



OUTER WEST LEARNING TRUST JOINT CONSULTATION LETTER

Monday 3rd October 2022

Dear Stakeholders,

Consultation on a proposal for the Outer West Learning Trust to establish a new Multi-Academy Trust and convert to academy status

Background

You may be aware that there is a significant ambition from Government to have all schools across the UK join academy trusts by 2030. As a group of nine schools in the Outer West Learning (OWL) Trust, we are eager to shape our own future. We therefore feel it is important that we approach any academisation agenda proactively. As a result of this, our Head Teachers have spent a considerable amount of time exploring the options for our schools.

The nine primary schools of the OWL Trust have worked together closely for over nine years. This collaborative relationship has helped to support school standards and develop protocols; helped staff learn from one another; and allowed our pupils to participate in shared learning events.

The Governing Bodies share the drive for their schools to continue to provide an excellent education for their pupils, while protecting each school's role at the heart of its community. This includes working to strengthen our partnership to provide mutual support, challenge and benefits for each other, which has led to provisional discussions around the potential of forming a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT). We believe that there may be potential for a closer working relationship with like-minded partner schools, which could result in all parties involved being able to provide the best possible educational experience in which all pupils can thrive now, and in future.

A formal partnership (MAT) would be built on the values of our existing set up. All of our schools are currently graded as Good or Outstanding according to Ofsted. Because our schools are already successful in their own right, under the proposal they would retain many of their unique qualities and strengths. Being part of an OWL MAT would result in the opportunity to work within a new governance structure with the aim of further improving outcomes for all the children in the Outer West. The schools will continue to share best practice, further develop and enhance the curriculum, and make financial savings, as well as being able to support and challenge each other in a much more meaningful way.

Proposal

Each Governing Body has been considering the future plans of its school in an ever-changing and increasingly challenging educational landscape.

The Governing Bodies agree that they should explore the possibility of converting to a new local Multi-Academy Trust and all that would entail and consult on conversion to academy status. The proposed MAT would have nine founding member schools, listed in alphabetical order below:

Knop Law Primary School

Lemington Riverside Primary School

Milecastle Primary School

Newburn Manor Primary School

Simonside Primary School

Throckley Primary School

Waverley Primary School

West Denton Primary School

Westerhope Primary School

One of the reasons we would like to explore this option is that pupils and staff may benefit from the greater opportunities that a formal MAT partnership would bring, which would include:

- increased collaboration as a natural extension of our successful Outer West Learning Foundation Trust
- better support for schools to raise standards
- extended learning opportunities and activities for pupils
- enhanced support for the pastoral and development needs of our pupils
- an enriched curriculum through partnership working and shared resources
- sharing of excellent practice in teaching and learning
- enhanced professional development of teaching and support staff
- the ability to attract and retain the best staff
- securing cost and resource efficiencies through joint commissioning of services
- being in a strong position to respond to changes in the local and national educational landscapes.

Consultation

We are now consulting with all stakeholders to invite your views on the matter, which will feed into discussions and determine whether our school should proceed with conversion.

At the end of the consultation, the Governing Body will consider the responses before any decisions are made. The consultation period will run between Monday 3rd October and Monday 7th November 2022.

If the Governing Bodies agree to proceed, the plan would be for the schools to apply to establish a Multi-Academy Trust and for the schools to convert in January 2024.

We have attached Frequently Asked Questions (an FAQ) for your information.

If you have any feedback on the proposal that you would like to share with the Governing Bodies, please complete the attached survey form and return to the school, or follow the link to the online survey, by Monday 7th November 2022.

The FAQ will be updated and shared on our schools' websites to reflect any questions that are pertinent to our local community. Whilst we do not anticipate responding to each and every communication, we will provide answers to questions via the FAQ and we welcome your views.

Please be assured that your views will be taken into consideration by our Governing Bodies when they meet in November to consider how to proceed.

We hope the information provided offers clarity about the proposal and the reasons for forming a MAT. We look forward to hearing your views.

Yours sincerely,

Vikki Dixon

Chair of Governors

Knop Law Primary School

Liz Simpson

Head Teacher

Knop Law Primary School

Robert Wilson

Chair of Governors

Lemington Riverside Primary School

Craig Heeley

Head Teacher

Lemington Riverside Primary School

Susan Hall

Chair of Governors

Milecastle Primary School

Suzanne Richardson

Head Teacher

Milecastle Primary School

Jill Brown

Chair of Governors

Newburn Manor Primary School

Stuart Pickup

Head Teacher

Newburn Manor Primary School

Lynn Rae

Chair of Governors

Simonside Primary School

Louise Thompson

Head Teacher

Simonside Primary School

Helen Richardson

Chair of Governors

Throckley Primary School

Julie Stuart

Head Teacher

Throckley Primary School

Angela Tinning

Chair of Governors

Waverley Primary School

Wendy Leeming

Head Teacher

Waverley Primary School

Joanne Lockey

Chair of Governors

West Denton Primary School

Mick MingStones

Head Teacher

West Denton Primary School

Susan Hall

Chair of Governors

Westerhope Primary School

Sarah Russell

Head Teacher

Westerhope Primary School



The Outer West Learning Trust Vision

The focus of the Trust's work will be our shared interest in maximising the achievements of all children and young people, through building and embedding the capacity for enhanced provision and widening access for the community.

