

The Future of School Improvement

EducationKingston Proposal

Frequently Asked Questions

Listed below are answers to some of the most frequently asked questions that have been shared since the proposal was first published on March 8, 2011.

This version contains updates arising from questions asked at the meeting for Governors on July 11, 2011.

1. When would it start?
It is hoped that this would start on April 1, 2012.
2. The timescale for decision making is very tight. Is this necessary?
In order to make that launch date the proposal will need to receive final agreement from the Council Executive on October 18, 2011. Schools will have to have indicated their willingness to be part of this by October 14.
3. Could it not be delayed?
RBK has guaranteed the majority of its services to schools until March 31, 2012. From that point onwards, if EK does not exist, the LA will be able to provide only a much reduced service to schools, concentrated largely on its statutory role. The LA will not be able support the current model of provision beyond that point as it intends to become a commissioner rather than provider of services. The option of maintaining a school improvement team that schools buy services from is not available. The proposed EK partnership model is acceptable to RBK.
4. To what extent are schools able to shape this proposal?
The proposal was first put to a meeting open to all headteachers on March 8, 2011. Since then there have been further occasions at which ideas and discussion points have been shared with open school forums. In addition, the main thread of the development work has been carried forward by a working party made up of representatives of all primary, secondary and special schools together with 4 LA officers. A paper was presented to the Governors' Partnership meeting in May and further information was sent to all Chairs of GBs by email on June 10. At all stages feedback, thoughts and ideas have been sought and shared with the working party as they have arisen. There is a meeting for governors to discuss these proposals at 7.30pm on July 11 at the King Charles Centre. Now that the project has been given the go-ahead to proceed through the next stage of investigation the working party is becoming an official Project Board and governor representation on that group is currently being sought.
5. What structure are you suggesting for EK?
There are arguments in favour of all types of approach. It appears easier to ensure the robustness of the arrangement and to advantage early partners with a more formal approach though this may also require more effort to initiate. At present the view is that EK is likely to be a charitable company. This is the subject of further investigation over the coming weeks to establish exactly which vehicle would be most appropriate.
6. Who will make the decisions about the final proposal?
This will be for Project Board. It is tasked with overseeing the development of the final proposal which will be published to all schools on September 8.
7. When will we get to see the detail of exactly what we might be signing-up to?
Those details are being shared as they are developed through all of the open meetings and the work of the Project Board. The full detail will be included in the final published proposal on September 8.
8. When will we have to declare whether or not we wish to be involved in EK?
Provisional agreements will need to be submitted by October 14.

9. When will we know if this is going ahead?
If there is sufficient interest from Kingston schools the proposal will taken to the Council for final sign-off on October 18. If it receives approval work would begin immediately on turning the vision into a reality.
10. How many schools are needed to represent “sufficient interest”?
RBK’s willingness to invest requires 90% of schools to sign-up as its purpose is to champion excellence across the borough, support school improvement and know its schools.
11. Exactly what is RBK’s role in this if EK is to be “*owned and operated by schools*”?
The LA takes it role as the champion of excellence seriously and believes that good schools strengthen the community of Kingston so it wants to stay engaged but in a different model. RBK will be an active and supportive partner to EK, commissioning it to support and challenge schools to maintain high standards and improve. It will provide substantial and essential investment in order for EK to operate RBK is proud of the schools in this borough and is keen to support them at a time of great change and uncertainty.
12. What will RBK want in return for its investment?
RBK wishes to continue to know the borough’s schools so there will also be requirement that member schools accept the modified School Improvement Partner (Education Kingston Partner – EKP) element of the offer. This will provide RBK with reports on the standards in Kingston schools and a mechanism for intervention in the event of a school causing concern (which remains a statutory duty of the LA). RBK will also require a place on the Executive Board of EK and a part in decision-making. RBK will want to ensure via a review process that its investment is value for money.
13. What will RBK’s investment look like?
If EK goes ahead RBK has committed to investing approximately £750,000 per year for five years in the form of seconded staff, accommodation, ICT etc.
14. Does this mean that schools will have to sign-up for five years?
This is the current recommendation of the working party. It has been the subject of much debate. It was agreed at the meeting of the EK Project Board on July 19, 2011 that this should remain the recommended period.
15. So why five years?
A five-year sign-up period for schools secures RBK’s investment, provides stability across a period in which there may be political change and allows for a full exploration of this way of working.
16. Will we have the option to leave EK before that period expires?
As EK will be owned by schools they could take the decision collectively to terminate this arrangement for all at any time. The difficulty with allowing individual schools to opt out at a point of their choosing is that it may make the EK proposal unviable for those that wish to remain. This is an issue that the EK Project Board will be considering ahead of the publication of the final proposal, taking into account the range of views, concerns and implications that have been shared. There will be a clear statement about this in the proposal.
17. Will there be periodic review of EK’s performance?
Yes, the precise mechanism for this is being worked on and it must be remembered that the whole rationale of EK is that it is by schools, for schools. The schools involved in EK will want to know at all times that EK is performing in the way that they want and to the standards they set.
18. Who will actually run EK?
It is a cornerstone of the philosophy behind EK that it is led by headteachers. There is a balance to be struck between giving schools the lead in all of the governance and operational decision-making and the demands that would make on headteachers’ time so they will probably decide to require officers to do some operational leadership. It has been agreed by the EK Project Board that headteachers will form the majority of the Executive Board and will need to be in the majority for any quorum. The headteacher members will be elected by the full membership.

