

CG/LA/MAT
31/10/2017

Dear Parents,

Formal consultation on proposed conversion to Multi Academy Trust (MAT).

You may be aware of the announcements by the Government making it clear that it wants all schools to become academies, or have a plan in place to become an academy. Whilst the compulsory nature of this has been removed it appears that this is still the long term policy of the current Government.

The preferred structure is a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT), which is where a group of schools/academies join together and form a single Trust company with a single board of trustees who are responsible for the strategic running of the Trust and are accountable for the Trust. The Department for Education, Ofsted and the Regional Schools Commissioner are all supportive of MATs as are all three main political parties. There is also an increasing body of evidence demonstrating clear benefits when groups of schools work collaboratively within a MAT arrangement. An Academy receives its funding directly from the Government and does not have any money withheld by the Local Authority to fund its services.

Over the last twelve months, our Governing Body has continued to revisit the issue of Academies and MATs and whether or not this model was in the best interests of the children, teachers and staff at our school. They have voted to explore this in more detail. At the same time, a number of our partner schools have arrived at a similar conclusion and their Governing Bodies have voted similarly to ours.

Governors would now like to consult more broadly with parents as to the best way forward for the school; there are ten other schools identified also consulting on forming the MAT, Galileo Multi Academy Trust, at the same time. These schools are as follows:

Galley Hill Primary School; St Peter's Primary School; Westgarth Primary School; Lakes Primary School; John Emmerson Batty Primary School; Ings Farm Primary School; Coatham Primary School; Green Gates Primary School; New Marske Primary School and Wheatlands Primary School. These are schools who Belmont have worked with closely over the last two years as members of the Landmark Teaching Schools Alliance. This has included a considerable amount of school to school support and training for teachers to further enhance standards across all member schools.

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This means the proposed MAT will be made up of 7 community schools, 2 foundation schools and 2 church schools; this is often referred to as a 'mixed MAT' and they are becoming more common as MATs increasingly reflect local partnerships or 'families of schools'. For the avoidance of any doubt, the community schools will remain as community schools, foundation schools as foundation schools and the church schools as church schools and the structure of the MAT will protect and enshrine the individual character and ethos of each school.

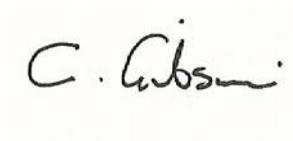
The 6 week consultation period (30 school days) will take place from Tuesday 31st October– Monday 11th December. As part of the consultation we will be holding a meeting on the evening of **Thursday 9th November**. The evening will take the form of informal table top discussions where representatives of the Governing Body and Senior Leadership Team will be on hand to discuss academy status with attendees. The meeting will start at **6pm in the Key Stage Two** hall and last for approximately one hour.

We have included three additional documents with this letter:

1. Rationale for the move towards forming a Multi Academy Trust
2. A detailed FAQ document (I trust that this answers a number of initial questions)
3. A feedback form; please complete this and return to school

We want and value your feedback and would encourage you to engage in the consultation process. It would be helpful if you could return the reply slip below – or email the school office – stating if you are planning to attend the meeting so that we can get an idea of numbers. Please note, this meeting is for parents and carers only and not suitable for children. I would like to thank you in advance for making the time to get involved with this important issue.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light yellow background. The signature appears to be 'C. Gibson' written in a cursive style.

Mr C Gibson

Converting to an Academy/Multi Academy Trust (MAT)

Frequently Asked Questions document

Why are we looking to become an Academy?

1. What is an academy?

Academy schools are state funded schools in England which are directly funded by central government (specifically, the Department for Education) and independent of direct funding and control by the Local Authority.

Academies were initially established through the Learning and Skills Act 2000. However, the number of schools converting to academy status only really started to gather pace following the passing of the Academies Act 2010. There are now over 5500 academies and whilst the government is no longer requiring all schools to become academies by 2022 their aim is still that all schools will eventually become academies.

As of September 2016:

- 1. 28% of schools are academies or free schools (21% of primaries and 67% of secondaries)*
- 2. 65% of academies and free schools are in MATs (73% of primaries and 52% of secondaries)*

2. Are all academies the same?

No. There are many different types of academy. For example, some schools have become academies independently, others have joined together with other schools to form a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) whilst others have joined larger MAT groups, often known as academy chains. Different academies have a variety of school improvement and governance arrangements.

