



## Frequently asked Questions:

### 1. Why does the governing board want to join a multi-academy trust?

We have spent a considerable amount of time looking at the future of our schools and how to ensure they continue to be successful, thriving schools at the heart of the local community. Over recent years, the support we have received from the Local Authority has led us to think about what other support is available to us.

- a. The key areas we have had in the front of our minds are: **Greater autonomy and flexibility** to respond to the needs of our local community, enabling us to make decisions that are right for our schools.
- b. **Financial stability and sustainability** through effective financial management and economies of scale.
- c. **Greater opportunity for collaboration and resource sharing** within a related group of schools, while preserving the brilliant education we offer our children in our local community. Joining an academy trust does not preclude us from continuing to work with and supporting other Local Authority schools and we remain committed to doing so).
- d. **Access to wider pool of expertise**, best practices and resources, creating a positive impact on teaching and learning outcomes including the way in which we support children with SEND and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. This will include sharing of specialised staff in SEND and specialist SEND clinics with additional expertise and legal support for EHCPs. The SLT and governors believe the partnership will strengthen and sustain the provision and flagship inclusion offer for our most educationally disadvantaged pupils and families in our school community.
- e. **Professional development opportunities** for staff, including training, workshops, conferences and networking. **Access to shared professional services** including HR, finance, IT which offer enhanced operational efficiency.

We recognise the need for more efficient use of central government funding, which can be achieved by the pooling of funds in an academy school network and making use of purchasing flexibility that the Local Authority does not have. This means that we are able to continue to offer an excellent education, whilst also having access to professional operational services, including HR, Finance, and IT that are currently provided by the Local Authority.

The financial position of our schools has worsened over a number of years, with both schools having deficit budgets. In November 2023, at the request of the governing board, Brighton and Hove Council commissioned a finance review of both schools by a **School Resource Management Adviser (SRMA)**. This is a Department for Education accredited sector expert that provides advice to schools and academy trusts on how to use government funding to deliver the best possible educational outcomes for pupils.

The headline recommendations included securing specialist support to lead the strategy for the future of the federation (WHIS and HJS). It suggested two possible sources for this: either the Local Authority or a local multi-academy trust. The Local Authority did not have capacity to fully support us with this. The best solution for our schools was to partner with a body which had a track record of delivery and which was available and able to provide the support needed.

## 2. How did the schools get into a position that resulted in a budget deficit of £660,000 and why did it go up so quickly?

There are a number of factors that resulted in the deficit position. These include a legacy deficit budget position and overstaffing in the infant school when the federation was formed. This was made worse by the legacy costs associated with the relocation of the school and redundancy payments that were made.

In 2023/24, like all schools across the country, the schools faced further pressure from unfunded pay increases. (which we know our staff fully deserved).

## 3. Why didn't we know about the financial problems and the work you've been doing with Aurora sooner? We thought everything was alright.

We've reflected on this and are sorry that the challenges we have been facing have come as such a surprise. Our job as governors is to ensure that the schools are successful and delivering for your children and the community we serve. It didn't seem right or constructive to publicly share the financial challenges, the threat of classes closing or even the potential closure of Holland Road. This would have unsettled you as parents and our wonderful staff.

We appreciate that the proposal to fix this situation has been presented to you only very recently, but we'd ask that you trust us to do the right thing. We've managed some significant challenges over the last thirteen years and understand how to run great schools which is why we are making this proposal now.

## 4. What happens to the deficit if the schools join Aurora?

The deficit transfers to Aurora who will use their reserves to pay it off.

## 5. Will the schools have to pay the deficit back to Aurora if we join them?

No. The financial model proposed by Aurora does not require the schools to pay back the deficit. Academies are responsible for ensuring that their budgets balance. Aurora has always been fiscally healthy and has maintained balanced budgets for all their schools

## 6. Why can't you work with the local authority and MP to solve the deficit problem? The Council has clearly let the school down. Please can more details be provided on these failures. Has the school sought to get the Council to address these failures, and what has the Council's response been?

Over the last 13 years we have been working closely with the Local Authority, opening schools' sites and later reducing pupil numbers. Throughout this time governors have been extremely proactive, urging the Local

Authority to take action to manage the changes in demand for pupil places and provide support needed. In 2022 we joined the governing boards of WHIS and HJS to take advantages of opportunities to further align our schools and work more efficiently together.

