

Dear Parents and Carers,

At our Parents' Consultation meeting on 26th April, it was evident that a number of you were unclear as to the impact that conversion to an academy would have on Lees Primary. I am therefore writing to provide you all with further information about the process of conversion and the practical changes that this would bring.

What is an academy?

An academy is essentially an independent school which is funded by the State. It is independent of the Local Authority and receives its funding direct from central Government.

Will Lees Primary definitely become an Academy?

The Governing Body of Lees Primary School has applied to the DfE for the school to convert and we are proposing to join the newly formed Bronte Academy Trust, along with Haworth and Oakworth Primary Schools. We firmly believe that becoming a MAT will provide exciting educational opportunities for all children in our family of schools.

As parents, you may be concerned about recent negative media coverage of the academy programme. Indeed, last Friday the Secretary of State for Education withdrew the Government's universal academy agenda, however she clearly stated that forced academisation would still go ahead in poor performing local authorities and those unable to provide school improvement services. As Bradford was the second bottom authority for pupil results last year and its school improvement team has been virtually disbanded, it is the school's view that it is important for us to take the initiative, to ensure that we remain firmly in control of our own future.

The school is working towards a conversion on 1st July, however, we are not obligated to become an academy until the contract between the Governing Body and the Department for Education (known as the Funding Agreement) is signed.

The Governing Body will not sign the Funding Agreement until parents and carers of pupils at the school; staff at the school and pupils themselves have had the opportunity to comment on the proposals. Following the information letters that we sent to you, the three schools held a joint meeting for parents on 26th April at Lees Primary and we have also held meetings with all school staff. Pupils have been informed of our plans and the School Council have been invited to ask questions and comment on the children's behalf.

All comments, questions or representations which are made about the proposals will be considered by the Governing Body before a decision is taken to sign the Funding Agreement. They will not sign the Funding Agreement unless they are content that conversion would be in the best interests of the school, taking account of all of the legal and practical ramifications.

What are the benefits of being an Academy?

In the school's opinion the benefits are numerous:

- **Academies are independent of Local Authority control**
This means that academies have more freedom about how they conduct themselves. It also means that academies can access School Improvement

services from other providers, who have a proven record of success (such as Teaching Schools).

- **Academies receive their funding direct from Central Government**
Academies receive more direct funding, because none is retained by the Local Authority for the provision of central services. Instead, our school will be able to make decisions about how to use all of its allocated funding for the benefit of the children. Each school in the Bronte Academy Trust will receive and control its own funding, the DfE will not allocate funding to the Trust itself to distribute to the three schools.
- **Academies have more freedom over the curriculum taught**
Academies do not need to teach parts of the National Curriculum which they do not consider appropriate for their pupils. However, assessments (the Reception baseline; the Year 1 phonics screening check and the KS1/2 SATS) and Ofsted inspections are still statutory for academies.
- **Academies can set their own pay and conditions of service for their staff**
Academies have the freedom to alter the pay and conditions of their staff (subject to normal employment law protections for staff) and so can provide staff with better pay and conditions than previously.
- **Academies have more freedom to undertake innovative projects**
Academies are companies and so have more freedom to undertake projects that will enhance children's learning experiences. The Bronte Academy Trust plans to share resources and expertise to provide new and innovative learning projects for our family of schools.

Are there any disadvantages to becoming an academy?

The Bronte Academy Trust will be directly liable for matters such as insurance, employment liabilities, pensions, health and safety, and, property maintenance. However, as mentioned above, academies receive more funding from central Government to help them meet these additional costs.

Will the admissions arrangements change?

Lees Primary's admissions arrangements are set by the Local Authority and they also decide which pupils should be offered places at the school. The current admission arrangements will remain in place. If the academy wanted to change its admission arrangements, consultation would be required.

Will staff leave?

If the school converts to an academy, all staff currently employed by the school will automatically transfer to the new academy on their current pay and conditions. Although the academy will have more freedom to amend those pay and conditions in the future, the Governing Body does not intend to take such a step in the foreseeable future and in any event, any change to pay and conditions would need to be consulted upon with staff and trade union representatives.

Staff will work for the Trust, but will continue to work in the school in which they were employed. Membership of a Multi-Academy Trust will actually provide greater training, support and career development opportunities for staff, which will encourage them to remain working at the school.

Will Lees Primary School change?

We do not intend to change Lees Primary, except in ways which we think will improve the school even more. For the children, it is unlikely that they will see much,

if any, change in their day to day school lives. The school will still be called Lees Primary and it will retain its uniform, ethos, staff and governors. Academies do have the power to vary their curriculums and vary the length of the school day, however, it is not intended to take any such steps at this stage and the Trust would engage with parents/carers, staff and students if it did ever intend to make such changes in the future.

How can I find out more?

There is more information about academies on the DfE website:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/academies>. If you can't find the answer to your question there, please email office@lees.bradford.sch.uk and we will try to assist you.