



## Re. Academy status

During this academic year the Governing Body has been exploring the opportunity for Westende Junior School to convert to an Academy. The option of academisation has been open to all schools for some considerable time and we believe it is now the right moment for us to take this step.

No doubt, as a member of the local community you are aware that many schools have already converted to be standalone academies or join Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) in the local area. Westende Junior School as you know is a school that is committed to be part of this local community and is keen to work in partnership with other local schools. Therefore, we are proposing joining a local all-through MAT called The Circle Trust. This Trust was selected by the Governing Body following a thorough process which involved meeting with a number of local and national MATs.

We believe The Circle Trust's vision and values offers partnership approach is in keeping with our own ethos and way of working. A founding principle of The Circle Trust is that all schools part of this MAT retain and celebrate their own unique identity and ethos. As you will know it is very important to myself as Acting Headteacher and the Governing Body that Westende Junior School's vision, values and ethos is kept in perpetuity. Further we are committed and can see great advantages to work with a Trust that is committed to the Wokingham area and to work with local schools. More information can be seen about this Trust via their website [www.thecircletrust.co.uk](http://www.thecircletrust.co.uk)

In order to join a MAT, Westende Junior School will convert and change its status from a Maintained School to become an Academy. There is no intention to exercise the freedoms offered to Academies such as altering timing or pattern of school holidays, nor will there be any substantial change regarding the admission arrangement of our schools or intention to deviate in any way from established terms and conditions for employees. The joining with other schools as part of a MAT allows us to continue our pursuit of providing an outstanding education for our pupils whilst protecting us from the worst effects of austerity and allowing gains from the economies of scales such as greater flexibility in purchasing services.

As part of the decision making process, our Governing Body is committed to undertaking full consultation with the local community, as well as other stakeholders and will take your views into account before any final decision is taken. The purpose of this website statement is to highlight the proposal that Westende Junior School converts to become an Academy and to

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signpost to you where you can find additional information and explain how you can take part in the consultation.

In addition to this website statement you will find a frequently asked question sheet, which explains about the practical and legal changes associated with a conversion. The formal consultation process begins today Monday 11<sup>th</sup> February 2019 and will conclude after a six-week period by Monday 25<sup>th</sup> March 2019. Members of the local community can contribute comments via our bespoke consultation email ([WestendeMATcomments@westende.wokingham.sch.uk](mailto:WestendeMATcomments@westende.wokingham.sch.uk))

We are very pleased to share this new development with you and we are keen to hear your thoughts and opinions as part of the consultation process.

Yours faithfully,

Norah Edgar  
Acting Headteacher

Jane Ainslie  
Chair of Governors

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Consultation: Frequently asked questions

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

An academy is a state-funded school, which operates independently within the requirements of national codes of practice for state schools. However, unlike a state school it receives its funding directly from central government rather than through a local authority. The first Academies required a sponsoring organisation and had the sole objective of raising standards within the school. Under new legislation, schools that are either 'outstanding' or 'good' are able to convert to Academies. As an Academy schools have greater freedoms to control their own futures and are able to make use of some additional freedoms.

### **What is a Multi-Academy Trust?**

Schools have a choice to become "standalone" academies. Overtime however it has been recognised that schools under this arrangement are at risk of becoming isolated and are not able to benefit from the economies of scale associated with working with other partners. The Multi Academy Trust model involves a group of Academies forming a 'Multi Academy Trust' (MAT). The Multi-Academy Trust model enables schools in the Trust to share school improvement strategies, resources and services more effectively and to provide consistent and continuous support for all pupils in every school.

### **Why convert?**

Schools have always operated within a changing educational landscape and the current situation means that for the schools to do nothing is not a viable option. It is the Government's intention that all schools in England "will over time" convert to Academy status and will cease to be maintained by their Local Authority. To date, the funding for maintained schools has been routed through Local Authorities who have 'top sliced' funding to construct and deliver a set of support services, such as legal advice, across all of their maintained schools. Local Authorities are adapting to this new climate by selling services in packages. So even remaining as we are, a community maintained school under the Local Authority would look different in the future than it does today.

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## **Why is Westende Junior School wanting to join The Circle Trust rather than other MATs?**

A common feature of both our school and The Circle Trust is our desire to work with others and be outward looking. Uniquely this MAT is an all through local Trust with a core purpose of improving educational outcomes for children and young people in Wokingham and the surrounding area.

## **What will change?**

Day to day – very little!

There is no intention to change our school. A core value of The Circle Trust is that schools must retain their own unique identity and ethos. There will be therefore no change of our school name, or a change in uniform or similar.

Therefore, whilst in one sense little will change for students, parents and staff behind the scenes; there will be change (for the better!) The Trust offers a well-designed school improvement system and will facilitate functions such as H.R. finance and the management of the school premises. We believe becoming an academy will help us deliver these areas to the highest standards as well as prudently manage our money in current challenging financial times.

Conversion to academy status is a complex process. One of the fundamental changes for schools joining a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) is the change in Governance arrangements. As we move towards a system of Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) the importance of governance only continues to grow. A school-led system should not mean schools working in isolation – far from it. It does mean that whilst schools continue to be fully integrated with their local community they are crucially connected and learning from each other. This working together is about helping to improve the quality of teaching, enhancing the curriculum offer, providing greater opportunities for leadership and development of teachers; and delivering more efficiency and effectiveness of financial and resource management.

The Circle Trust like all MATs is governed by the Board of Trustees; the Board of Trustees is accountable for the operation and performance of the Trust as a whole and ultimately all schools in the Trust. Therefore, existing Governing Bodies of any school joining this MAT would cease and would reconstitute to become a Local Advisory Board (LAB). Therefore, our present governors would continue to serve as either Trustees or Local Advisors. LAB's will continue to have elected parental and staff representation.

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### **What is the advantage of being part of the proposed Multi Academy Trust?**

We now have the opportunity to work together in a supportive Multi Academy Trust, which builds on the collaborative structures already established. This will give extended opportunities to share good teaching and learning, join together to buy resources and develop a collaborative way of working for the benefit of all our children and families and create a pathway for the long-term sustainability of all of our schools.

We have a vision for education that goes beyond individual schools and is fundamentally rooted in the ambition of improving educational outcomes for all our children and young people.

A number of other elements would remain unchanged. An Academy would still be bound by the statutory codes for Special Educational Needs and we have no plans to substantively change the admissions criteria and catchment areas for either school. There are no changes to the pay and conditions of staff, to the start and finish times or length of the school day and no change to the school's policy on pupil discipline or the school uniform.

This school as part of The Circle Trust will continue to work closely in partnership with other local schools. That commitment to wider partnership working will remain and we will continue to work with our Local Authority in an atmosphere of mutual support.

### **Are there increased opportunities or demands for staff?**

Certainly as an all-through Trust there are increased opportunities for a deeper professional understanding for all teachers of a child's educational experience from 5 through to 18. As more schools join the Trust so there is opportunity to share CPD and other professional experience. There will be no expectation for teachers in one school to teach in another in the Trust.

TUPE is "transfer of undertakings" and in essence is the process of protecting your current employment terms and conditions. In addition to the present consultation, there would be a separate and additional consultation for the TUPE process, which will involve staff representative and Unions.

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**Before I give my views, where can I find out more information?**

Further information generally on Academies provided by the DfE can be found on:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/academies>

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