



Rose Hill Primary School

Where Children Flourish
The Oval, Rose Hill, Oxford, OX4 4SF

 /rosehillprimaryschool  @rosehillprimary

Head Teacher: Sue Vermes

(01865) 777937
www.rose-hill.oxon.sch.uk
office.2531@rose-hill.oxon.sch.uk

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Academy Status for Rose Hill Primary School

Information Paper

What is an Academy?

An academy is a government-funded school that is independent of the Local Authority. In terms of the day-to-day functioning, an academy school will not be noticeably different to a Local Authority maintained school. However, academy status gives schools both additional responsibilities and greater freedoms, and the governors believe there are sufficient educational advantages to becoming an academy. Responsibility for funding the school, including any capital projects, and for monitoring performance, will fall to central government rather than to local government.

Becoming an academy does not mean that the name, character nature or ethos of our school will change at all. It is not our intention to change these things.

When the decision is made to become an academy, the school and governing body will become part of what is known as an **academy trust**, which in reality is a charitable company. The Trust has to have a Board of Trustees who have responsibility and accountability for the academy or academies within the trust. No-one can make any money from the company. The company is limited by guarantee: it does not pay dividends and it makes no profit. It is, however, a legal entity where the trust is able to enter into contracts, employ staff and be recognised as a legal body. The trust has additional responsibilities compared to the governors of our school: for example, they would have to make sure that accounts that comply with the Companies Act and the Charity Commission are filed and published every year.

The academy trust will have a lease from the local authority for the land and buildings for 125 years, and a funding agreement directly with the Government, and will be the employer for staff at the school.

Academy Schools in England and Oxfordshire

Academies now account for over 30% of primary schools and 90% of secondary schools in Oxfordshire. At the time of the most recent budget in March 2017, just under 23% of primary schools and just over 74% of secondary schools in England are academies, and these numbers continue to grow.

When the academy programme was first introduced, schools were 'sponsored' by another organisation or school to help them improve; this still happens and these academies are called 'sponsored academies'. In more recent years, all schools that were performing well were able to choose to become academies, and did not require a sponsor. They were called 'converter academies'.

Whilst the political landscape has continued to shift, schools becoming academies is still very much part of the government policy and in particular for schools to join multi-academy trusts.

Multi-Academy Trusts

Many of the first schools that became converter academies set themselves up as single-school academy trusts, where the newly-formed charitable trust was only responsible for that one school. However, the vast majority of conversions to academy status are now into **multi-academy trusts**, an approach that is replicated in Oxfordshire. The statement from the County Council above also makes it clear that schools becoming part of a larger group of schools in a multi-academy trust (MAT) is their preferred model, and this is also the recommendation from central government.

MATs are created when there is one charitable company, and one Board of Trustees for more than one academy school. The most common structure is that each school within a MAT has their own Governing Body, much as they would a local authority school, with the MAT Board of Trustees delegating authority to them, whilst the final responsibilities rest with the Trust Board.

The increased number of MATs is due to the significant advantages that can be achieved by working together with other schools in structured way. The following is a brief extract from 'Governance in Multi Academy Trusts', a document released by the National College of Teaching and Leadership (2014) and outlines the potential benefits of this structure.

Headteachers and chairs of governors cited a strong sense of moral purpose and an aspiration to improve the quality of teaching and learning as key drivers for adopting a MAT model.

The MAT model has also allowed them to capitalise on the benefits of this approach, including:

- *sharing best practice*
- *economic benefits, such as centralised services*
- *the ability to focus funds where they are most needed*
- *increased and flexible staffing resources*
- *the opportunity to establish succession planning programmes and, in doing so, retain good staff who might otherwise move on – including headteachers*

Each of these benefits should be realised in a MAT and for a primary school, where changes in staff and leadership may leave the school in a vulnerable position can be supported through any period of transition by trust resources, including other schools and staff within the Trust. Having centralised trust services will also help to ensure that the focus of the Headteacher continues to be education.

The River Learning Trust

We are becoming part of the **River Learning Trust**, a MAT that is committed to excellence and responsible for a number of schools and a School-centred Initial Teacher Training provider (SCITT). The schools and SCITT are united by their commitment to the principles of the Trust and a common belief in the benefits of everything that is gained by working together. You can find out more about the trust here: <https://riverlearningtrust.org/>

The principles of the River Learning Trust are:

- **Commitment to Excellence**; striving for the best educational experience through continuous improvement
- **Everyone Learning**; creating and taking opportunities that enhance lives through evidenced based practice supporting adult and pupil learning
- **Respectful Relationships**; acting with care, integrity, and fairness in all we do

The Trust recognises that education has the power to change lives, communities and society for the better and that it can achieve more for our pupils, trainees, staff and communities by working together rather than alone.

The River Learning Trust is growing to around 12-16 schools and could grow beyond that. It is developing what is recognised as a highly effective way of organising a MAT, with the growth of inter-connected local hubs; in this context schools gain benefits from close locality working as well as from working with schools in other areas, therefore increasing the pool of knowledge, skills and experience. Each school has its 'voice' – there is no priority given to any one school over others.