For several years before the co-location, West Hove Infant School urged the Local Authority to allow the Connaught Road site to relocate because it was becoming financially unviable, and the delay by the Local Authority had a considerable negative financial impact on both WHIS school sites.

The reduction of PAN (Pupil Admission Numbers) at the Connaught and Holland Road sites from 4 form to 2 form entry meant that the two sites were now housing empty classrooms, and the two schools' sites could be co-located into one building providing both building and reduced staffing costs at all levels. The delay in this approval from the Local Authority contributed to the financial issues which both schools are still recovering from.

The redundancy costs were also absorbed by the school, rather than by the Local Authority, which is unusual where a site closure happens. This placed an additional financial burden on the two schools, which federated in 2022.

Staffing at WHIS was at 103% at the point of federation (which is unviable) and the new federated governing body along with the new executive headteacher and SLT for WHIS and HJS have worked hard to reduce staffing costs over time.

Over time, there have been significant weaknesses in the support offered by the Local Authority. In September 2023, the Local Authority wrote to all Local Authority maintained schools and acknowledged the issues with their provision of central support to the schools, such as Payroll and HR support. They recognised that many schools have been frustrated by the cost and consistency of service, which has not represented value for money. They also promised to foster strong partnerships and professional networks amongst staff and Headteachers. This has never materialised.

Plans to address the fall in pupil numbers across the city have also been slow to develop, despite the emerging picture over the last few years, and this has had a significant impact on our ability to address the situation and to make important decisions that affect our financial standing. The Local Authority has recently taken steps to close schools and reduce admission numbers across the city. However, this has come too late for us. More than half of schools in Brighton and Hove have deficit budgets and this picture looks unlikely to improve in the next few years.

We have met frequently with the Local Authority to understand the plans for the city, and we have produced many modelled scenarios for our schools and have asked for specific support, including:

- Support for financial modelling to demonstrate the financial impact of change to our schools
- HR advice and support for staffing restructures
- Financial support for the move from Connaught Road to Holland Road, which the school ultimately had to pay for itself
- Support for redundancy costs from the co-location including the SLT restructure

We have also asked the Local Authority to provide modelling to show how its plans for school reductions and school closures would help to address the surplus place issue in the city, but this was not provided.

Because of the lack of support from the Local Authority to help us with the challenges we faced, we requested a finance audit from the Department for Education. A School Resources Management Adviser (SRMA) visited our

school and examined both the operational and financial aspects of our schools. He made several recommendations which included strong strategic support, and said:

***There are two possible sources for this help: the local authority or a local academy trust with which the governors have had some initial discussion. The MAT has been helpful in offering help with financial planning without any future commitment on the part of the governors. The governors have agreed a memorandum of understanding with the MAT in which the MAT will help with strategic direction and financial planning.***

We approached the Local Authority for this support, but they were not able to provide it. We therefore developed our partnership agreement with Aurora.

Throughout, the support we have received from core Local Authority services has been insufficient for a school of our size and complexity.

This year, the Local Authority has announced a proposal to create federations of schools, to come together and benefit from economies of scale, but the proposal has few details or information that would suggest this could work. Our experience as a federation is an extremely positive one but comes from a place of already being a very close pair of schools within the same community. We do not believe that joining with other schools in this way would achieve the stability and security we need.

Governors have previously met with MP Peter Kyle twice, to express our concern at the Local Authority's handling of the school situation in the city and more recently with the head of the council, who apologised for the failings of the Local Authority and the way our school has been treated.

## 7. How is being an academy school different from being a Local Authority school?

Academies are community schools which, instead of being run by the Local Authority, are run by academy trusts. They receive government funding directly from the Department for Education. Academy trusts are not-for-profit charitable companies.

Academy trusts operate independently from local authorities. This means they employ their own staff, set their own admissions policies and are responsible for their own land and buildings.

Although academy trusts are not required to follow the National Curriculum, Aurora Academies Trust has chosen to do so. Academy schools are inspected by Ofsted in the same way as Local Authority run schools, and they are subject to strict financial regulation and accountability to the Department for Education.

