

Arnold proposes joining educational charity to secure future

School is poised for £3m windfall

By **HEATHER BUTLER**
Education Writer

ONE of the Fylde's top independent schools has revealed plans which could see more than £3m pumped into a new building programme.

Arnold School is considering joining the United Church Schools Trust (UCST), a national educational charity which runs 11 city academies and 10 public schools across the country.

Despite the name there are no plans to turn Arnold into a faith school or evangelise the teaching of religion, according to school bosses.

The plan is designed to secure the future of Arnold which, like other public schools, is suffering against a backdrop of falling pupil rolls.

More than £140m is due to be invested in Blackpool's secondary schools, bringing them up to 21st Century standards.

Without such a windfall, Arnold is keen to explore options for improving facilities and maintaining the school's position at the head of the league tables, rejecting suggestions of pumping up fees, reducing school size, negotiating a merger or becoming a maintained school or academy.

Principal Barry Hughes said: "I think this is a fantastic opportunity for us and the



I think this is a fantastic opportunity for us and the governors agree.

— Arnold principal Barry Hughes (left)

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governors agree. We have examined a number of options to meet the pressures that all schools in the independent sector face, in particular a decreasing population and pressures to prove their public benefit in order to retain charitable status.

"By joining the UCST family, we would be able to have the continuity of all that is best about Arnold School while benefiting from membership of a very strong group of schools."

While Arnold's assets and overall management would be handed over to the trust, the day-to-day running of the school would remain in the hands of

the principal Mr Hughes.

Sixth form facilities are top of the wish list to undergo a makeover and the school expects an influx of new IT equipment in the early stages of the programme.

Money for investment comes from the trust's £150m pool, drawing profits from other public schools in the trust – not Government academies cash – and reinvesting it in buildings, equipment and teacher training.

And Mr Hughes insists the trust would have no say over the curriculum. The involvement of religious groups in education

has been controversial – with some accused of promoting the teaching of creationism rather than focusing on the theory of evolution – although the trust says it does not promote creationism.

He said: "We were impressed by their passion for education and the good it can do for deprived areas and they are keen to become established in this region.

"It is a Christian trust but Arnold was set up on Christian values and we share a similar ethos.

"But UCST does not embrace extreme views or set out to evangelise and Arnold will remain open to pupils of all faiths and none."

Flagship

Sir Ewan Harper, chief executive of the United Church Schools Trust, said: "We share a similar ethos and outlook towards education and we would be extremely pleased if Arnold School became our flagship in the North West."

Union bosses have urged teachers to look carefully at the proposals before making their views known while parents and friends of the school can find out more on March 11 at an information meeting at the school.

Members of Arnold Schools Ltd, which controls the school charity, make a final decision on March 28.

heather.butler@blackpoolgazette.co.uk