The Trust's vision is to build a shared learning community in which children, young people, and staff discover their talents, realise their potential, and develop a passion for learning that endures through their lives.

Our children will:

- Be inspired to be people of character, with a lasting passion for learning
- Develop an enduring core of competencies and values
- Have the capabilities to thrive in the 21st century globalised world
- Experience a safe and joyful childhood.

All schools in the Outer West Learning Trust will:

- Have high quality staff who have excellent opportunities for development
- Provide a stimulating, relevant, and enjoyable curriculum
- Create a learning environment that shares and reflects best practice and current educational research
- Cultivate every child's skills, enabling them to realise tomorrow's dreams
- Work with families and the wider community to enable the best outcomes for children and young people.

We will work in a way together which espouses the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity. We will endeavour at all times to be honest and open, show social responsibility, and care for others.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the proposal?

The proposal is for the nine local primary schools of the Outer West Learning Trust to form a partnership called a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT), and for the schools to convert to academy status.

The nine schools have been working closely together for some time and have already benefitted from such collaboration and partnership.

How would forming a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) benefit our school?

We believe that stronger partnership between schools that share a similar vision, ethos and values, and the same commitment to raising standards, would help our school in a number of important ways, which would include:

- securing cost and resource efficiencies
- increased collaboration as a natural extension of our successful Outer West Learning Foundation Trust
- better support for schools to raise standards
- extended learning opportunities and activities for pupils
- enhanced support for the pastoral and development needs of our pupils
- sharing of excellent practice in teaching and learning
- an enriched curriculum through evidence-informed practice
- enhanced professional development of teaching and support staff
- the ability to attract and retain the best staff
- being in a strong position to respond to changes in the local and national educational landscapes.

We believe that we can bring enhanced benefits and opportunities to parents and pupils by formalising these existing working relationships.

Why is this being considered?

Being an academy and joining a MAT with the Outer West Learning Trust could potentially provide greater opportunities for working more closely together in the secure knowledge that we have a common purpose and ethos.

What is an academy?

An academy is a state school that is run by an academy trust. The academy trust enters into an agreement with the Secretary of State for Education that sets out its responsibilities and accountabilities for the effective running of the academy. The

academy is funded directly by the Government - not through the Local Authority. The trust is given charitable exemption, which means it must operate much like a charity.

What is a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT)?

A Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) is when two or more academies come together in partnership. In our case, we are looking to form a primary Multi-Academy Trust of the nine schools currently in the Outer West Learning Trust. Each member school would keep its own name.

What are the advantages of conversion?

The Government is clear that the greater freedoms enjoyed by academies are designed to allow schools to develop and build on individual strengths in response to the needs of the community. We are investigating whether the additional freedoms, flexibilities, and support provided through a Multi-Academy Trust would enable the Governors to better secure the long-term future of our schools. We would be able to pool resources, allowing us to improve teaching and management practices further. We would also achieve a greater degree of control of our finances, helping us to safeguard these funds for the benefit of our children.

What are the disadvantages of conversion?

Greater freedoms do bring additional responsibilities including statutory duties as a Multi-Academy Trust, but our schools are confident we can manage these. Academy conversion is not a panacea for all ills and we are aware of some difference in opinion as to the effectiveness of Multi-Academy Trusts. We would encourage you to consider the arguments for and against, and check the accuracy of assertions that are being made.

What are the risks of becoming an academy?

The change to academy status takes a school out of Local Authority control but does not exclude the school from Local Authority support. Local Authority support is provided equitably to maintained schools and academies where a statutory duty applies. Other services are available on a traded basis for both maintained schools and academies to opt in as they wish. At some stage in the future, any school might be influenced to become part of a broader academy chain. We believe that the ability to form a local MAT, under local direction, offers the best opportunity to sustain vibrant, successful local schools, and the best outcomes for children.

What is involved in becoming a Multi-Academy Trust?

Our schools will complete a consultation with parents, pupils, staff and the wider community which the Governors will take into account in reaching their decision. If, following the consultation, the Governing Bodies of all schools agree this proposal in principle, and Governors decide to proceed, it will be the Department for Education who decides whether or not to approve our application.

Who makes the final decision to join a Multi-Academy Trust?

The Governing Bodies will consult with all stakeholders in order to make an informed decision on whether or not to join the MAT. After collecting evidence, the final decision will be made by each individual Governing Body.