You can find out more about academy schools here: <https://www.gov.uk/types-of-school/academies>

## 8. Are there other schools in Brighton and Hove that are academies?

Yes – there are five multi academy trusts who run schools in our city. These include Hangleton Primary, Benfield Primary, Moulsecoomb Primary and West Blatchington Primary schools. Their pupils and staff are already seeing the benefits of these relationships through financial investment, enhanced teacher training and better facilities for the children. City Academy Whitehawk has been part of Aurora Academies Trust since 2017 and has thrived during this time. Around half of all primary schools in England are already in multi-academy trusts and there are now significantly more secondary schools in multi-academy trusts that run by local authorities.

Many more schools are considering conversion to academy status including diocese schools.

## 9. Are our schools being forced to become academies?

No. Sometimes schools which are underperforming are forced to become academies, but this is not the case here. The governing board has decided to consult on joining Aurora Academies Trust because we feel it would benefit our schools over the long term. The final decision as to whether to go ahead rests with the governing board.

## 10. Did you consider other multi-academy trusts, and if so, why were the others discounted?

Exploratory research was conducted on 14 national and local academy trusts. A number were ruled out on account of:

- **Size** – We do not want to get lost in a large academy trust (e.g. 40+ schools)
- **Location** – We want an academy trust with local presence and experience to take better advantage of collaboration between schools, and who recognizes the challenges and opportunities of the local area. We want to preserve our contribution to the local community.
- **Faith** – as non-denominational schools we do not think a faith academy trust is right for us.
- **Values** – we want an academy trust that shares our core values about education and pastoral care.
- **Individuality** – we want an academy trust that allows us to retain our individuality and continue to serve our local community as we do now.
- **Primary focus** – the academy trust must have a focus on primary, not just secondary.

For these reasons, several academy trusts were discounted, and we continued exploratory talks with Aurora Academies Trust to understand if there was a cultural fit as well as a teaching and learning fit. We also conducted extensive due diligence to assess the feasibility of joining with Aurora.

## 11. Why join Aurora Academies Trust?

Having undertaken research into our options, we began conversations with Aurora in February 2023, attracted by their alignment with our ethos and values. Aurora's experience in running successful schools in Sussex, Brighton and Hove and Surrey, alongside their ability to offer strategic and operational support, made them a strong contender. Governors and SLT visited several Aurora schools to observe their approach to education and operations, which further reinforced the potential for a successful partnership.

Following the report from the SRMA (see Q6) we approached Aurora to support our development of a comprehensive financial model specifically tailored to our schools that would achieve financial sustainability. This proactive approach was far more detailed and strategic than what we had been able to secure through the Local Authority, giving us confidence in Aurora's ability to support our future.

Throughout 2023, our relationship with Aurora grew stronger as we collaborated on key areas such as financial management, curriculum development, and professional development for staff. Aurora recognized the strength of our curriculum and teaching, viewing it as a valuable contribution to the wider Trust. This mutual exchange of strengths has created a solid partnership, where Aurora not only supports our schools but also values what we bring to the Trust's educational community.

## 12. Where can we find out more about Aurora Academies Trust?

You can find out more at [www.auroraacademies.org](http://www.auroraacademies.org)

### 13. Are the Executive Headteacher, Head and Deputy Heads of School of West Hove Infant School and Hove Junior School supportive of this proposal?

Yes. They've been involved in the partnership with Aurora since the beginning and fully support this proposal, as do the wider extended leadership team and subject leads. Our year/phase leads have already benefitted from CPD and subject specific meetings in EYFS, maths and inclusion as part of our collaborative working.

### 14. Do Aurora Academies Trust's values and ethos align with those of the Hove Learning Federation?

Yes. Our schools provide high-quality education to all pupils. This is realised through strong, shared values, policies and exceptional, inclusive practice. We believe in:

- Love of Learning
- Equality & Inclusion
- Aiming High
- Respect & Kindness
- Nurture & Safety

Aurora Academies Trust has recently updated their vision and values. Our schools were invited to contribute to the consultation on these as part of the partnership that has developed between our organisations. We are confident that the vision, values and cultures of our two organisations complement each other.

Aurora Academies Trust's mission and values are available [here](#)

### 15. Why does Aurora Academies Trust want to work with our schools? Why do Aurora want to pay off our deficit? What's in it for them?

