



Stakeholder Consultation on Alfred Street Junior School converting to Academy status and joining Sharnbrook Academy Federation Multi Academy Trust (SAF)

The Governing Body of Alfred Street Junior School has researched the models of collaboration available to Alfred Street Junior School in response to significant changes in the educational landscape. After thorough research which considered many different models of collaboration, the Governing Body has concluded that it is in the best interests of pupils, parents and other stakeholders to apply to convert to become an academy and join SAF.

At their recent meeting the Governing Body voted in favour of initiating the consultation with our key stakeholders and submitting an application for an academy order to convert the school to an academy and to join SAF. An academy order would confirm whether the Department for Education (DfE) was, in principle, supportive of this option. This is subject to due diligence being undertaken on both sides. Due diligence is a comprehensive and robust process to ensure both parties are fully prepared for joining together and working as one organization.

The consultation process will begin by providing information via the attached Academy Conversion – Frequently Asked Questions and Answers document in order to inform stakeholders about academies, multi-academy trusts (MATs) and about the opinion of the Governing Body. Stakeholders are invited to submit comments and questions and the responses to this consultation will be used to further assess the case for proceeding with academy conversion and joining SAF.

The Governing Body is currently seeking the views of:

- Pupils, parents and carers
- Staff and their union representatives
- Local schools
- The local community
- Other interested parties

How you can contribute your views:

Consultation will last for six weeks, concluding on 20th January 2017, so that everyone has time to consider the issues properly and, if they wish, to express their views using any of the following methods:

Responding to the surveymonkey consultation:

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/AlfredStreetJuniorSchool>

Email: tmcdonagh@sharnbrook.beds.sch.uk

Letter: marked 'Private and Confidential – Academy Proposal Consultation for Alfred Street Junior School' and addressed to Tracy McDonagh, c/o Sharnbrook Upper School, Odell Road, Sharnbrook, Beds, MK44 1JL

Only once all stakeholder comments and representations have been collated and considered will the Governing Body decide whether or not to pursue academy status and join SAF. We welcome all of your comments via the channels listed above by Friday 20th January 2017.

Thank you

John Kidney
Headteacher

Academy Conversion Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

This document has been specially prepared by the Governing Body to inform stakeholders about academies, MATs and the current intentions of the Governing Body of Alfred Street Junior School. The questions are grouped into the following sections:

- General Questions about Academies
- Consultation and Decision-Making Procedures
- Alfred Street Junior School - SAF
- Governance and Accountability Arrangements
- Impact on Pupils and Parents
- Miscellaneous Questions

GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT ACADEMIES

What is an academy?

Academies are schools that are state-funded and state-governed, but are not under the direct control of the Local Authority (LA) and so have more independence over what they teach, how they operate and how they spend their budget. All academies are charities and therefore are entirely non-profit making.

What is a multi-academy trust (MAT)?

A MAT is a group of two or more academy schools working in a legally agreed formal collaboration called an academy trust. The MAT is the legal employer for all staff and determines a number of common practices and procedures across the MAT, whilst still encouraging each academy to have its own individual identity. MATs are usually run by an Executive Principal (or similar title) with a Headteacher or Head of School in each member academy.

What is the position nationally on academies?

The Labour government introduced the first academy schools in 2002. At the time, academies were only for long-term under-achieving secondary schools in inner city areas and for brand-new secondary schools in areas where there was a shortage of high achieving schools. They were sponsored by charitable organisations such as religious bodies, or by entrepreneurs and companies. The Conservative-led coalition government moved quickly after the election in 2010 to offer academy status to all good and outstanding schools and introduced the free schools programme (legally a free school is an academy).

At the start of September 2015, over 5,000 schools had become academies and a further 782 had applied for conversion. This represents around two thirds of all secondary schools and about a fifth of primary schools.

The Government has repeatedly said that it hopes all schools will become academies.

CONSULTATION AND DECISION-MAKING

Whose decision is it whether or not we become an academy?

The decision to apply to become an academy lies with the school's Governing Body. The decision to accept or reject the application lies with the DfE and the Regional School Commissioner for the area the school is in.

