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talk2learn highlights

Inspiring leaders;
improving children's lives

Issue 11a

In case you missed it...

Recent highlights from NCSL in Dialogue, talk2learn's
online community for national education debate

Also available as a podcast

Taking it on trust

What are trust schools and what advantage is there for a school in opting for trust status?

Schools Commissioner, Sir Bruce Liddington, took to the talk2learn hotseat to answer questions on the latest addition to the range of school models aimed at increasing parental choice and raising standards. The debate was co-hosted by Ray Tarleton, headteacher of South Dartmoor Community College, and Paul Edwards, headteacher of Garforth Community College in Leeds – both trust school pathfinders.

Leonora Hanmer, chair of governors at an 11-16 high school in a London borough, wanted to know what material advantages becoming a trust could offer her school:

"We are a specialist technology college with strong local community links and work closely within a cluster of local partner institutions. I'm finding it quite difficult to assess what substantive advantages we might gain by becoming a trust school - it almost looks as if it would simply formalise what we already do."

Ray Tarleton agreed that putting current partnerships on a formal footing was one result but it was not merely an administrative move:

"[For us] *the formalisation was itself a useful means of establishing some control and focus over what had developed in effective but piecemeal ways.* We are delighted by the new energy and sense of purpose the trust partnerships are bringing."

The trust approach can also support the ECM agenda by allowing schools to formalise work with external organisations, such as social services or charity groups, he added.

How would trust status affect BSF plans, asked a school business manager in Salford? It is an issue many school leaders raise, said Bruce Liddington:

"If a school transfers to trust status it will have no impact on BSF plans for any school and must be fully included in an authority's BSF educational vision and investment project," he said.



"It is the school that is considered in the BSF plan, its status is of no consequence."

An assistant vice-principal in Plymouth, Julian Hems, wondered how trusts differed from federations, given that both were concerned with cementing existing collaborations.

Bruce Liddington said that while federations, hard or soft, do enable schools to collaborate to raise standards and to deliver various functions or services through shared governance arrangements, they are not a mechanism for formalising partnerships with external bodies. *"Acquiring a trust is another way to formalise collaboration between groups of schools* while also drawing on the expertise and energy of external partners to strengthen their governance," he explained.

Another contributor was keen to know what impact trust status might have on a school's ability to tap into new funds.

There are no guarantees that trust status would give smoother access to funds, said Bruce Liddington: "But something current schools with trusts have found is that with the additional support of being a part-charitable trust, the bids submitted are generally stronger."

If you are not yet a member of talk2learn and would like to join, more information is available at www.ncsl.org.uk/onlinecommunities