

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is an Academy?**

Academies are classed as independent state-funded schools, which have the freedom to determine their own policies on such things as the curriculum taught, school hours, term dates and staff pay and conditions. They aim to provide free, first-class education for pupils of all abilities. They offer a full, broad and balanced curriculum. This is enabled by the Academies Act 2010.

Academies are managed by their own academy trust and are not the responsibility of the Council. Academy Trusts are given directly the money which would have been given to the Council, so academies can choose how best to spend that money on the provision of education.

### **What is a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT)?**

A MAT is a single charitable company which operates a group of schools. In this case, each school will continue to have a local governing body to which certain functions will be delegated. The MAT will ultimately be accountable and responsible for the performance of all schools in the trust.

Funding for the schools within the MAT continues to be allocated on an individual academy basis.

### **Why would a school want to convert as part of a Multi-Academy Trust?**

A MAT, as a single legal entity, allows schools to achieve strong collaboration and to use this collaboration and accountability to drive up school standards. Having the MAT as employer of staff also allows flexibility around sharing resources to meet the needs of the individual schools involved. The MAT can also provide a clear, consistent strategy and vision across a group of schools working together. MATs can often negotiate contracts and services that achieve much better value for money than if each school was to negotiate individually.

### **Which MAT is it proposed that we join?**

Gordano School, High Down Infants, High Down Juniors, Portishead Primary School, St Mary's CEVA Primary School (Portbury) and St Peter's CEVC Primary School have all expressed their desire to work together to create a local Multi-Academy Trust in Portishead. This will be a new Partnership of strong schools. Together the partnership will have more than 3,500 children and young people. This will mean that from the very beginning the MAT will be big enough to achieve some economies of scale and have the resources to deliver first class services which are directly commissioned and appropriate for the schools in Portishead and Portbury. In setting up a new MAT we will also be able to shape the ethos and governance of the Trust. It is our intention that each school within our MAT will retain its own distinctive ethos and individuality.

### **What about the other schools in the cluster?**

St Katherine's School and Crockerne CEVC Primary School have chosen to join the Inspiring Futures Trust which is led by Weston College, Trinity CE & Methodist VA Primary School will be joining the Bath and Wells Diocesan Multi-Academy Trust and St Joseph's RCVA Primary School will be joining a Collaborative Learning Hub for Clifton Diocese schools. We will continue to work with all these schools as partners in our school cluster.

### **Will the name of the school change?**

We will not be changing the school name.

### **Will the school change its uniform?**

We will not be changing the school uniform.

**Will term dates and school day times change?**

We have no plans to alter the times of the school day or term dates, keeping these in line with most North Somerset schools. However, we may consult with the other schools in the partnership to align some of our INSET days in future years to make it easier for parents.

**Will the curriculum change?**

We would have greater freedom and autonomy over our curriculum. This will enable us to continue to develop our curriculum over the next few years should we so wish and the freedom to review any proposed changes by government and to decide whether they are right for the children at our school. We may also choose to work with some or all of the other schools in the partnership on joint curriculum projects.

**Will the admissions policy and criteria change?**

Academies are bound by the School Admissions Code. This means that, for example, we would not become selective.

**Will the school receive more money from the government?**

At present North Somerset retains a proportion of our funding to provide some central local authority services. As an academy we would receive that money directly and will be able to choose who to buy those services from and how they should be best deployed for the specific benefit of children at our school. By becoming part of a Multi-Academy Trust, we would be able to take advantages of economies of scale to maximise our resources.

**Will the senior staff spend more time running the business side of the academy instead of focusing on the teaching and learning?**

Setting up and running an academy will require extra administrative work particularly in the early stages. However, we will be using start-up funding from the government to project manage this process and to get the partnership up and running. A few members of staff across the partnership will split their time between partnership activities and their responsibilities in their own schools. Where this is the case the school will be compensated from central funds to release their time. The senior leaders at our school will continue to be fully focused on delivering high quality teaching and learning.

