

Consultation on proposal to establish a Multi-academy Trust between Cherry Orchard First School, Inkberrow First School, Norton Juxta Kempsey CE First School and Pershore High School.

Frequently Asked Questions:

1. What is an academy?

Academies are independent, state-funded schools, which receive their funding directly from central government, rather than through a local authority. They control their own admissions process and have more freedom than other schools to innovate. They are subject to inspection by Ofsted.

2. How many are there?

Currently (May 2016 figures), 2,075 out of 3,381 secondary schools are academies, while 2,440 of 16,766 primary schools have academy status. The number grew dramatically under the coalition government, from 203 in May 2010, and has continued under the present Conservative government.

3. Aren't academies all about improving failing schools?

They were once. The policy, which originated under Labour in 2000, aimed to improve struggling schools, primarily in deprived areas. This continues under the sponsored-academy model, where failing schools are taken over and run by an academy trust. But it has changed radically to embrace all types of schools - successful or otherwise. All schools - primary as well as secondary - have been invited to convert to academy status, with priority being given to the best performers.

4. What is the future of "academisation"?

In the last Budget, Chancellor George Osborne announced a forced academisation plan, under which all schools in England would either have to convert to academies by 2020 or be committed to converting by 2022. This would have, in effect, ended the link between local authorities and schools that began in 1902. However, the plans aroused strong criticism from teaching unions and others, including Conservative MPs and councillors, and have now been abandoned. Ministers say the "goal" of academising all schools remains but forced academisation or sponsored-academy trusts will now focus on schools that are "clearly failing".

5. What is a "Multi-academy Trust"?

Multi-academy trusts (MATs) are groups of academies that have chosen to come together to form a charitable company, with a single group of "members" (who have an overview of the governance arrangements) and a single board of "trustees". Although Pershore High School is already an academy, any school now wishing to convert has to become part of, or establish, a MAT.

6. What are the benefits of this proposed change?

By far the most significant benefit to the schools involved is their increased ability to work collaboratively; by sharing best practice and working together in areas such as school improvement, pupil attainment, assessment and monitoring and enrichment opportunities, the schools passionately believe we can improve the educational outcomes of all of the children in the schools. There are further financial and administrative benefits to be gained through focused outsourcing of supplies and centralised services, identifying and securing school improvement grants and increased

flexibility and succession planning for school staff. The schools will also ensure that they remain in control of their futures, rather than be at risk of influence from a large corporate Academy organisation.

7. What are the benefits to the community?

By supporting each other in the promotion of values we will develop a future generation that demonstrates these values in their everyday lives. An important benefit of the proposed MAT is to keep the schools as key hubs of their local communities, retaining their individual identities but working in partnership to help solidify those communities.

8. Will the schools be financially better or worse off?

The legal costs for conversion to an Academy within a MAT will be met via a £25,000 grant from central government. Each school will receive its own yearly funding on the same per-pupil basis as the LA does for maintained schools, direct from the Education Funding Agency and the MAT itself will receive funds from a "top slice" from each of the schools funding; the level of that slice is anticipated as being a little lower than the amount currently withheld by the Local Authority, so each school should be slightly better off, but we stress that the reasons for forming a MAT are primarily educational and not financial; this decision is not financially motivated.

9. What are the disadvantages of conversion?

Greater freedoms do bring additional responsibilities including statutory duties as an academy trust company, but the Schools are confident that we can manage these. Pershore High School has been an Academy since 2011 and therefore has considerable experience that the other three schools will utilise.

10. Why have these schools chosen each other for this MAT?

The schools already have several close working relationships established and moving to the stage of forming a MAT is a logical extension to that collaboration. In initial discussions on the MAT suggestion, it quickly became evident that the schools share the same vision, ethos and passion to improve the education and hence life choices for all children in the Pershore pyramid.

11. Will other schools be joining the MAT in the future?

This is very likely. The current schools are keen to simplify the process by keeping the number of founding schools at 4, but it is envisaged that more schools will join in the future once the MAT is established. The decision on which schools could join the MAT and when will be the responsibility of the MAT members and trustees, who will ensure that the incoming school shares the same ethos, vision and values whilst recognising that for a school to join there must be a benefit to the schools, and importantly the children at those schools, in the current MAT.