19. Will this be a great burden on schools and headteachers?
There would inevitably be some management overhead required but it is not envisaged that this would be a bureaucratic model. Headteachers already provide significant input to a number of decision making groups and it is envisaged that the EK activity would simply replace some of that. The amount of time required in carrying out the governance and supervision function would be for schools to decide. LA officers seconded to EK could carry out the majority of the operational activity with headteachers providing oversight and governance; possibly through meeting structures that already exist.
20. How much will it cost?
For the scale of operation envisaged in the proposal the total school contribution would need to be of the order of £300,000. This is roughly equal to an average of £6000 per school per annum.
21. Will it be possible to pay for all five years 'up-front' and will this attract a discount?
This will be considered by the EK Project Board and a statement about it will appear in the final proposal.
22. What is the pricing model? Will all schools pay the same?
There are arguments for both "flat rate for all schools" and "pupil number based" models. The current recommendation of the working party is a flat rate model with some adjustment for very small schools.
23. What about Academies?
The EK proposal makes no distinction between Academies and maintained schools. The model proposed does not envisage that academies would need to pay more because it is based on the principle of a partnership across all Kingston schools, regardless of status, at its core and a belief that all schools have something to offer and learn from others.
24. Would joining EK limit our ability to apply for academy status at a later point?
The existence of EK or membership of it has no bearing at all on the ability of any school to convert to academy status if it should so wish. In creating EK we are trying to reduce the possible adverse impact of the fragmentation that might occur within the education system as schools become more autonomous. EK is an attempt to recognize and work with that autonomy rather than oppose or challenge it. EK is being proposed to all RBK schools regardless of whether or not they are academies now or likely to be so in the future.
25. Will all schools have access to same level of support regardless of need?
All member schools would be entitled to the same minimum level of entitlement as detailed in the Subscription Services booklet.
26. How can we be sure EK will have the capacity to deliver this level of support?
It is dependent on sufficient funds being generated through subscription fees and other income streams. Current financial plans are expected to be able deliver the offer as set out. Schools would be able to buy additional time subject to availability. Consideration would have to be given to how schools causing concern would access additional support and much of this is anticipated to come from school to school support.
27. Can we choose what we want from it?
Schools would be free to use the services that they need and want subject to any membership conditions and availability of staff etc.
28. How will time / support be allocated?
It would be for the organisation to agree its protocols for the allocation of support but it would have to allow for all schools to be able to draw down the entitlement contained as part of the core subscription offer. It is hoped that schools would recognise any system as fair and just. All schools would have a basic support allocation and an allocated EKP. The principles upon which resource allocations were to be made would need to be agreed by the EK Executive Board and transparently applied.

29. Will the support be tailored to the needs of the school?
In formulating this proposal it has been acknowledged that a more customised, tailored approach should be adopted. The 60 credits element of the offer will allow schools to tailor the activity further to suit their needs.
30. Will part of the subscription include the ability to make general enquiries or will calling for advice use up some of the school's allocated 60 credits?
The EK staff team including, in particular, the school's assigned EKP will be available to respond to enquiries from schools without additional cost. A credit 'charge' would only be applied if the enquiry resulted in a specific piece of work being undertaken. This would probably be at the standard rate of one credit per hour of in-school support with the rate for any other kind of activity being negotiable. The vast majority of queries will be dealt with 'free of charge'. It should be noted, however, that EK staff will be able to handle only those queries relating to core school improvement activities. Queries relating to any services provided by RBK and/or Achieving for Children will need to be directed there. EK staff will be able to signpost where best to direct enquiries.
31. Would we need buyback in addition to our subs?
All schools would get an entitlement as part of the annual subscription. Subject to considerations of capacity schools will be able to purchase additional credits. The provisional cost of these is approximately £80 per credit.
32. Can unused credits be carried forward to the next year?
No.
33. Can a school 'sell' unused credits to another school?
No. A core principle of this proposal is that schools will be supporting schools. It is envisaged that any spare credits will create the capacity to provide additional support for any school that may find itself in difficulty for one reason or another.
34. What is the difference between an Education Kingston Partner (EKP) and a School Improvement Partner (SIP)?
The key difference between the two roles is that EKPs will not automatically be involved in headteacher performance management and the EKP's activities will be more personalised to the school.
35. Does this mean we do not have to have external involvement in headteacher performance management?
This is currently under review nationally but the current requirement is that governing bodies engage the services of a suitable professional to assist them in this task. EKPs will be available for this role as a 'charged' activity from the school's credit allowance.
36. Will we be able to choose our own Education Kingston Partner?
SIP allocations have traditionally been negotiated with schools – heads and governors - and this would be expected to continue. Final decisions on allocations were made by the Head of Learning and School Effectiveness. Flexibility is never absolute because of finite resources and these will be tighter than ever in the future. It is clear that RBK's investment is to ensure the quality of school provision and to secure the necessary feedback on that. Therefore EKPs must be able to variously review, support, advise and report to governors, the LA and EK without compromise – the "without fear or favour" principle. The arrangements for allocating EKPs will be decided by the EK Board.
37. How will we know we are getting value for money?
This is ultimately for schools to decide. Consultancy rates on the open market typically cost £400 upwards per day plus expenses. The EK Subscription Service booklet sets out what is envisaged as available for the investment to include possibly: an assigned Education Kingston Partner for support and challenge, membership of a strong partnership which includes links to all services for CYP in Kingston and beyond and an additional 60 hours credit for school improvement work. Comparative costs derived from the offers of some neighbouring LAs are being developed and will be sent with the final EK proposal.