**How will the school be accountable financially?**

We will be governed by the rules and regulations for charitable trusts so we will be required to produce and file annual accounts with Companies House, as part of the Multi-Academy Trust.

**Will the school get support towards the expenses of academy conversion?**

We will shortly be receiving a £25,000 grant from the Department for Education (DfE) to cover the costs of the conversion including legal expenses. As a partnership we also hope to receive an additional start-up grant from the DfE.

**What is the Local Authority view on academies?**

Academy status offers schools an opportunity to develop a new relationship with the Local Authority with the Local Authority becoming the commissioner and schools the providers of education. We envisage that we will continue to work very closely with the Local Authority. We have worked in close liaison with officers from the LA in developing our strategy.

**Does withdrawing from the Local Authority control leave us on our own?**

We will still be in a position to buy in the LA services as and when required rather than being tied in, or alternatively, look elsewhere if we feel there are better service providers. As we will be working in daily collaboration with the other schools in the cluster, our MAT and the wider region we will definitely not be on our own. We will also be maintaining our excellent relationship with North Somerset LA who have a key role in commissioning education and overseeing standards across all schools in the area.

**Will the structure of the Governing Body change?**

The composition of the Governing Body will be maintained as it is now.

**What will be the future responsibility of the Governors?**

The Trust Board will now have overall responsibility for educational standards and the business operations of the partnership. We will be operating a model of earned autonomy so in practice they will delegate the work of overseeing standards in each school to the school Governors. As each school will also have its own budget the Governors will have to take responsibility for planning and spending funds at school level.

**Can you revert to LA control once you have become an academy?**

The rules from the DfE state that a school would be required to maintain its academy status for at least 7 years. There have not been any examples of Academies reverting to LA control.

**What support will there be for children with special educational needs?**

SEN support for children with statements/EHCPs and 'Looked After children' will still be provided by the LA who have a statutory responsibility for this and would continue to monitor us to ensure that we are doing all we should.

**Do we need a sponsor for the school to become an academy?**

Schools who Ofsted judge to be 'good' or 'outstanding' do not need a sponsor. All the partners will be working together as equals.

**Will the school still have Ofsted inspections?**

Academies are subject to exactly the same system of Ofsted inspections as Local Authority schools.

**Has the decision to convert to academy status already been taken?**

The legal process to becoming an academy has started with a special resolution, made by the Governing Body, to make an application to convert. This has triggered a full consultation across the school community. A final decision to convert will only be taken once the consultation has been concluded. It is feasible that the Governors could reverse their current thinking and they will be carefully considering the responses to the consultation.

**If the Governors decide to convert when would it happen?**

We have indicated in our application a conversion date on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2016.

**Who are we consulting with?**

We are consulting with parents and carers, staff and their representatives, the children, the Local Authority, other local schools, local community groups and, in the case of the Church of England schools, the Diocese of Bath and Wells and parishes of Portbury and Portishead.

**Have members of staff been consulted?**

We are consulting with the staff. Some meetings have been held already.

**Will staff terms and conditions of employment change?**

Staff will transfer across under normal TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment)) rules. Terms and conditions would remain the same. If the partnership wished to change any conditions of employment in the future it would have to go through a further consultation process.

**Do the school leadership and governing body have the capacity and expertise to take on the additional responsibilities of academy status?**

The governing body and school leadership has strong experience in leading a successful school. By operating as a multi-academy trust the non-educational functions can be shared with other schools. Gordano School has been an academy since 2011 and staff there will be leading on some of the business and finance aspects of academy management.

**Why do we need to change?**

We don't need to change. However, in the current financial and educational climate, where the landscapes of education are rapidly changing, we feel that we would like to be in control of our own destiny and make a positive choice about the partner schools that we would wish to work with. The Governors feel that the opportunity to become an equal partner in a locally based trust directly benefits our children.

**Where can I find out more about academies?**

There is a large amount of information available from the Department for Education. You can also access more information on our school website. Please note the difference between schools that are being required by government to become academies, and those successful schools, like our school, which are positively opting to become academies.