

## Woodlands School Academy Conversion FAQs

The information in this fact sheet is intended to help answer some of the questions which may arise when considering conversion to academy status and the foundation of the Multi Academy Trust. This information cannot replace the informal conversations and formal consultation that takes place during the conversion process. Woodlands' consultation was from 13/1/17 to 10/2/17. In addition there was a staff meeting presentation, and a consultation evening for all families and stakeholders. Woodlands will continue to be called "Woodlands". The proposed name of our Multi Academy Trust is "Unity". The proposed conversion date is 1/12/17. The FAQs and answers have been drawn from a number of documents and consultation processes.

### GENERAL QUESTIONS

#### What is an academy?

An academy is an all-ability school that is directly funded by central government and independent of direct control by local government. Academies are inspected by Ofsted. Academies are self-governing.

#### What is Multi Academy Trust (MAT)?

This is the strongest and most formal type of collaborative structure for academies. In a maintained school there is one governing body, but in a MAT there is a second layer of governance. The Trustees of the MAT appoint a Local Governing Body that is accountable to the Trustees. The Trustees have a strategic oversight of the school, as the Trust is ultimately accountable to the Secretary of State for Education for the quality of provision within the school. This responsibility is set out in a legal document called "The Funding Agreement". Ultimately, the responsibilities of the Trustees are to: ensure the quality of education provision, challenge and monitor the performance of the school, manage the MAT's finance, assets and property, ensure the MAT complies with charity and company law. Local Governors will have delegated powers from the Trustees for oversight of many elements of the school. Local Governors of high performing schools will have a considerable degree of "earned autonomy", and will be accountable, on a day-to-day basis, for the running of the school.

#### What is the current and future educational landscape?

In March 2016, the Government produced the White Paper "Educational Excellence Everywhere". This paper stated the government's intention that all schools join, or are in the process of joining, a MAT by 2020. Though it would appear that the Government made something of a "U-turn" subsequently, it is important to recognise that the educational landscape is changing rapidly, and that schools will continue to convert to academies. The powers and capacity of the Local Authority will continue to steadily diminish.

#### What is the main motivation for converting to academy status?

- *The MAT believes that co-founding a new MAT places both schools in a powerful position to continue their high quality provision, and their evolution towards outstanding. We will be in charge of our own destiny, and will avoid the potential of being taken over by a MAT that does not share the same aspirations or vision. Brooke is a like-minded, innovative and successful all-age broad spectrum special school.*
- *As an Ofsted "Good" and LA "Category A" school (ie with significant and fast-developing strengths), Woodlands Governors believe that the time is right for Woodlands to powerfully shape its own destiny. This is an exciting and trail-blazing opportunity to fully retain our identity, but also to accelerate school improvement. As co-founders we are in the strongest possible position to "do rather than be done to".*
- *Both schools are aware of the limitations of funding and the implication on the LA for developing services for special schools. The MAT believes that it can enhance the level of service to both schools by working as academies rather than maintained schools. One particular example of this is School Improvement. The LA is due to lose responsibility for School Improvement in September this year. As academies, the two schools have established a School Improvement Officer who will be employed by the MAT to provide external scrutiny and support the schools to outstanding status. External scrutiny will increase significantly. This formative challenge will be on a half-termly rather than annual basis.*

#### Why not form a MAT with other Special Schools in Warwickshire?

We wish to be, jointly, the pioneers in the formation of the MAT, and, as co-founders, to shape its future. Other specialist settings in Warwickshire have already academised, or continue to carefully consider their options. Our proposed MAT will have the capacity for other like-minded and successful settings to join us in the future. It may also be possible for Woodlands and Brooke to work collaboratively and alongside other stakeholders to create Free Schools.

### **Why not form a MAT with mainstream schools in Warwickshire?**

This option was also given all due consideration. Governors strongly feel that partnership in a much smaller MAT is in the best interests of Woodlands pupils and the best model for the full retention of our unique identity.

### **How will Academy conversion improve the quality of education for my child?**

This is the most important question facing the Governing Body, staff and parents of our school. We are all committed to seeing Woodlands continue to flourish, ensuring that all pupils have a happy, safe and fulfilled education which provides the very best that we can offer. Forming a MAT, and working so collaboratively, will enable our unique and wonderful school to enhance its evolution towards a consistently outstanding provision.

### **Is an academy like a business?**

No. A business makes profit for its shareholders. An academy is a charitable trust which cannot make profit.