Is everything already decided?

No. Applying, or even having the application accepted in principle, does not automatically

mean that Alfred Street Junior School will become an academy. At any point up to the signing of the Funding Agreement, the Governing Body or the DfE could decide to stop the process.

Who will the Governing Body be consulting?

The Governing Body will be consulting with all staff at the school, parents and various other stakeholders, local schools, and other community members.

How will you be consulting? How can I share my views?

You can respond to the surveymonkey link provided at the beginning of this document. You can also write to, or email, us at: tmcdonagh@sharnbrook.beds.sch.uk. Please put 'Academy Consultation' in the subject line in the email or on the front of the envelope, which can be delivered to the school office.

What will you do with any responses you get?

The responses will be reviewed by the Governing Body, and therefore will be a factor in the decision making process. Responses will be made to each question raised either directly, or through a newsletter.

The question I want to ask is not in this Q&A document. How can I ask my question and get an answer?

Questions can be submitted through email or by letter as described above.

Alfred Street Junior School - SAF

Which academy trust does the Governing Body want to join?

Alfred Street Junior School Governing Body is consulting to decide whether to join SAF Multi Academy Trust. This conclusion comes after careful consideration.

Why do the Senior Leadership Team and Governing Body think that it is in the best interests of the school to join a MAT? And why now?

PULL Factors:

Converting to an academy and joining SAF would be positive with a number of benefits and improvements because:

- Building on the achievements of our children to deliver higher standards and increase outcomes for all
- Flexibility and creativity to design a curriculum best for our children designed to be engaging, relevant and appropriate
- Freedom to share best practice with other like-minded schools to ensure best practice is shared to all staff
- Increase staff opportunities to ensure we recruit the highest quality of staff, and provide CPD & career progression opportunities to retain them
- Keep responsibility of school finances within our organization, as part of a MAT we could use our greater buying power to negotiate contracts and services that achieve much better value for money than each school negotiating individually. This means that more of the school's funding can be focused upon teaching and learning.
- It would enable us to build stronger relationships and partnerships with key local educational organisations.
- It would enable our quality of education to extend beyond the pupils who attend Alfred Street Junior School because being an academy would allow greater sharing of resources and expertise.
- This is a unique opportunity to join a progressive MAT. From September 2017 SAF will have

one primary school within Harrold, Lincroft Academy which will be a secondary provision (age 11-16) known as Lincroft Academy, Great Ouse Primary Academy north of Bedford, Oakley Primary Academy in the village of Oakley, and Sharnbrook Academy as a full 11-18 secondary provision. SAF is also in discussion with Wootton Academy Trust joining the MAT which would bring another upper school and a STEM sixth form college

- Joining SAF can improve the important transition from the primary phase to the secondary phase of a child's education.
- Joining SAF would not prevent us from working in partnership with the LA or other local schools. We would be able to continue that relationship in the areas that we consider most beneficial for the school

PUSH Factors

There are several factors that are pushing us (and other schools) towards academisation:

- The number of academies is steadily growing and government policy is likely to be continued.
- Many conversations are taking place amongst schools trying to work out how best to align themselves within formal partnerships.
- School funding has reduced over the lifetime of the present Parliament. The Institute for Fiscal Studies estimates that funding per pupil will fall by about 8% over the next 4-5 years which means that further collaboration and sharing of resources with other schools will become even more important.
- Continuing reductions in Local Authority budgets means schools must find alternative sources of support that the LA is no longer able to provide.

IMPACT ON PUPILS AND PARENTS

Will my child's education at Alfred Street Junior School be better or worse?

When the Governing Body considered all of the options that are available to Alfred Street Junior School, the principle concern was to recommend a strategy that would provide the best outcomes for current and future pupils. The Governing Body is convinced that converting to an academy and joining SAF will offer children a better education than that which would be available through any other strategy, including doing nothing and remaining under LA control.

Alfred Street Junior School has an excellent record of recruiting, developing and retaining high quality staff. As part of SAF, there will be a larger, but still tight-knit, group of staff who can share ideas and collaborate on initiatives. In a tightening financial situation, we will be better placed to make sure our financial and other resources are targeted on improving the education of our pupils.