Aurora Academies Trust would like us to join because it recognises the strength of our schools, in particular in relation to our excellent curriculum and outcomes, and the additional capacity that we would be able to bring to the organisation. Our cultures and ethos closely align with Aurora's and they feel that we would be an ideal fit with their other schools.

As a trust, they would like to grow to develop and strengthen the support that they are able to offer its schools, increase collaboration and professional development opportunities for its staff and to take advantage of the economies of scale available to larger groups of schools.

The trust already has a presence in Brighton & Hove through City Academy Whitehawk which joined Aurora in 2017 and it is looking to grow a small cluster of schools in our area.

Aurora is confident that it will be able to help support our schools to maintain excellent educational outcomes whilst navigating the challenges of falling pupil numbers across the city.

Aurora would prefer not to have to pay off the deficit. However, they recognise that over the longer term, the increased number of pupils within the trust will mean that they are able to continue to develop and improve their offer in a sustainable way and benefit from further economies of scale.

## 16. Will joining Aurora mean that the school gets more money?

All schools – whether they are academies or run by local authorities- are funded based on the number of pupils who attend them. Academies and maintained schools in the same local authority get the same amount of funding for each child but there are some differences in how academies can use their budgets which means that our schools will be in a better financial position if we join Aurora.

## 17. Is the main reason for this proposal the perilous financial position the schools find themselves in?

We knew that we needed to seek support from outside the council to help us address the financial challenges we faced. Aurora has helped us to get a grip on our finances and offers us a path to future financial stability. Over time, we have also come to greatly value the school improvement offer that Aurora make, the expertise they have in their organisation and the opportunity for us to become part of shaping and influencing their future direction. We also recognise that the Local Authority is no longer able to provide the wider operational support to the standard we expect – particularly on issues such as finance, payroll and human resources.

## 18. What experience has Aurora got of managing schools that are in a deficit position?

Aurora schools have been able to set balanced budgets. This is because of the expertise Aurora has in managing finances whilst providing good quality education to its pupils. Aurora has grown schools, opened them and reduced them in size. This experience is what has allowed them to help us to get a grip on our finances and gives us confidence that our financial future with them would be secure.

## 19. How much money from the school will go to Aurora to pay for their services that they provide?

Local Authorities and academy trusts use a proportion of their school budgets to pay for the central services that they provide. Local Authorities do not publish this amount. Most academy trusts do. Aurora's schools contribute 5.5% of their budgets. Aurora expect this to reduce if HLF schools join the trust. This provides schools with the following services and support:

- Full access to the [Aurora School Improvement Strategy](#)
- Professional networks for curriculum subjects, special educational needs coordinators, SEND specialist clinics, attendance officers and designated safeguarding leads as well as for operational roles
- The two schools will continue to use both Arbour and Edukey provisions to track, cost and analyse SEND provision and costings for pupils on the SEND register.
- School 's Mental Health Lead will continue to provide triage support for referrals for pupils and families and enhance the school offer and provision
- Training and support for all Aurora staff covering all educational and operational functions
- Software used for educational and school operational purposes including: Management Information System, financial management, human resource management, compliance management, safeguarding record keeping, curriculum resources, M365 accounts, governance management
- In house specialist support for financial management, accounts payable, recruitment, human resources, safeguarding, compliance, estates, governance and health and safety
- Legal support, Data Protection Officer and GDPR advice
- Local Academy Board Clerking Service

- Contract management and procurement
- Onsite and remote IT support as well as inclusion in trust Digital Strategy
- Payroll platform and management
- Aurora Advantage
- Professional qualifications through trust training programme
- Curriculum development fund
- School development fund
- International staff exchange programme
- Full suite of policies
- External audit and completion of statutory returns

This offer of support far exceeds what the Local Authority is able to provide to us.

## 20. If we join Aurora will it result in job losses?

No. Aurora have committed to no redundancies if we join them. As well as promising to maintain the contractual terms and conditions for all staff they have further guaranteed not to enter into any consultation with staff for at least twelve months if we join them. This offer is intended to reassure staff that Aurora doesn't need to reduce staffing levels to help the schools become financially healthy.

## 21. How long have you been working with Aurora and what have you been doing? What has this achieved that's benefited children?