*- The MAT believes that any funding the academies receive should be directed to enhancing teaching and learning and providing additional opportunities for the children and students.*

### **Who makes the decision to become an academy?**

The governing body.

### **Are academies bound by the same rules and regulations as other schools?**

Academies are required to follow the law and guidance on admissions, special educational needs and exclusions.

### **Will holidays and term dates change?**

*- The MAT has no changes to make any changes to holiday or term dates.*

### **Will transport provided by the Local Authority Change?**

No - arrangements will remain exactly the same.

## **THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM**

### **Will the academy follow the National Curriculum?**

Yes, but it would have more freedom to be innovative and make sure that what is taught is relevant to our pupils and their specific needs.

*- Both schools are currently working on developing and personalising their curricula, whilst still having due regard to the National Curriculum. In both cases the schools are trying to make the curriculum more bespoke and relevant. Conversion will empower this process.*

## **PARTNERSHIP**

### **Does becoming an academy change the relationship with local schools and the community?**

No. Academy funding agreements state that they must ensure that the school will be at

the heart of its community, collaborating and sharing facilities and expertise with other local schools and the wider community.

- *Over the last few years there has been an increased need from the wider community for special school support. Both schools already have strong links with the LA, local schools and colleges and this is unlikely to change as a result of conversion.*

**As an academy, will it still work with the local authority (LA)?**

Academies are independent of the local authority. However, we wish to continue working with the LA, other local schools and local partners.

- *The Local Authority will always retain responsibility for vulnerable learners, so the two schools will always have a link to the LA. The LA will maintain responsibility to ensure that every vulnerable child has access to quality learning, so the two schools are looking forward to maintaining this relationship.*
- *The schools have already started dialogue with the LA to maintain the effective partnership.*

