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Early Years

1. Budmouth College is currently a foundation school. Foundation schools are not under the direct control of the Council, the running of the school, including finances, building assets and other key decisions such as curriculum and employment of staff are the responsibility of the Governors. Dorset Council has, however, been working with the College to address the issues raised by the Ofsted inspection that took place in May 2018.

Responsibility for educational and welfare standards at Budmouth Academy will fall to Aspirations Academy Trust and the Regional Schools Commissioner. Dorset Council will continue to track progress but will not have direct involvement. This is the same as a foundation school. SEND students on an Educational and Health Care Plan

(EHCP) are monitored and reviewed as individuals. This will not change when the College becomes an Academy.

2. Budmouth College was directed by Ofsted to academise under the Education and Inspection Act due to their poor inspection outcome in July 2018. Although the revisit in January identified some improvements, it is very rare that an order to academise is revoked.

Section 5b Academies Act 2010 states the local authority must take reasonable steps to convert the school to academy. The Council are legally bound to cooperate, our powers are limited and any attempt to stop academisation would likely be overruled by the secretary of state. Essentially, the decision to academise Budmouth College was not the Council's decision to make or change. This is the only reason why Dorset Council would advance the academy agenda.

I would like to extend an invitation to Cllr Sutton to meet with me and senior officers at the earliest opportunity following Council. This is in order to be able to provide a fuller briefing on some of the wider implications of academisation.