

1 October 2016

Dear Parent/Carer or Member of the Local Community

MULTI - ACADEMY TRUST CONSULTATION LETTER FOR PARENTS, CARERS AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY

The governing bodies of Brooklands Academy, Gilbert Inglefield Academy and Vandyke Upper School are proposing to form a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT).

Our priority is to enable the school to continue to provide an excellent education for our children while protecting the school's role at the heart of our community and retaining its unique qualities and strengths. We recognise that the role of Local Authorities in supporting schools is diminishing and that it is government policy to encourage schools to become academies and for academies to come together in multi-academy trusts.

The governing body believes the best way of improving standards in the future while maintaining our school ethos, values and vision is by forming a multi-academy trust (MAT) with near-neighbours and partner middle schools at Brooklands and Gilbert Inglefield. Each school would retain its own name and much of its independence while benefiting from being part of the trust. There would also be more opportunities for the children and staff to work together across the schools.

The Governing Body has therefore agreed to consult on the three schools forming a MAT. This consultation is open to all, including parents, students, staff and the wider community. The consultation period will start on **1 October and end on 28 October 2016** after which the governing body will consider feedback received before deciding whether to proceed.

We have prepared the attached document which includes answers to many 'Frequently Asked Questions' however there will also be the opportunity for parents and members of the community to meet and ask the headteachers and governors questions if they wish to. The joint consultation meeting will take place on

Weds 19 October 6pm at Gilbert Inglefield Academy. The consultation meeting will begin with a joint introduction by the three schools before breaking into separate sessions for each school.

Written responses to this consultation should be emailed to:

office@vandyke.cbeds.co.uk fao The Clerk to the Governors, Mrs Britton.

Alternatively please post your response to: MAT consultation response, fao Mrs Britton, Clerk to the Governors, Vandyke Upper School, Vandyke Road, Leighton Buzzard, Beds LU7 3DY.

Yours sincerely,
David Packer
Chair of Governors

Why Change our Existing Schools?

Over the last few years, our schools have each become academies and have sought to increase the amount we work together. All three schools are judged as “Good” in their latest OFSTED inspections.

Examples of our closer working include:

- The headteachers have met regularly to share experiences and support.
- There has been some sharing of expertise between governors and several governors now sit on the governing bodies of two of our schools.
- The schools have worked together on aspects of joint school development.
- The schools have shared training opportunities and created more opportunities for staff to work together.
- Some staff have already been teaching in more than one of the schools and some students have had lessons on more than one school site.
- There have been some opportunities for children to work together.

This has shown us that there is much to be gained from working together and we believe the time is now right to work together more closely to:

- Protect the schools’ ethos and inclusive philosophy by maintaining control of our own destiny.
- Forge formal structures to share experience, expertise, skills and resources.
- Enhance existing moderation and assessment arrangements by implementing rigorous cross-school systems.
- Identify both common and individual school weaknesses that can drive a robust programme of mutual development and support.
- As a larger umbrella organisation provide greater value for money across the three schools.
- Create opportunities for better sharing of skills and people across the schools through shared funding.
- Share facilities more readily and create the opportunity to apply for capital money to enhance facilities.
- Recruit staff and retain our best staff through opportunities to work across all schools.
- Take advantage of the strong position we are in to develop and create a sustainable model for the future of our schools.

We believe that in order to make these changes, we need to change the way we are structured and governed. The proposed multi-academy trust is a good way to make these changes a reality. As a result we believe it would deliver:

- Higher standards of teaching and learning in all classrooms.
- New opportunities for children to work across schools and access learning opportunities.

- Enhanced expertise, confidence and morale in staff.
- Greater opportunities for career development.
- Greater visibility of the strengths and weaknesses of each school.
- Stronger governance across the schools.
- Increased efficiency and effectiveness of school administration and business management.

Summary

Under these proposals

- Each school will remain focused on delivering excellent teaching and learning within its local community.
- Each school will continue to have its own, local headteacher with less administration and more time to focus on the teaching and learning within the school.
- Each school would continue to have its own local governing body with a similar degree of autonomy as at present
- All schools will work together on projects to improve education and learning across the multi-academy trust
- All schools will share administration and support in order to reduce costs and improve effectiveness.
- A joint trust board will exist to provide oversight of the performance of each school and ensure effective investment in improvements across all schools. The trust board becomes the employer of staff across the three schools and has overall strategic responsibility for the schools within the multi-academy trust.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What is an Academy?

