



Dore Primary School

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Intention to consult on conversion to a multi-academy trust

Dear Parents and Carers,

We wrote to you in February 2017 to inform you of our intention to work with Greystones Primary School to form a Multi Academy Trust (MAT). However, informal feedback from the regional school's commissioner was that, due to changes in national policy, a two school MAT was unlikely to be approved. We have therefore been consulting with other local schools that we already have strong partnerships with, through the 'South West Improvement Partnership'. Five schools have confirmed their intention to join together to form a MAT: Dore Primary School, Greystones Primary School, Hunter's Bar Infant School, Hunter's Bar Junior School and Dobcroft Infant School. We remain in conversations with other schools about the options for them to join, either at the application stage or at a later stage.

There will be a full, formal consultation process involving written information and public meetings for parents. You will be informed well in advance when this process is due to take place.

Academies are independent, state-funded schools, which receive their funding directly from central government, rather than through a local authority. The day-to-day running of the school is with the head teacher, but they are overseen by individual charitable bodies called academy trusts and may be part of a MAT. These trusts provide advice, support, expertise and a strategic overview. They control their own admissions process, although we would work closely with the local authority on this matter, and they still have to follow the same rules as other schools on special educational needs and exclusions but they don't have to follow the national curriculum and have more freedom than other schools to innovate.

It is not a given that the schools will convert or that the academy application will be approved as there is still a lot of work to do. More detail will be given at the consultation meetings, however it is important for you to know why the decision has been made.

There is a clear national agenda that schools will convert to become academies and we are working within that framework. There are a number of questions that we asked ourselves before we made the decision to investigate academy options:

1. What does it mean for the children?

We want to take the opportunity to further develop a curriculum where the arts and creativity are valued as highly as academic excellence. The schools in the partnership have a common vision as to how forming an academy will allow us not to be constrained by the national curriculum and whilst we will be subject to national assessments, we will be able to make our own decisions about the nature and focus of our curriculum. We want the children to have the opportunity to be physically



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and intellectually creative, to have opportunities to develop through an engagement with sport and through building self-confidence in these areas, to achieve well academically.

2. Why change? Why not stay as we are, a Local Authority maintained community primary school?

Local authorities, as they are traditionally understood, no longer exist. Schools are, essentially, already autonomous whilst being constrained by the national curriculum and local authority structures. We are part of Learn Sheffield, local networks and the wider Sheffield community of schools and intend to remain involved in these partnerships. However, as noted above there is a strong Government push for all Schools to eventually become Academies. The Governing Bodies feel it would be more advantageous for the schools, whilst we have the choice, to proactively move to an academy model which protects the valued characteristics of all schools that could be lost if we were compelled to join a larger MAT at a later date.

3. Why are the 5 schools joining together?

The schools would like to create a MAT together as we are like-minded schools with very similar principles. The Governors in all the schools have a strong desire to protect and maintain the unique and special nature of their schools and to continue to serve their own communities in the way that they always have. After in-depth research, we believe that the best way to do this is to jointly create an academy trust, initially involving the five schools but with a commitment to find other partner schools.

4. Why not join an existing academy chain or trust?

Our strongest desire is to maintain the autonomy and unique nature of our primary schools. We want our trust to be primary focused and operate based on a deep understanding of primary education.

5. What does it mean for the staff?

By creating a MAT we want to create a structure that allows for the career development of our staff without losing excellent teachers and other members of staff to other schools. We will protect the working rights, the pay and conditions of all our staff by signing up to all national and local agreements and by working closely with trade unions.

6. What would the structure of a trust look like?

There are established structures for all academy trusts. There are members, a Trust Board and Local Governing Bodies. The greatest responsibility lies with the Trust Board and we will establish a Trust Board that includes people with a strong local knowledge and care for the schools as well as people with the skills necessary to run the trust and ensure that the schools provide the highest level of service to the communities they serve. There would be a clear scheme of delegation that establishes what would be the responsibility of the Trust Board and what would be the focus of the Local Governing Body. For example, some trusts operate a scheme of delegation where the Trust



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Board has responsibility for the 'business' of the Trust e.g. contracts, services, HR, health and safety etc. and the Local Governing Body has responsibility for pupil related issues such as safeguarding, health and welfare, standards within the curriculum etc.

7. What are the financial benefits and risks?

As the trust grows we would have the opportunity to benefit from economies of scale, for example, when negotiating contracts with HR providers, premises services, maintenance companies etc.

We will have the opportunity, over time, to create bespoke services within the trust. For example there may be an opportunity to create our own outreach/advisory service for aspects of special needs or for the provision of specialist teaching in areas like music.

Before any final decisions are made a thorough process of financial due diligence will be followed. If there is a financial risk to any of the schools, we will not convert.

As was stated earlier in this letter these are very early days. Primary schools are not allowed to convert to academy status as a single school, and whilst the 5 schools have a large combined number of pupils, have a history of strong performance that has been recognised by Ofsted (all schools are rated Good or Outstanding) and are led by experienced and respected school leaders, it is not a foregone conclusion that an academy order will be issued when the application goes in.

If you wish to submit a written response to this letter so that your views can be considered before and during the formal consultation, please use the following email address rather than emailing the head teachers or governors directly at consultation@dore.sheffield.sch.uk.

Yours faithfully,

Debbie Miller
Chair of Governors
Dore Primary School

Lynnette Glossop
Head Teacher
Dore Primary School