My child has special educational needs. I am concerned that this might mean changes for the worse.

The motivation for the proposed changes is securing and improving the standard of education that the school is able to provide to all children. The Governing Body is not aware of any reason why the educational experience offered to any group should not be maintained and improved through joining SAF. There is no reason why children with special educational needs should experience negative changes.

All academies must comply with the legally binding Code of Practice on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and that is the 'safeguard' that all pupils and parents will continue to have.

What will change if we become an academy and what will stay the same?

The educational experience for children would continue to improve through initiatives that are developed or supported by the teaching staff at Alfred Street Junior School, supported by the

expertise, networking and best practice being part of SAF will bring.

There are no plans to change the school uniform or any other day-to-day arrangements, although inset days would be coordinated across SAF.

Will it be harder for local families to get their children into Alfred Street Junior School?

Conversion to an academy should not influence the admissions process because all academies have to comply with the legally binding Code of Practice on School Admissions in exactly the same way as state maintained schools. Academies are still required to comply with the relevant codes in respect of admissions, exclusions and special education needs.

In terms of administering the application process for school places, the school will almost certainly continue to use the LA services for admissions.

GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY ARRANGEMENTS

How are MATs governed and run?

Alfred Street Junior School has the opportunity to join an academy trust that is already established and one that brings a commitment to excellence, quality of leadership and vision to the running of other local schools. This means that SAF would support the school in becoming an academy without the need for the school to establish a separate Charitable Trust and a Limited Liability company. The school would have a local governing body committed to providing challenge and support to the school senior leadership team, but this would be accountable to the Trust.

MATs usually have three layers of governance to ensure accountability and scrutiny:

Level 1:

First of all, there are the Members of the Company. Members are sometimes likened to shareholders (but as a charity they do not own the company or receive money from it). Members can be individuals or named bodies such as a diocese, or a local teaching school. Although they are ultimately responsible for all of the schools in the MAT, they have very limited functions. Members vest the strategic functions of the MAT in the hands of Directors.

Level 2:

The strategic governance of the MAT is the responsibility of the Board of Directors (who are also known as Trustees). Academy boards usually have a representative mix of people with a composition similar to that of a regular school's governing body.

In SAF there are 11 directors. Individuals become directors through appointment, nomination or co-option. Outside bodies, as well as the Members, are able to appoint or nominate members; the Executive Principal is automatically a Director. Directors are able to co-opt people onto the Board to ensure that there is the right mix of skills and experience. The present Board of Directors is fortunate in having members who are, or who have been, senior figures within local and central education, in higher education, in finance and local businesses.

Level 3:

Usually in MATs, each school has its own local governing body (LGB) that will focus on issues pertaining to its own school. Those LGBs would have a similar composition as Alfred Street Junior School's current Governing Body i.e. parents, staff, Headteacher and other stakeholders.

How are the accountability and the competence of the MAT assured?

Academies are still very accountable. Although they have more autonomy than schools under the control of the LA, they arguably have higher levels of accountability.

The Chief Executive Officer is accountable to the Board of Directors/Trustees and to the DfE through the Regional Schools Commissioner. The Board of Directors must report annually to the Members and must publish annual accounts as well as a report on their stewardship of the MAT over the previous year.

Individual academies are subject to Ofsted inspections and, under the regulations governing inspections, the MAT itself can also come under the scrutiny of Ofsted. If standards in any of the academies within a MAT are falling, the MAT can be challenged and scrutinised by the DfE through the system of Regional School Commissioners.

The Academies Financial Handbook governs the financial conduct of academies and the MAT. Budgets and accounts have to be submitted to the Education Funding Agency. The accounts have to be audited externally by independent auditors. Annual accounts and all details of directors have to be submitted to Companies House.

What happens when the present governors and senior staff move on?

The Governing Body believes that by joining SAF, we would be setting up the kind of organisation that capable staff and trustees will want to join. The Governing Body believes that there will always be a strong pool of talent and experience on which to draw. There are specified periods of office for all the directors/trustees and any member of the LGB, with clear rules about how replacements are appointed.