**GOVERNANCE**

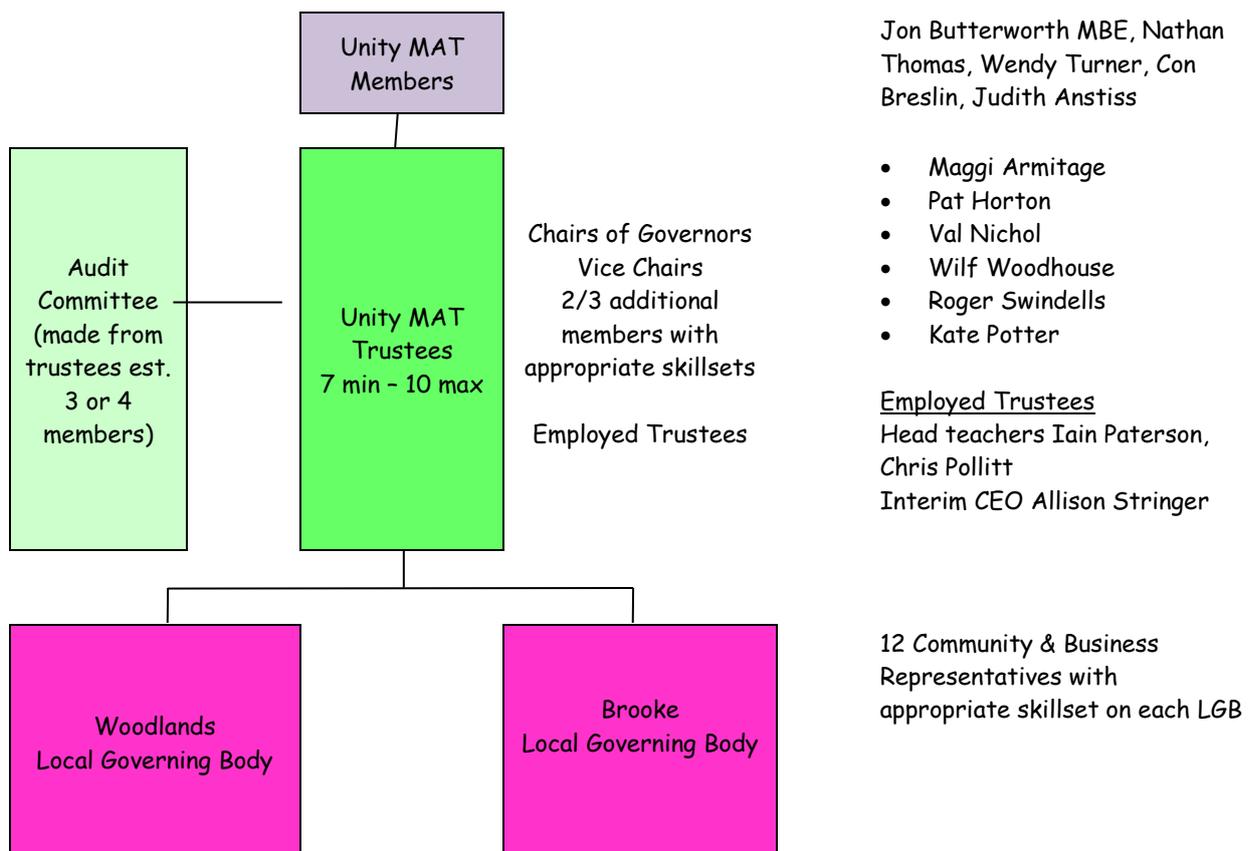
**How does governance work?**

The MAT has a board of Trustees who are ultimately responsible for the work of the Trust and the academies. However, we devolve as much responsibility as possible to the individual academies. The Board of Trustees is responsible for appointing the majority of the governors on each academy governing body, including the post of Chair of Governors. Each academy has its own governing body who work with the academy CEO to check that the academy is making good progress. Each governing body has parent/carers representatives and at least one staff governor.

The governing body will set the vision for the academy in line with the overall commitment of The MAT. The governing body also drafts the academy spending plan and improvement plan for approval by The MAT.

The governing body has delegated powers from the Trust Board, including the management of finance and property and the appointment of staff. The scheme of delegation is the same across each of the academies within the Trust.

- *The MAT has identified a clear governance structure that is outlined by the following diagram:*



## **FUNDING**

### **What will happen to our school's funding?**

The Department for Education meets the running costs for an academy in full. Academy funding is calculated on a like-for-like basis with local authority schools. Therefore the academy will have a similar budget to that of its predecessor maintained school. With greater freedom to procure services from other providers and to realise cost efficiencies across the network, the academy will be able to make more efficient use of resources to support school improvement. Like other schools, an academy cannot run at a loss or agree a deficit budget, i.e. it has to break-even.

- *Both schools are currently setting a balanced budget and this is the same for the next three years. The MAT does not believe there is any financial benefit to becoming an academy, but will look to work together to share resources and services. It is a priority for both schools to maintain a balanced budget. Both schools are likely to benefit from funding reviews currently happening on a national and local level.*

### **How will the school be accountable financially?**

An academy is governed by the rules and regulations for charitable trusts, e.g. we will be required to produce and file accounts and trustees cannot be paid. There will be robust systems with an audit conducted by an external independent auditor.

- *The MAT has already identified a series of trustees who have strong financial skill sets and have identified an audit group that will review the finances of both academies on a termly basis.*
- *The MAT is currently negotiating with an external organisation for external financial scrutiny on a twice termly basis.*
- *The MAT has also identified a chief financial officer (CFO) role to further support the development of school budgets. It is likely this person will be appointed after conversion has taken place.*

### **How does academy status affect SEN funding?**

SEN funding will come directly from the government through the Education Funding Agency. Funding allocated to a named child would continue to be funded directly by the local authority.

### **Does it cost to become an academy?**

Yes. There are legal costs associated with becoming an academy. The government gives each converting academy £25,000 to cover these costs.

### **Who will own the school building and land?**

The local authority will be required to grant a 125 year lease to the academy trust.

## **ADMISSIONS**

### **Will the school remain non-selective?**

- *Yes. The MAT believes the admission procedure and criteria is very strong within Warwickshire, and has no desire to make any changes. Woodlands will continue to admit pupils from Warwickshire and neighbouring authorities.*
- *The MAT will continue to work in partnership with the LA to maintain this arrangement for admissions and support in developing provision across the county.*
- *Both schools will remain Broad Spectrum Community Special Schools*

## **THE NEW ACADEMY**

### **Will the school need to change its name?**

- *Both Brooke School and Woodlands School are committed to maintaining their names and do not see a need for change.*

### **Can the academy work with the council and other schools?**

- *Both schools already purchase resources and services from the local authority that they are happy with.*

- *The MAT believes that when these services can provide value for money and enhance the quality of provision for children, then they will still be purchased.*

**Will there be a new uniform?**

*The MAT has no plans to make any change to school uniforms. For Woodlands School, the logo and uniform will remain the same.*

**What happens if the headteacher leaves?**

The Trustees will work with the Academy Local Governors to appoint a new Head Teacher.

The Department for Education website contains a wide range of information about becoming an academy. In particular the website has a FAQ section which can be found at: <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/academies/primary/faqs>