38. What are other LAs doing?

All LAs are considering the level of service that they are offering and the model for securing it. The range of LA response is from divesting all involvement in school improvement to keeping previous models in a slimmed down version. This proposal goes further than many in giving greater governance control and direction to schools than most models.

39. Does Education Kingston need to be a wider organisation, working in partnership with surrounding LA's?

This is currently under discussion but schools views on this are important. A shared peer moderation approach and challenge role with neighbouring LAs is being considered. This is believed to be of potential benefit to replace some of the external challenge and opportunities for sharing of ideas that has existed through the National Strategies. Richmond, Kingston, Merton and Sutton LAs have expressed interest in working together and this will be pursued in relation to various services. EK will need to establish clear working protocols with a range of key partner organisations that deliver services to children, schools and families,

40. Can we build in a review of current services and changes required before becoming EK?

This is currently underway and will inform the final proposal. It is essential that the needs of schools are fully articulated during the development and implementation phases. The EK model covers only school improvement services such as though currently provided via inspectors, consultants and CPD. Other services will be reviewed and recommissioned over time.

41. Who will appoint staff to EK?

All appointments to the organisation would be managed by the organisation itself. There would have to be transitional arrangements in the early days.

42. Will existing posts in RBK safeguarded?

The EK model affects school inspectors, consultants and CPD staff. All these colleagues are aware that posts are currently intended to be secured until end of March 2012. The model proposed requires some staff to work in a seconded role for EK. Employment law would require current employees to be protected where possible.

43. How would Executive Board treat complaints or concerns about EK staff?

It would be for the organisation to decide upon a complaints policy and procedures. Where seconded staff are employed by RBK were involved the policy would need to reflect that reality, with suitable processes. Legal advice would need to be obtained on this and many other matters if the partnership is pursued.

44. Will there be clear financial accountability regarding costs including salaries?

The EK Board would be responsible for financial control of the organisation. Accounts will be made available to all members and scrutinised.

45. How will EK ensure equality?

As with all organisations there would need to be a policy to establish principles of fairness and equality and a process for dealing with grievances.

46. Will EK be working in the Early Years voluntary sector? Who will be paying for this work?

EducationKingston would not be expected to work in any areas not contributing to its funding. Hence Early years work that is funded solely for the Private Voluntary and Independent sector would not be part of the model. It is likely that schools' Early Years provision would benefit as they do now from Sure Start funding as well as investment. Some RBK staff seconded to EK would be likely to retain some responsibility for areas funded by other means e.g. Early Years Private, Voluntary and Independent settings

47. Where do services like HR, health and safety etc. sit?

RBK will continue to be responsible for certain statutory services and is exploring how to provide those in conjunction with other local authorities. In particular Kingston's Children's Service is looking to develop a jointly owned organisation called Achieving for Children to provide core statutory functions across Kingston and Richmond boroughs. Additionally Schools and Academies are

expected to be able to continue to buy services.

48. What about the Educational Psychology Service and Education Welfare Service?

These services are not part of the EK model although their roles in school improvement are recognised and highly valued. The future of these services is under discussion and it is expected that they will continue in Achieving for Children and that buy back opportunities will still be available in the future.

49. How much exclusion will a school face if it decides not to join EK?

It would be for schools to decide on the extent to which the services it provides are for members only and the services it makes available to non-members. We very much hope that all schools see the benefit of partnership across all schools.

50. What if EK does not go ahead?

The partnership between schools and the LA will change significantly. Schools causing concern will receive intervention and the needs of children who are vulnerable and their families will be championed. While the detail is unclear it is certain that the school improvement service will not be supported in its current form.