An academy is a state school that is run by an academy trust. The academy trust enters into an agreement with the Secretary of State for Education that sets out its responsibilities and accountabilities for the effective running of the academy. The academy is funded directly by the government not through the local authority. The trust is given charitable exemption, which means it must operate much like a charity. The majority of secondary and middle schools across England and Wales are academies.

2. What is a multi-academy trust?

A multi-academy trust (MAT) is when two or more academies come together in a formal partnership. Our governing body believes that the best option is to form a local multi-academy trust from the three schools. Each school will keep its own name and unique identity. In the future, it will be possible for other academies to join the trust and indeed the vision we have for our multi-academy trust is that schools from all three phases join the trust to strengthen our partnership.

3. How would joining a multi-academy trust benefit our school?

As outlined above, these changes are about enhancing teaching and learning for all children. They would allow us to maintain control of our schools for our community, share skills and operate more effectively.

4. Who will be responsible for running our school?

Each school will retain its own local governing body. The newly formed trust will have a trust board. The trust board will delegate powers to the governing bodies which will have a similar role to the one that they currently have. Each school will continue to have its own headteacher and the trust will appoint an executive headteacher to work with headteachers across the schools within the trust.

5. What is involved in becoming a multi-academy trust?

The school will complete a consultation with parents, students, staff and the wider community which the governors will take into account in reaching its decision. The governing body has unanimously resolved in favour of this proposal in principle and The Secretary of State for Education will decide whether or not to approve our application if governors decide to proceed.

6. Would the school have to change its name, logo or uniform?

No, these proposals have no plans for schools to change their name, logo, uniform or individual identity.

7. How will this affect staff?

Currently, the employer for staff is the individual academy trust. In a multi-academy trust all staff at all the schools will be employed by the trust. Staff are legally protected to transfer under the same employment terms and conditions, including pensions. Their continuity of service is protected, and all staff will be consulted in accordance with the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations.

9. How are the children affected?

In many ways the children will not notice any immediate difference; they will be in the same uniform, in the same classrooms with the same teaching staff. We will continue to strive for an outstanding education for all our children. Over time students will continue to notice changes and improvements in the way that they learn, resulting from the additional opportunities the multi-academy trust arrangements will provide for staff development and training and for innovation.

10. Will we get more money as an multi-academy trust?

Academies receive the same amount of per-pupil funding as they would receive from the local authority as a maintained school and this remains the same within a multi-academy trust. All funding comes direct from central government to the multi-academy trust which controls the overall budget. Each school does not necessarily have more money, but as a group the schools will be better able to control their part of the budget and achieve efficiency savings.

11. What are the risks of becoming a multi-academy trust?

There are of course risks associated with change but the governing bodies have worked together and considered long and hard the implications of forming a multi-academy trust seeking to learn from the experience of others. The very strong view

is that the potential benefits significantly outweigh possible risks and that the risks are understood and will be managed. There are risks also with not moving to a multi-academy trust. At some stage in the future, any school might be forced or influenced to become part of a larger academy chain. Many of these large chains have an approach based on a centralised business model with a wide geographical spread of schools. We believe that the ability to create a local MAT, under local direction, offers the best opportunity to sustain vibrant, successful local schools and to retain our values and vision.

12. How will admissions to the school be affected?

The trust continues to be required to adopt clear and fair admission arrangements in line with the admissions law and the School Admissions Code and no changes to the current criteria are proposed. The local authority will continue to have responsibility for making sure there are sufficient places locally and will coordinate the admissions process for all schools. This means parents will still only have to complete one application per child. Applications will still be via the coordinated process.

13. Does forming a multi-academy trust change the relationship with other schools and the wider community?

No. We wish to ensure we remain at the heart of our community, collaborating and sharing facilities and expertise with other schools outside the multi-academy trust and with the wider community. We would retain a good working relationship with Central Bedfordshire Council who are supportive of this proposal.

14. Will our responsibilities in relation to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and exclusions change?

No. Responsibilities in relation to SEND and exclusions will be just the same as they are now.