12. Who will be the members and trustees for this MAT?

It is planned that there will be 5 members and 11 trustees, the vast majority of which will be people that are already members of the current Local Governing Bodies of the 4 schools, in roughly equal representation, with the Diocese of Worcester responsible for nominating 1 member and 2 trustees. Each school will be regarded as one entity irrespective of how many pupils that school has; it is important to stress that this is an equal four way partnership, and not 3 First schools being absorbed by or incorporated into the High school.

13. Does this mean the schools involved will become primary and secondary?

Not necessarily, but this is a long term vision common to the four schools that moving to a two tier structure would be of educational benefit to the children in the schools. A change of age range for one or all of the schools in the proposed MAT would be an issue which would require a separate consultation process. One or more of the schools may begin this process in due course irrespective of whether the MAT proposal proceeds or not.

14. What happens to the leadership of each school?

There will be no changes to the Headteachers responsibilities regarding the operation of each school. Similarly, the Local Governing Bodies of each school will also remain unchanged with a predominantly similar level of responsibility delegated by the MAT trustees that is currently delegated to them by the Local Authority.

15. What about other school staff?

School staff will be employed by the MAT rather than the Local Authority and their employment terms and conditions will be transferred under a standard process known as TUPE. Union memberships and pensions would be unaffected.

16. What would happen regarding provision for children with Special Educational Needs?

Effectively nothing changes; the schools would still have to comply with the Admissions Code and any SEN obligations as set out in the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice. The LA would retain responsibility for pupils with an Educational Health Care Plan in an academy on the same basis as in maintained schools. The Governing Bodies would retain their excellent ethos of inclusion through which there is a strong commitment to providing the best possible education for the young people of all abilities and backgrounds from our community.

17. Will there be new school names and uniforms?

There are no plans to change any of the school names or introduce a new design of school uniform. We believe it is very important that each school in the MAT retains its unique identity.

18. Will there be any changes to term dates and school hours?

There are no plans to change the length of the school day or term dates as a result of this proposal. Academies can implement such changes if they believe it to be beneficial to the education of the children at the schools but any such change would require a full consultation process.

19. Will Norton Juxta Kempsey remain a Church of England school?

Yes. The Diocese of Worcester will still retain its presence on the Local Governing Body at NJK and additionally will have a 25% representation within the MAT members and trustees. The other three schools will not be required to become Church of England schools or have Diocesan representatives sitting on their Local Governing Bodies.

20. Will any changes to the School be made as a result of conversion?

We do not intend to make any changes to the School as a result of the conversion, apart from taking advantage of the opportunities outlined above to work more closely with other schools in the MAT. Please be assured that the distinctive Christian character, ethos and values of the School would remain unchanged. Indeed, we anticipate that this opportunity to work even more closely together within a supportive Multi-Academy Trust would further strengthen and support the School's ethos and high standards.

21. How to take part in the consultation process

At this stage, we are not committing the School to conversion to Academy status. We are consulting with everyone associated with our School before Governors meet again to make a final decision. We would like to know what you think of this proposal and are inviting you to take part in this consultation. Your views are important to us. In addition to attending the meeting at either our school or PHS, or if you are unable to attend, we would also welcome comments e-mailed to:

office@nortonfirst.worcs.sch.uk

If you wish, letters can be handed to the school office for the attention of the Chair Of Governors marked – “Confidential: Multi-Academy Trust proposal” to ensure prompt attention.

22. When and how will the decision be made?

The consultation process concludes on Friday 14th October 2016. Each schools Local Governing Body will meet during the following week to review the issues raised during the consultation and decide whether or not that school wishes to proceed with the formation of the MAT. The Headteacher and Chair of Governors from all 4 schools will be meeting during the first week of November 2016 to share these decisions and determine the overall outcome, which will be communicated to all stakeholders as soon as practicable after this meeting.

23. If the decision is taken to proceed, when will the change happen?

The legal process can be variable and it is difficult to be sure of a conversion date, but if it is agreed to proceed and there are no abnormal delays to the process thereafter it is likely to be 1st February 2017 (conversion is generally implemented on the first day of the month).