Discussions between HLF and Aurora began in February 2023. Initially we visited each other's schools to find out about more about our organisations and to allow us to evaluate any support that Aurora may be able to offer. This relationship developed into Aurora providing support for HLF to manage its deficit budget position. Over time, our organisations worked together on sharing best practice around curriculum and teaching. During an extended period of unavoidable absence in the leadership team of HLF, Aurora provided advice and guidance to school leaders.

Our partnership with Aurora has helped us to maintain and build upon the educational offer we make for all pupils whilst reducing our costs and bringing our budget closer to a break even point.

Aurora supported West Hove Infants during our recent Ofsted inspection.

## 22. Parents love this school. Why can't we ask parents to contribute to cover the cost of the deficit? This would work out to be £109 a year for six years. I'd certainly pay this for my child to attend this school.

We're so grateful for the support we receive from our families and know how much you love the schools. We can't rely on parental contributions or fundraising to help us back to financial stability, but we do want to continue the great work of the PTA and use the money raised for things that make school even more irresistible for our children.

## 23. How has the Local Authority responded to the proposal to join Aurora and have they offered an alternative path forward?

We've repeatedly asked the local authority for help over a sustained period of time. In the summer term we held meetings with Local Authority officers that also included Aurora who we were working in partnership with. Aurora and ourselves were open with the Local Authority about the scale of the financial challenges we faced and



proposed different scenarios that could address the deficit, whilst remaining a Local Authority maintained school. These all would have resulted in further redundancies and staffing restructures and the Local Authority was not able to offer any alternative suggestions.

Joining Aurora offers us a clear path to financial sustainability that will allow us to maintain our excellent provision, be in control of our own future secure jobs and remain an integral part of the local community.

#### 24. We love our schools, and our children do really well. We don't want things to change and lose what is great about our schools. How do we know that things will stay the way they are, and Aurora won't make changes?

Aurora knows us well. They know our strengths and value these. They don't dictate things in their schools or micro-manage them. Aurora schools have their own identities. We've seen this on our visits there. We've spoken to staff, not just trust leaders. Aurora's commitment is to helping children achieve success and they know we do this already. What we need to change is our financial outlook and Aurora can help us to do this. Community events would not change, and we will continue to hugely value the contribution they make to the school community. Aurora schools all have their own unique community activities and PTAs, determined at a local level. What we teach children won't change. Aurora won't make us change our curriculum or teaching methods. What they will do is provide security and sustainability for the future working in partnership for sustained school improvement.

#### 25. Will the schools' leadership remain the same?

Yes. Aurora recognises the strength of leadership across our schools and is looking forward to working with them.

#### 26. Will the names, logos or uniforms of the schools change if we join Aurora Academies Trust?

No. All Aurora schools have their own unique identities, and therefore no changes would be made to our schools' uniforms, logos or school names. Regular events such as the Spooky disco, school fairs and parents' evenings will all still be able to take place.

#### 27. Will the start and end of school times change?

There are no plans to change this, and the schools will adhere to DfE guidance and deliver at least a minimum length of school week.

#### 28. Will term dates change?

There are no plans to change this. Aurora has academies in four different local authorities. The term dates for each academy will normally mirror those of local schools.

#### 29. Will this affect the admissions process?

Admissions policies will remain the same after joining Aurora. Academies have the freedom to set their own admissions criteria, but Aurora does not intend to make any changes. We will continue to serve the local community and offer places to children based on the same criteria we have always used.

#### 30. How will the governance structure of the schools' change?

The schools will retain a joint governing body known as a Local Academy Board (LAB). This will include elected parent, staff and community members. Existing governors will be invited to serve on the LAB.

The LAB's primary focus will be the continual improvement of the schools. It will not be responsible for the setting and monitoring of the school budget which is done by Aurora in conjunction with the Executive Headteacher and School Business Manager.

The Chair of the LAB will have regular meetings with the trust's CEO and Director of Education as well as the other LAB chairs from the trust. In addition, the LAB will be encouraged to continue to participate in networking and training events including those which may be offered by the local authority to maintain good links locally. The LAB monitors the educational performance of the school and thereby hold senior leaders to account. It agrees the School Improvement Plan and monitors its implementation. It approves the annual special educational needs information report prepared by the school and ensures that the school's self-evaluation processes are robust and accurate. In addition, it ensures that additional funds, including Pupil Premium and Sports Grants, are used for the purposes intended and that they have impact on educational outcomes.