3. Why are we considering converting to an academy now?

*We are currently state funded via our Local Authority. The current educational climate is changing and many schools nationally are choosing to take advantage of academy status. **We are not obliged to convert to an academy and can continue to be maintained directly by Redcar and Cleveland Council.** However, across-the-board cuts in central government funding to local authorities in recent years has led to reduced local budgets and cuts to local services. These cuts are unlikely to abate in the short-to-medium term. It is **possible** that the requirement to further cut local budgets and spending over the next few years may ultimately impact on the ability of the Council to deliver its core services, including supporting schools within its boundaries.*

*This **potentially** raises the prospect that the school **may**, at some stage in the future, be forced to move from being a local authority supported school to an academy at short notice and at a time not of our choosing. This would be made worse by the fact that other schools within the local authority area would also be scrambling to convert, which would inevitably lead to confusion and uncertainty. Such a scenario would not be in the best interests of our children, parents or the school.*

In summary, the reasons we are considering converting to become an academy are:-

A. Educational

- 1. Improve pupil progress and educational outcomes*
- 2. Common approach to curriculum development and assessment across schools*
- 3. Increased curricular and extra-curricular opportunities*
- 4. Common core policies and procedures to increase consistency within the MAT schools*

B. Financial

- 1. Joint procurement and purchasing opportunities*
- 2. Improved recruitment of high quality staff*
- 3. Improved retention of high quality staff within the MAT*
- 4. Benefit from economies of scale*

C. To retain our own unique ethos within our family of schools

- 1. We will be working with schools that builds on strong existing relationships*
- 2. We will be working with schools that share a similar outlook and ethos*

D. To take control of our own destiny

- 1. Reduce the risk of being left in a position in the future where we feel we need to join a large MAT without the opportunity to shape that MAT or retain any autonomy at school level.*

4. Are any other schools in our local area involved in this proposal?

Several other first/primary schools across the partnership are also looking to form part of this MAT.

What day-to-day challenges will happen?

5. Will a move to academy status mean a new name for the school?

No. The school will continue to be called Belmont Primary School and there is no intention to change the name of the school.

6. Will a proposed new academy have a new uniform?

No. Parents will not need to buy a new uniform.

7. What will be the impact on our children with special needs?

There will be no change to the level of support provided. The school will continue to recognise that every child is different and has the right to be included as a valued, respected and equal member of the school community.

8. Will the school hours be any different as an academy?

Although it is highly unlikely that the school day will be changed, it is the decision of the MAT Board to decide this as they have the power to do so. This decision is usually delegated to the school specific 'academy committee / council' of an academy, so there is no real change from our authority in this regard. As is the case now, parents would be consulted prior to any change in school hours, although no change is envisaged.

9. Will pupils' education be disrupted by a transition to academy status?

No. When an academy is approved to go ahead, it will do so with minimal disruption to the staff and students. Most of the changes will take place behind the scenes with support from a dedicated team.

10. If we move to being an academy will this change what is taught?

Academies are exempt from having to follow the National Curriculum however we would continue to offer the full range of National Curriculum subjects. OFSTED continue to inspect academies and their handbook for inspection is the same one as used in any other school. In other words, it is highly unlikely we would change what pupils are taught.

What will this mean for our School finances?

11. How is an academy funded?

Currently, in maintained schools all revenue funding goes directly to the Local Authority. The Local Authority (LA) takes a proportion of the money from the school budget to provide essential services to the school and the rest is delegated under the Local Management of Schools. Schools can, and do, buy additional services from the LA and other providers. As a result some schools currently depend upon the local authority for many services such as school improvement, HR, finance, etc.

Academies receive a similar level of per-pupil funding as maintained schools, plus funding to meet additional responsibilities that are no longer provided for them by the Local Authority (LA). With a MAT, the money that would have been provided to the LA to run the school is provided directly to the MAT. The MAT will retain some of the budget in order to provide services to the academy. Local authorities fund their core services in a similar way.

12. Does this improve on current funding arrangements?

Converting to an academy will not be to our detriment financially, although there may be the potential for some financial gain due to the increased buying power across the MAT and the opportunity to compare and contrast services centrally to ensure we are obtaining the best value for money. However, any decision is not motivated by money.

Funding is available to cover the costs of the conversion process itself, which is provided by central government once the decision to convert has been approved. We may have opportunities to support other schools and to benefit financially from doing so. In addition, the MAT Board may have access to capacity funding from the Department for Education as well as opportunities to bid for capital funding on an annual basis.

What will this mean for Teachers and Staff?

13. What are the Terms and Conditions for staff?

On conversion to academy status teachers and staff employed by the school will transfer with the same terms and conditions, via a formal TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment) process. In addition, conversion will not affect any union memberships.