How will the MAT and the schools be run?

The MAT would have a Trustee Board consisting of nine Directors made up of people with particular skills and expertise to help it run efficiently, effectively, and compliantly. Although the Board would have a number of legal and regulatory powers, it can delegate many of its powers to Local Governing Bodies and Committees. Local Governing Bodies would continue to have a mixture of representatives from parents, staff, and local communities.

Each Head Teacher would still be responsible for running their own school. Together the nine Head Teachers would then form a leadership group to develop plans for partnership and collaboration.

Will any changes to the school be made as a result of conversion?

There would be additional governance accountability within a MAT to bring closer working practices between Trust members, through school improvement planning. The MAT would have an overarching Board of Trustees responsible for the running of academies that would then delegate responsibilities to each individual school's Local Governing Board.

It is our intention at this stage that the character, ethos, and values of the schools would remain unchanged should academy conversion take place.

Would the school have to change its name, uniform, or logo?

No, none of the schools would be changing their name, uniform or logo as part of a MAT conversion. However the MAT would have its own additional logo included on all school correspondence.

How will being a Multi-Academy Trust affect staff?

Currently, each of the schools in the Outer West Learning Trust employ their own staff. After conversion, all staff will be employed by the new Trust Board. Staff are legally protected to transfer under the same employment terms and conditions, including pensions. Staff will be provided further information on how they are affected. Being part of the MAT will also provide greater opportunities for career progression and development. Already, staff are working together on a range of teaching, learning, curriculum, and pupil support projects.

How are the children affected?

If the schools convert to academy status and establish the MAT, the children won't notice any immediate difference. Each school would continue to strive towards an outstanding education for all our children. As a result of potential new training opportunities given to teachers, the intention of these opportunities would be to further improve the children's education and raise standards. They would also have wider opportunities to collaborate with other children in the Outer West.

How are parents/carers affected?

Parents will not be affected however they may start to see and hear more information about the MAT. Parents may notice that correspondence sent by the academy, e.g. letters and emails, would include the MAT's logo.

How much does conversion cost?

Costs depend on which law firm the academy chooses to use, and can vary from school to school. Once schools are granted permission to convert by receiving their academy order, each school in the group will be eligible for a grant of £25,000 from the Department for Education towards the conversion costs.

Will we get more money as an academy?

Academies receive the same amount of per-pupil funding as they would receive from the Local Authority as a maintained school. The whole of the school budget would come direct to the school from central Government, allowing the school to control the whole of their spending. As part of a Multi-Academy Trust, we may also achieve greater efficiencies through increased buying power and joint commissioning of services.

What happens with money raised by parents for an individual school?

The money that is raised by parents, members of the community, and the school's PTFA for an individual school will be retained by that school.

How will admissions to the school be affected?

The application process for parents and carers would remain the same. The MAT would become the admitting authority for the nine schools but each would have its own admissions policy going forward. Any future policy changes would need to be clear and fair, in line with the admissions law and the School Admissions Code. The Local Authority will continue to have responsibility for making sure there are sufficient school places locally and coordinating the admissions process for all schools.

Will our responsibilities in relation to SEND and exclusions change?

No, responsibilities as an academy in relation to Special Educational Needs & Disability (SEND) and exclusions would be just the same as they are now.

Can a child with an Education, Health and Care Plan nominate an academy as their school of choice?

Yes, schools converting to academy status can retain the admissions criteria they currently use. These arrangements and related processes must at all times comply with the School Admissions Code.

Will academies be free from the Ofsted inspection regime?

No, academies are inspected in the same way as maintained schools. Each school will continue to be inspected individually. The performance of all schools would continue to be monitored and if there are signs of deterioration, or other factors likely to cause concern, these could trigger an inspection.

Does the Multi-Academy Trust have charity status?

Yes, the MAT has charity status – the directors of the academy trust are the charity trustees. Academies in MATs are 'exempt' charities – this means they are not required to formally register with the Charity Commission, but the academies have the same charitable status as the organisations that are fully registered charities.

Does becoming an academy change the relationship with other schools and the community?

No, academies must ensure that they continue to be at the heart of their community, collaborating and sharing facilities and expertise with other schools and the wider community.

Can schools withdraw from the conversion process?

Schools are able to withdraw right up until the point that they sign the funding agreement. Once this is signed, there is a legally binding agreement between the Secretary of State and the academy, and the termination would require a long notice period (seven years).

Will parents/carers be able to share their views?

Yes, the school will hold a full consultation which all parents/carers, governors, and staff members will be invited to take part in.

How do I take part in the consultation process?

At this stage, we are not committing the schools to conversion to academy status. We are consulting with everyone associated with our schools before Governors meet again to make a final decision.

We encourage you to respond to via the survey below, or online via the school's website, to make comments and share your views by Monday 7th November 2022.

<https://run.conjoint.ly/study/318219/exwk4blj9b>