The LAB ensures that safeguarding policies and procedures are being followed by the school. It agrees and annually monitors the school's equalities objectives and is notified, where required, to consider the school's decision to exclude a pupil. It also considers complaints referred to the LAB in accordance with the school's complaints policy. The local academy board (LAB) meet at least four times per year.

As a charity, Aurora has a board of trustees legally responsible and accountable for all the schools within the trust. A representative of our LAB will be invited to join the Aurora board of trustees.

### 31. Aurora is sponsored by Pansophic who operate schools all over the world and are a profit-making company. Why are they the sponsor and what's in it for them?

When Aurora Academies Trust was set up in 2012, it was typical for a trust to have a "sponsor". The DfE definition of sponsored academies is as follows: "Some academies are supported by sponsors such as businesses, universities, other schools, faith groups or voluntary groups. Sponsors work with the academy trust to improve the performance of their schools."

Sponsors do not benefit financially from this relationship in any way.

Aurora Academies Trust is sponsored by Aurora Education Trust whose sole member is Pansophic Learning. Pansophic Learning is company running schools in the US and internationally. There are no financial transactions between Aurora Academies Trust and Aurora Education Trust or Pansophic Learning. Pansophic Learning do not make any money from the arrangement but see the partnership as part of their wider commitment to education.

### 32. What governance is in place in Aurora schools and how does this protect against conflicts of interest from their sponsor?

All academy trusts have a board of charity trustees who are responsible for overseeing the trust. Like school governors, they are unpaid and act in a voluntary capacity. Aurora also has a Local Academy Board for each of its schools which include elected parent and staff members as well as co-opted members from the community.

### 33. Who are the trustees of Aurora and what do we know about them?

Aurora has 10 charity trustees who act in a voluntary capacity. They have a range of experiences in education and business. Details can be found [here](#)

### 34. What happens if the sponsor pulls their support?

The DfE would decide if it was appropriate to appoint a new sponsor or let the trust continue without one. Many academy trusts do not have a sponsor.

### 35. Will those that have made the decision to transfer (senior management and governors), remain in place should this go ahead ie. will they be held accountable to see the proposal fully implemented? Governors need to be on the LAB - can this be confirmed?

Our governing board and senior leadership team are loyal, dedicated and long serving. The proposal to join Aurora is being made because of the commitment governors and leaders must ensure the long-term future of our schools.

### 36. What assessment of the risks of academisation has been carried out and how do we know the benefits outweigh these risks?

As a governing body, we have considered any risks extremely carefully. The main issues we have discussed are:

- Becoming an academy is (currently) irreversible
- The DfE has the power to transfer an academy from one trust to another
- Requires different model of governance
  - Some responsibilities will be absorbed into Academy Trust Board with a revised local governing academy board (LAB) established.
  - For the purposes of Ofsted, this is the LAB that provides local governance of the school
  - Academy will encourage current governors to continue to support the new structure
- School budget approved by board of trustees rather than local governing body (but better strategic planning of finance)

Issue	Threat	Proposed Mitigation
Falling pupil numbers in B&H	LA likely to ask us to reduce intake again as we are largest primary school. This will negatively impact financial model of school. May need to reduce form entry or combine classes or close site	Joining an academy trust will mean the Hove Federation will sit outside of any mandated reduction to pupil numbers and can make other adjustments to tackle financial challenges
Legacy financial issues at HLF	Delivering financial recovery plan over 5 years requires difficult decisions and delivery of significant changes that are likely to disrupt school.	Find an academy trust that offers improved value for money and to reduce costs with minimal impact to pupil outcomes.
LA Federation proposal for 2030	Likely to be asked to join together and find efficiencies with neighbouring schools however limited evidence that this will deliver positive change needed	Join an academy trust that has proven competence in bringing schools into its organisation

Issue	Threat	Opportunities
No tolerance for unexpected costs	Any shock to budget cannot be accommodated in current financial plan or within local authority (as many other B&H schools are also in deficit; no wiggle room)	Find an academy trust that has sufficient financial stability to better absorb shocks and has clear financial strategy
UK Gov position on Academy strategy	Remains committed to academy model. Risk that if we delay building relationships with potential academies we won't have as much control over what is best for the school or as many options	Research academy trusts and build relationships with those that fit with our criteria

The Governing Body believes the significant benefits outweigh the risks considered.

