

PRO's: joining an existing MAT	CON's joining an existing MAT
Financial security: they offer central services such as HR, finance management, procurement, which reduces the need for individual schools to pay separately. Bulk buying can reduce costs.	Some loss of control over financial decisions. No governing body for school – but a local advisory board which includes a governor to speak for school, and head.
Access to central Continuing Professional Development for staff, including support for specialist subjects, curriculum support, in house training to ensure quality of teaching. This helps small schools who are still expected by Ofsted to have leaders in every subject	Some individual control of curriculum by teaching staff lost.
Support for leadership, joint meetings with other headteachers, support around risk assessments/reactions to covid, structured support for leadership team to ensure high quality leadership	
Great links to other primary and secondaries in the MAT – shared experiences for pupils/links to help progressions up to secondary school for pupils.	
Support with staff sickness/absence and cover.	

We decided that an existing MAT offered a lot of support and security and expertise that we as a small school would benefit from. We do not have a lot of choice when it comes to how to spend finances now, as our money is linked to pupil numbers, which are low and fluctuate as any rural school does. From a teaching and learning point of view a MAT is a great option to support our staff to provide the best quality of teaching. Great opportunities for training, support, networking, and progression which we as a stand-alone academy cannot provide. We also recognise a need for support with leadership, as the additional challenges from the last 2 years have shown just how hard a job being a lone headteacher is.

We then investigated a number of local MAT's including The Good Shepherd, and Cumbria Education Trust (CET) and had presentations from both.

Looking for the best fit we chose CET for the following reasons:

1. They offer great support for leadership, support for teaching and learning and have a focus on doing the best for all pupils. They have high expectations of all pupils and support them to achieve, while maintaining the individuality of their schools.
2. They have our feeder secondary school in, as well as many local primary schools, making it a great opportunity for networking for pupils and staff. Our pupils will benefit from sports opportunities and other linked experiences with pupils of other schools they will then

be at secondary school with. They will also have great links to aid the transition to secondary school.

3. There is support around curriculum and teaching, as much as teachers request, leaving room for individual interests of pupils to be followed if so wished by teachers. High quality of education is paramount to CET and is reflected in their schools.

We did have concerns about whether we would be a carbon copy of other schools and lose our unique family rural friendly feel. However, we have done visits and reviews of other CET schools as part of our due diligence and are reassured that this will not be the case. The Headteacher is supported by CET but has choice and vision for the school, so each remains individual.

In September 2021 we found out we were losing Rebecca Stacey our Headteacher and formed plans to replace her. CET offered us support around senior leadership of the school, and we have staff seconded from their schools in place currently, which is a great benefit to us. The loss of Ms Stacey caused us to progress our plans around future direction for the school quicker than planned.

In September 2021 we expressed the formal intention to join CET and have started the ball rolling. It has been agreed in principle by the DfE commissioner, the next stage is for CET to complete its due diligence and decide if we are a good fit for them.

Once that is complete there will be stakeholder discussions with everyone about the proposal to join CET and opportunities for you to be heard and ask questions. In due there will be legal matters to complete, eventually forming part of the trust with CET, and the single academy trust of Castle Carrock Primary school will be dissolved.

As the governors of this lovely school, we are passionate about keeping it for future generations while providing the best quality education to our pupils now. The support we would gain from joining CET we feel will provide the best for our pupils and support our staff. It is an exciting opportunity for us to move forwards and ensure all our pupils have the opportunity to be the best they can be. We appreciate it is also a time of change, and you will be kept in the loop as much as possible. With pupil numbers as they are, we are also looking at options and staffing ourselves and will consult with you as things move forwards.

I recognise this is a lot of information and apologise some of it hasn't come out before. I am very happy to discuss any of this 1:1 and there will be opportunities for group meetings as things progress.

As ever if you have any concerns, please do speak to the Senior Leadership Team at school, and if you have any queries for me please do feel free to contact me via email [clerk@castlecarrock.cumbria.sch.uk](mailto:clerk@castlecarrock.cumbria.sch.uk)

Best wishes

Kirstie Smith (Chair) Castle Carrock Governors.