In the case of senior staff, being part of a larger MAT means that there would be a larger pool of staff who are already experienced in our way of working and already share our ethos and who would potentially be able to step up to fill any vacancies. New staff would, of course, be appointed on the basis of ability.

MISCELLANEOUS QUESTIONS

If Alfred Street Junior School becomes an academy, how will it affect other schools?

Alfred Street Junior School's decision to academise and join SAF is not likely to affect other local schools, which may be considering their own future options and acting accordingly. It is possible that other local schools might express an interest in joining SAF.

How will becoming an academy affect the school's finances?

In LA controlled schools, the LA provides the school's budget and retains a proportion of that budget to fund some central functions. Maintained schools also purchase some services from the LA such as payroll services, financial management systems and buildings maintenance. Schools then choose how to spend the rest of their budget. The vast majority of a school's budget is spent on staffing and essential services, such as utilities.

Academies receive their entire budget directly from central government from the Education Funding Agency without any 'top slice' being taken by an LA. An academy is then free to choose how to purchase services. Academies can still opt to buy services from the LA if they choose. Academies are therefore responsible for securing best-value in the procurement of a wide-range of supplies and services. A MAT is funded by a contribution of a certain percentage of the participating schools' budgets. As larger organisations, MATs should be able to realise economies of scale that lead to savings for individual schools, through such activities as joint purchasing and procurement.

Will the school be in a more secure financial position as an academy in SAF?

When the Governing Body assessed options available to Alfred Street Junior School, an improved financial position was not the principal concern; however, to ensure that the chosen strategy was feasible and sustainable, the financial implications were investigated and continue to be thoroughly examined.

The Governing Body expects the school to be in a better financial position as a result of becoming an academy and joining SAF. This is because money, that is held centrally by the LA, would come directly to the school and the school would benefit from some of the services that SAF is able to provide at a lower effective cost than the LA. However, the school would also have to pay for some services which are currently 'free' or not currently required. Neither Alfred Street Junior School nor SAF are profit-making organisations, and any financial advantage that is realised now or in the future as a result of extra funding or economies of scale would be invested in the school to enhance educational provision.

The costs incurred while converting to an academy are compensated by a conversion grant.

What will be the impact on the staff?

One of the 'freedoms' afforded to academies is the right to set their own terms for staff pay and conditions. Understandably this is, and has always been, an issue of great concern for all teaching and support staff and their unions.

The Governing Body wants to make it clear that we fully recognise and appreciate the enormous effort and commitment of current Alfred Street Junior School staff in contributing to the school's success and our pupils' outcomes. The concerns and welfare of our staff have been very much to the fore throughout the Governing Body's deliberations.

It is quite clearly in the best interests of Alfred Street Junior School and our pupils, in particular, to continue to have motivated, contented and engaged staff and this remains a priority for the Governing Body throughout this process. Although academies have the freedom to set their own pay and conditions, the SAF Board has no plans to move away from the present nationally agreed pay and conditions. In any case all current staff at Alfred Street Junior School have the right to retain their present posts, as well as conditions of service, should the school become an academy as a result of the TUPE regulations.

What is TUPE?

All qualifying staff would transfer from the employment of the LA to the employment of SAF. Qualifying staff are generally those who have contracts of employment at a converting school on the date of conversion to academy status. This transfer takes place within the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 (TUPE) for staff transfer, which ensures that staff retain all of their existing rights, terms and conditions and pension arrangements, including continuity of service. The pension arrangements for staff would be unaffected by the transfer.

The TUPE Regulations provide that the current employer's rights and obligations arising from a contract of employment existing on the date of transfer shall, by reason of such transfer, be transferred to the new employer.

Staff are able to respond to the consultation as part of the academisation process, including a meeting for all staff to discuss their views. In addition, there will be a further formal consultation process (involving trade unions) as stipulated by the TUPE regulations.

Where can I find out more?

Please contact John Kidney Headteacher of Alfred Street Junior School via the school office, or email Tracy McDonagh at tmcdonagh@sharnbrook.beds.sch.uk