### 37. What is the academic justification for this change?

This proposal allows us to return to financial health which means we can maintain the great academic outcomes our pupils benefit from. It also helps us be prepared for future policy changes from the curriculum review the government has underway and the forthcoming changes that are being made to the Ofsted inspection framework.

### 38. Joining Aurora doesn't help solve the declining birth rate and reduction in the numbers of children in Brighton and Hove. How does joining them result in more children attending the school?

Maintaining our great educational offer will mean that parents continue to choose us as the best school for their children. Falling birth rates are a national issue and Aurora has experience of helping schools to keep working effectively where the number of pupils is declining. As an academy we would be in control of our own Planned Admission Number.

### 39. How does joining Aurora help us to recruit and retain teachers and support staff?

Teacher recruitment and retention is a national challenge. By joining Aurora we will be securing jobs, joining an organisation that can offer great opportunities for training and career progression and supporting us in remaining an attractive proposition for all our staff. Aurora follows the NJC pay scales for all support staff and the relevant local authority interpretation of these. Support staff at City Academy Whitehawk in Brighton and Hove are on the same pay scales as other support staff in the city.

### 40. Academisation is irreversible. Aurora has a good track record of running schools, including here in Brighton, but what happens if they go bust or are taken over?

If an academy becomes financially unsustainable or the standards in its schools decline significantly the DfE may decide to transfer it to another academy trust. However, Aurora is in good financial health and in a position to ensure our schools become financially sustainable.

### 41. What is the direct benefit to children?

Securing a future that will allow us to maintain the great educational offer that is available to them and securing the future viability and sustainability of our great schools.

#### 42. Will Aurora stay as a small trust going forward or will it increase in size?

The government's White Paper published in March 2022 suggested that multi academy trusts would be encouraged to grow to at least ten schools or 7,500 pupils. This is the aim of the trust for the medium term (4-6 years). If Hove Learning Federation join Aurora sufficient time will be given to bring the two organisations together before any further growth is considered.

#### 43. Are there other schools of our kind of size in the academy trust?

Yes – The Gatwick School has over 850 pupils on roll.

#### 44. The consultation seems quick. Why can't it be extended so we've got more time?

We understand this and have listened to the feedback requesting more time. As such, we've extended the consultation by a week. We've also provided more opportunities for stakeholders to talk to us during this consultation. We can't extend the length of the consultation beyond this because the process of joining an academy trust is a lengthy one and if we do proceed, we need to make sure we can do that quickly enough to secure our financial viability. Our partnership with Aurora has not been rushed and we've taken considerable time to come to this decision and be certain that it is the right option for our schools.

#### 45. Are trade unions involved in the consultation?

Yes – they have been invited to respond, have represented their members in consultation meetings and been invited to meet with school governors during the consultation. In addition to this, Aurora has a trade union recognition agreement in place with all the unions who represent our staff and is meeting with them during this consultation process.

#### 46. Why haven't the Local Authority been invited to present their views at consultation events?

As a stakeholder, the Local Authority has been invited to respond to the consultation. So far, they have chosen to do this through the media rather than by providing a formal response to the consultation.

The LA wants to create a robust and effective model of citywide collaboration that supports the best academic and wellbeing outcomes for all pupils, but particularly the most vulnerable. The LA has not been able to demonstrate and model the case for how this will work and how schools in the LA will be affected. Their timeline is too slow to benefit our two schools and the federation has been asking for support for many years starting in 2018.

Hove Learning Federation believes it will achieve both aspiring and sustainable partnership and collaboration by joining the trust and that this does not preclude the 2 schools working with other schools in the city and continuing to support school improvement within the LA, as City Academy Whitehawk does now, and as do other academy schools within the Hove Partnership of Schools.

#### 47. Will the outcome of the parent survey influence the decision? If 100% of parents vote against the proposal would that stop it?

The stakeholder survey is one of the sources of information that will be considered by governors when they make their decision on how to proceed. There is no set metric that will dictate whether the proposal will proceed or stop.