Currently, the following schools are part of the River Learning Trust:

- The Cherwell School, North Oxford
- Cutteslowe Primary School, North Oxford
- Wolvercote Primary School, North Oxford
- Wheatley Park Secondary School, Wheatley
- Horspath CofE Primary School, Horspath
- Garsington CofE Primary School, Garsington
- New Marston Primary School, Oxford
- Chipping Norton School, Chipping Norton
- Tower Hill Primary School, Witney
- Edith Moorhouse Primary, Carterton
- The Swan School, Oxford: a new secondary free school in pre-opening. All new schools are described as free schools. The Swan School is due to open to pupils in September 2019
- The Cherwell OTSA SCITT: a School Centred Initial Teacher Training provider, based at The Cherwell School

A number of other schools are also in the process of seeking to join or consulting to join the trust in the coming year.

Will our school change if it joins a MAT?

In a MAT, different schools will retain their characteristics and culture, with a clear expectation that all will have shared values. There is no reason for there to be changes to the school's curriculum, to the policies on teaching and learning or behaviour. We will continue to be able to make our own policy on uniform, and the leaders within our school will make the day-to-day and strategic decisions that they are currently responsible for. Our responsibilities as an academy in relation to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities will be just the same as they are now.

The Headteacher and Governors will be accountable to the Trust Board and Chief Executive of the River Learning Trust for the overall quality of education, but will have autonomy about exactly how that could be achieved. If there were to be a drop in standards or a drop in Ofsted grade, the level of autonomy may be reviewed to protect the quality of education. We expect this structure to help bring about further improvements and lead us closer to becoming an outstanding school.

Although academies can vary the length of the school term and, like Local Authority schools, vary the length of the school day subject to consultation and discussion, there are no plans to do either.

There is no intention to change the current admissions criteria or catchment area should we become an academy. All schools in the River Learning Trust have continued to use the Local Authority admissions team to manage admissions.

What are the implications for teaching and support staff?

Academies have the ability to set their own pay and conditions for staff. There are no plans to do this when we become an academy as part of the River Learning Trust. We expect all employees to transfer to the River Learning Trust, with no changes to conditions of service under the TUPE provisions which give protection surrounding terms and conditions. For teachers, the School Teachers Pay and Conditions Document will always be the key document and we expect to adopt or match the OCC policies on all aspects of pay and HR.

The River Learning Trust will be the employer and would aim to provide an excellent professional experience for all employees. A high priority will be professional learning for all. Teachers and support staff will be based in one school and would not normally be moved to other schools within the Trust. If the opportunity or need were to arise, it would be carefully negotiated with the agreement of staff involved. Each current teacher would be employed by the Trust (after TUPE) to work at Rose Hill Primary School.

However, the River Learning Trust would be able to provide many opportunities for good professional development, for benchmarking and for teamwork across its schools. We see the membership of the River Learning Trust as an attractive opportunity which would help us to recruit and retain excellent staff.

A small number of posts would be 'central', working for the Trust to the benefit of all schools. The River Learning Trust employs staff to deliver the core support services for schools including a Chief Executive, Chief Operating Officer, Operations Director, HR Director, Head of Finance and a number of other finance staff.

What are the implications for pupils?

From a pupil's point of view, there will be no obvious change except a continued development and improvement of the educational provision which is the aim in all RLT schools. However, it is very important for leaders and Governors at Rose Hill Primary School that our actions remain fully focused on ensuring the best possible educational experience for our pupils. We are confident that robust accountability and strong school-to-school improvement networks will help to improve the quality of learning. Teacher development will also have a positive impact on pupils.

What are the implications for governors?

In a MAT, the academy trust is managed by members of the academy board, who are a mixture of people with specific expertise such as education, business, and finance who are not linked to particular schools, and parents and staff. More details about how the board of Trustees and who they are can be found on the River Learning Trust website www.riverlearningtrust.org

Rose Hill Primary School will move on from the Interim Executive Board, by which it is currently governed, to having a local governing body who will be appointed and elected (parent governors). It will fulfil a role that is very similar to the governing body of a maintained school but will be able to have a greater focus on education, as some of the business and financial considerations currently considered by the governors would be the responsibility of the trust board.

What are the implications regarding funding and finances?

At the moment, the school receives its funding from central government via the Local Authority. A slice of the Education Services Grant is taken by the Local Authority to pay for a range of services, and schools opt to buy into other services either via the Local Authority or other providers. As an academy, the River Learning Trust will receive our funding and will operate in the same way as the Local Authority where a small percentage then funds the services provide by the Trust, rather than by the Local Authority and the vast majority is passed to the school to decide how best to allocate it.

As the River Learning Trust continues to grow, schools will be involved in setting the value of school income that is used to fund central Trust services at the most appropriate level, which is expected to benefit all schools' budgets over time. We would also be eligible for an annual capital grant, which may ensure more regular funding of capital projects.

How will the MAT change and grow? What about other local schools?

It is likely that the River Learning Trust will grow over time. Ultimately all schools in the River Learning Trust should be or become good or outstanding, and any possible changes or new members should never undermine the quality of education in existing schools.