

A **BEST** Success Story

#2 – Campton Academy: A New School Joins BEST



On 1 November 2020 a new era dawned for education in the picturesque Central Bedfordshire village of Campton.

That was the date Campton Lower School converted to academy status and joined the Bedfordshire Schools Trust (BEST).

The official handover from the local authority followed months of hard work behind the scenes that enabled the transition to take place.

BEST's central team worked closely with the school to review its education provision, integrate financial systems and provide operational support.

Everything was geared towards making the process of joining BEST as smooth as possible – for staff in particular.

Now the school is looking forward to a bright future, including moving into a new home as part of the wider two-tier reorganisation in the area.

This is the story of Campton Academy becoming part of the BEST family.



CAMPTON AT A GLANCE

- 1FE lower school (Reception-Year 4)
- Set to expand to a 2FE primary in 2023 as part of two-tier reorganisation in area
- Plans also include a move to a new site on Hitchin Road, Shefford

‘ I like the way that BEST has left us to be Campton but with good backup that is always focused on the children

– Lucy Close, Foxes Class Teacher (Year 3)

‘Campton’s a good fit for lots of reasons’

Campton Academy has secured a “bright and exciting future” by joining BEST, according to Chief Operating Officer Craig Smith.

“There’s lots of reasons why Campton is a good fit for BEST,” he said. “We felt we had a good connection and could work well with them, the school is in our geographical proximity and the due diligence we carried out was very positive.”

Expansion is on the horizon, with Campton set to become a two form of entry primary school at a brand new site on the edge of Shefford in 2023.

Mr Smith said: “Importantly, the new build provides a sustainable future for the school. We’ve got strong plans for the next couple of years, which will accelerate once we get into the new building.”

The relationship between school and multi-academy trust will be two-way, too, Mr Smith said.

“It’s an opportunity for BEST to offer support, share some of our practice and help them become the school they want to be, but it’s also a great opportunity for us at BEST to learn from the school,” Mr Smith added. “That’s a much more sustainable long-term model for the growth of a trust.”

One of the key priorities at the start of the transition process was to fill a leadership vacuum, with Campton’s previous headteacher and deputy having just left.

Susanne Combe became Interim Principal on secondment, with Sarah Fraher – the school’s SENDCo – taking over the role in January 2021.

Ms Combe said: “For me, the big thing was I didn’t feel alone. The BEST support network was there.

“I could pick the phone up and somebody was there to help. There isn’t the bureaucracy that you would have at a larger institution such as a local authority.

“BEST’s support network is like a safety net. During Covid, for example, it was hugely helpful to have people coming and checking my health and safety and risk assessments. BEST was taking responsibility for it.”



The journey so far... and beyond >>

November 2019

Campton Lower School makes initial contact to explore joining BEST. Meetings between governors and trust senior leaders follow

January 2020

Campton sends academisation application to the DfE, while BEST establishes working group to oversee the transition

Looking ahead to 2023

Planned expansion and move to new site off Hitchin Road, Shefford (site clearance in late 2020, pictured left)

June 2020

Regional Schools Commissioner’s Headteacher Board officially approves application for Campton to join BEST





Snapshot

BEST gives wide-ranging support to schools through the entire conversion process, across all areas.

Some of the help given to Campton was operational – such as health and safety site visits and updating signage featuring a new school logo – while BEST’s central finance team ensured pension schemes were transferred correctly and staff were trained on new accounting systems.

Meanwhile, staff immediately started to enjoy the positive impact brought about by joining a trust with a strong School Improvement team.

This team – headed up by Director of Education Alison Wilshaw – helped with a curriculum review, in readiness for the school becoming a primary with its first Year 5 and 6 pupils.

BEST’s Directors of English and Maths – Amy Morris and Helen Jameison – liaised with their respective subject leads, discussing new ideas and offering whole school training.

Channels of support have also been established where expert practice is shared through BEST staff, such as in the form of the Safeguarding Leads Forum or the numerous Specialist Leaders of Education the trust has.

The Campton staff voice has been invaluable in these groups, with teachers citing renewed enthusiasm about being able to join in planning to improve outcomes for children.

Interim Principal Sarah Fraher said: “BEST has a structured system in place and support can be accessed really easily.

“We just didn’t have that before.”

‘Converting to an academy was made easier by staff support for the proposal and BEST’s positive attitude

– Phil Armstrong,
Chair of Governors

Ensuring staff remained happy was a top priority for both BEST and the school throughout the transition process.

Interim Principal Sarah Fraher, who has worked at Campton for 15 years, said the views of her colleagues were sought from the outset.

She said: “We as staff very much felt part of initiating it. At the start a survey was sent round asking if we wanted to join a multi-academy trust, specifically BEST, or federate with another school. The opinion was 100% to join BEST.

“We were very keen to make the move to BEST as we felt part of that choice, instead of it being something done to us.”

Year 3 Teacher Lucy Close said: “I am so pleased the school has joined BEST. The trust was so generous with its support and made what could have been a very difficult period with no head or deputy manageable.

“It’s good to be part of something bigger. I like the way BEST has left us to be Campton but with good backup that is always focused on the children.

“As an experienced teacher it has also been nice to get the opportunities to develop professionally and carry on my own learning.”

Teaching Assistant Frances Cobley said: “I think everything was made very clear and I loved that we were all kept involved and in the loop through the whole process.”

BEST Chief Operating Officer Craig Smith said: “The staff are an absolutely vital resource in running the school and you want to take everybody with you on the journey to make it a success.

“Our approach is to ensure the school has a strong voice during the transition, so we do it with rather than unto. That’s really important.”

WHY THIS IS A SUCCESS STORY...

- Improves the experience for pupils and the wider community
- BEST’s model of autonomy works well for Campton and secures the future of the school
- Becoming part of BEST empowers staff and helps them get the support they need
- It is a great strategic fit as part of BEST’s long-term growth