14. Who will employ teachers and staff following conversion?

At present teachers and staff are employed by Redcar and Cleveland Council or governing body. Following conversion, teachers and staff will be employed directly by the MAT. For the avoidance of doubt there will be no church involvement in the recruitment of any staff apart from in the event of the need to recruit a new Headteacher of any church school.

15. Will the MAT employ non-qualified teachers?

All class groups of pupils will be registered to a qualified teacher, as is the case in schools currently.

16. Will the Board of Governors have less authority and control?

The current school's Board of Governors will, in future, be referred to as either an Academy Committee (with delegated powers) or an Academy Council (with few delegated powers).

The composition and powers of the Academy Committee/Council will be set out in a formal 'Scheme of Delegation' which allows the MAT board to delegate responsibilities. There will continue to be (elected) parent representatives on the Committee/Council (as at present), together with Foundation and a Staff representative as well. That said, the MAT may appoint additional people, such as representatives provided from the local community, and may step in if the Academy Committee is not performing its duties effectively.

What will this mean for standards?

17. Does the MAT have the capacity to raise educational standards?

The MAT will establish its own school improvement capacity for those schools choosing to become an academy. It will ensure that primary practice is shared extensively to ensure parity and consistency across this phase. Transition will begin from year 4 to ensure that pupils are ready for the move to secondary.

18. How will an academy raise achievement?

The whole structure of the Multi Academy Trust will be designed to challenge and support schools in equal measure.

The MAT will intervene rapidly in schools that are underperforming or on a downward trajectory based on OFSTED criteria.

What are the implications of forming a ‘mixed MAT?’

19. How will the MAT be structured?

The standard company structure for multi-academy trusts is five Members who are similar to shareholders in a company; there is then a Board of Directors (essentially governors) who are responsible for the strategic running of the trust. The Members formally adopt the constitutional documents for the company (which set out its core purpose, i.e. provision of education etc.); they also have responsibility for appointing the majority of Directors. They should attend one annual general meeting each year and sign off the audited company accounts. The Chairperson of the Board of Directors should also be a Member of the company to ensure a link between the two layers.

The proposed MAT will be made up of 9 community schools and 2 church schools, which means that certain governance structures need to be in place as part of the proposed MAT so that we can include all schools; this is often referred to as a ‘mixed MAT’.

The constitutional documents will be based on template documents agreed nationally between the Department for Education and the Church of England.

The MAT has a very small group of Members (5 in total) who are named for legal purposes but don’t have a great deal to do with the daily running of the school. The MAT Board of Directors has overall responsibility and accountability in law for the performance, site and overall running of the Trust and the schools. A local Academy Committee/Council sits beneath this and supports the Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team to implement strategic decisions. Neither the Members, Directors nor Academy Committee/Council representatives are paid positions (except the CEO of the MAT who receives a salary as usual).

It has been agreed that the Church of England will be in the minority at both Member level (two out of five Members) and at Board of Director level (25% of the Directors to be appointed).

20. Role and basis for appointment of Trustees

The core governance functions of the Multi-Academy Trust, (i.e. setting the direction of the Trust, holding the headteachers to account and ensuring sound use of finances) are carried out by the Multi-Academy Trust Board of Directors (who are also charity trustees).

Trustees should be appointed on the basis of the skills they can bring to the trust board as it is essential that this is made up of skilled individuals to ensure the success, both academically and financially, of the trust and the best outcomes for the pupils within the trust. Ultimately the members have the power of appointment and removal of the majority of trustees but as part of this MAT the Members will sign a Members Agreement making it clear that appointments will be based on skills.

21. Legal Protections of unique school character

Each of the schools and the Church of England are fully committed to ensuring each school’s own unique ethos and character is protected, i.e. that the community schools cannot be turned into church schools and vice versa. However, as part of our proposals we have also carefully looked at the formal legal protections available to ensure the continued individual unique character of the community schools within the proposed MAT. As well as a Members Agreement making it clear the appointment of trustees will be based on skills, the Department for Education template funding agreements (which set out how funds are paid to the MAT) offer further protections. These state that the MAT must maintain the non-religious character of a community school. To do otherwise would breach the funding agreements and hence risk losing the MAT’s funding from the Secretary of State. The Company documents

also make it clear that the MAT board must protect the individual ethos of any academy within the MAT and this is the responsibility of all directors.

The local Academy Committees/Councils set up for the schools within the MAT, will reflect the ethos of that school so there would no church appointed representation in a community school and responsibility would be given to the local Academy Committee/Council to protect that ethos. There will be the opportunity for parents to be elected to these local Academy Committees/Councils and so maintain an input into the governance of their school. However, as mentioned above, it will also be the responsibility of the MAT Board of Trustees overall to ensure it protects the individual ethos of each school within the MAT (whether church or community) in accordance with the company documents and the Members should also be assured this is happening.

22. Would community schools continue to be community schools?

Yes, it is a non-negotiable requirement that community schools remain community schools and that church schools remain church schools if they become an academy. We believe it is vital that parents have the choice to continue to send their children to community schools within the partnership just as some parents may wish to send their children to the church schools. When a school converts it does so “as is”, therefore we retain exactly the same status. We will not “become a church school”; we are and will continue to be a community school serving our catchment area.

Individual local Academy Committees/Councils and Headteachers will remain responsible for the day to day running of their own school. Staff appointments will still be made by individual schools, without any reference to the church in the case of community schools, employment terms and conditions will remain unchanged and schools will retain links with the Local Authority. Furthermore, every school will keep their own uniform and the aspects that make each school special. For the avoidance of doubt there would, and could not legally be, any faith based admissions criteria for any of the community schools within the MAT.

23. What would happen to the community school land?

Any land transferred to the MAT whether by lease or transfer can only be used for the purposes of the MAT without Secretary of State authorising some other use, which is unlikely.

Any land belonging to the Church of England will remain with the Church and be occupied under a church supplemental agreement which will again be based on a template agreed nationally between the Department for Education and the Church of England.

Rationale for, and benefits of, forming a mixed Multi Academy Trust (MAT)

1. Educational progress and outcomes

1.1. Schools will benefit from increased internal accountability; we will support and challenge each other to ensure high quality outcomes for all pupils

1.2. Research indicates that school to school collaboration is an effective tool for improving educational standards - we would seek to exploit close working relationships to do just that

1.3. We will ensure a common approach to curriculum development ensuring that students have a similar experience in all primary schools whilst retaining a curriculum suitable for each specific school.

1.4. Increased curricular and extra-curricular opportunities

1.5. Common core policies and procedures to increase consistency within the MAT schools

1.6. Teaching staff will benefit from a more diverse approach to their ongoing professional learning including access to action research and regular school visits to ensure that teaching practice is high quality and evidence based

2. School organisation

2.1. The proposed MAT will provide a clear structure reflecting this organisational change and a solid platform to ensure that it is highly effective

2.2. The proposed MAT ensures long term stability and continuity, even if a headteacher leaves post

2.3. Schools have strong relationships and a history of working closely together and there is high levels of trust among colleagues

2.4. The 'mixed MAT' allows us to be wholly inclusive ensuring that all primary schools are able to join this 'family of schools'

3. Ofsted/School performance

3.1. All of the schools listed in the proposal are currently rated as either good or outstanding by Ofsted therefore we join together from a position of strength

3.2. All schools are performing well with the potential to make further improvements through closer collaboration

4. Financial

4.1. We will develop teams to manage key areas such as finance, HR and data; this will free up headteachers to focus on improving teaching and learning, and driving up standards

4.2. Joint procurement and purchasing opportunities will enable us to be more financially resilient at a time of increasing cost pressures on school budgets

4.3. Improved recruitment of high quality staff as they will be attracted to working within a strong MAT with a track record of success

4.4. Improved retention of high quality staff within the MAT; we will be able to plan effectively for succession and internal promotion

4.5. We will benefit from economies of scale

5. To retain our own unique ethos within our family of schools

5.1. We will be working with schools that build on strong existing relationships

5.2. Our schools share similar values and a vision for the future of education within the Trust

6. To take control of our own destiny

6.1. We will take the initiative to shape a MAT that reflects our values, ethos and vision for the future

6.2. We recognise that the role of the Local Authority is diminishing significantly and therefore schools will need to become more self sufficient

6.3. We reduce the risk of being left in a position in the future where we feel we need to join another MAT without the opportunity to shape that MAT or retain any autonomy at school level

Multi-Academy Trust: Consultation Response Form

We would like to know what you think about the proposed academy conversion.
To take part in the discussion please complete the questionnaire below and return to
the school office by **3.30pm on 11th December 2017**

1. Do you support the decision for the school to become an academy?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Comments:

2. The proposal is that the school will be an Academy within a primary
Multi- Academy Trust with partnership schools. Do you agree with this arrangement?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Comments:

3. Do you have concerns about this proposal? If so what are they?

4. Please indicate whether you are:

- A member of school staff
- A pupil at the school
- A parent/carer of a pupil
- A member of the community

- A school governor

- Other (Please specify)

Consultation Meeting – Academy Status

Yes, I/ we will be attending (please circle) Number attending _____

No, I/we will not be attending (please circle)

Signed _____ Dated _____

Print name _____