



Woodside Junior School
Headteacher Mrs Dorota Milner



Mitchell Walk, Amersham, Buckinghamshire HP6 6NW
Tel: 01494 725897
Email: office@woodside.bucks.sch.uk
Website: woodside.bucks.sch.uk

28 September 2018

To: Parents/Guardians of pupils at Woodside Junior School and St George's C of E Infant School

Dear parent/guardian

PROPOSED CONVERSION OF WOODSIDE JUNIOR SCHOOL TO AN ACADEMY

We wrote to you on 14 May to tell you that the governors of Woodside Junior School were proposing that the school should apply to become an academy, and in so doing join the Oxford Diocesan Bucks Schools Trust (ODBST). A parents' meeting on the proposal was held at Woodside on 17 July, and another, attended by representatives of ODBST, on 18 September. The letter and meetings were part of a consultation process intended to make sure that the governors could take your views into account in deciding whether to take the proposal forward, and if so how.

This letter is the last stage in that consultation. It contains fuller information about the thinking that has led to the proposal. Immediately after the closing date for responses the governors will make a final decision on how to proceed. The closing date is Wednesday 31 October 2018.

Does this mean that Woodside is failing?

Several early responses have been based on a belief that only failing schools become academies, and have asked whether it follows that Woodside itself is failing. The answer is a definite no. Although academisation was indeed originally devised as a way of improving schools in difficulty, government policy since 2010 has been that it is the best way to operate state-funded schools whatever their performance level. Many good and outstanding schools – such as Woodside – have made the conversion.

Background

At present Woodside is a Community School, maintained by the Local Authority (Buckinghamshire County Council). The Council employs the staff, determines the admissions arrangements for the school and is responsible for maintaining the school estate. Funding is provided through the Council, which is responsible for ensuring the effectiveness and quality of the school and for some strategic decisions, for example about the size of the school.

An academy is a state-funded school not maintained by the Local Authority but by an



independent charitable trust which is also a company limited by guarantee. Funding is provided direct to the trust by central government. New academies are now expected to join with others in a 'multi-academy trust' (MAT), governed by a single board of trustees/directors. The MAT becomes the organisation accountable for the effectiveness and quality of the academy.

Why change?

In recent years there have been notable changes in Local Authority funding, including cuts to parts of education budgets and the complete removal of some of them. As a result, many services traditionally provided by the Authority have either been reduced or phased out. At the same time more and more of our fellow Buckinghamshire schools have taken the academy route, mostly within MATs. The combined effect is to make Woodside's position more isolated and insecure, and although the school is strongly led and is performing extremely well at the moment it is vulnerable to small changes in its circumstances, a risk heightened by its small size.

Participation in a MAT offers some safeguards against these dangers, but also some more positive advantages. We would be able to share in a larger pool of expertise and resources; have the support of the trust's central management and administrative services; have available to us more staff development opportunities and career pathways; and have the opportunity to contribute to the development of a school-led system, in which schools support each other rather than rely on an external source of guidance and advice on school improvement.

The options we considered

The governors and school leadership have carefully considered the following options:

- not becoming an academy at all
- joining a large national MAT
- joining a local, school-initiated MAT
- joining ODBST
- starting a school-initiated MAT ourselves.

We had the following criteria especially in mind:

- which option was likely to provide the most secure future for Woodside children, giving them not only an excellent academic education but the opportunity to grow and develop as complete human beings
- whether the school's ethos and character would be preserved
- whether we would have the opportunity to look outwards, contributing to the development of a school-led education system in Bucks and beyond
- whether Woodside would be part of an integrated and geographically compact community of schools
- whether we would retain a significant role in the governance and operation of our school at a local level



We concluded that joining ODBST was the option with the best fit. It offered the prospect of being part of a trust linked to an already established and well-resourced MAT (see below), with a sufficiently community-based nature, and with governance arrangements based on a high degree of local autonomy. The arguments against not converting at all are set out above. The governors judged that Woodside did not have the capacity to take the lead in forming a new MAT, and that in any case it would be difficult to draw in enough schools to form a potential MAT nucleus or a basis for future growth.

About ODBST

ODBST is a new MAT launched by the Oxford Diocese in September 2017 to provide an option for schools across Buckinghamshire which want to become academies. Although this is a new MAT, the Diocese already has a popular and successful Diocesan MAT for schools in Oxfordshire and Windsor & Maidenhead – The Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust (ODST), which ODBST is modelled on. There are currently 29 schools in that MAT with approval for four more schools to join. The earlier MAT will provide support to ODBST as it establishes itself.

Both MATs have their origins in the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education, which continues to have a role in their governance, but their schools are not expected to subscribe to any particular faith or indeed any faith at all. The ethos of both derives from the centuries-old Church tradition of serving the community by helping its children to flourish regardless of background or belief.

Each school within the Trust is understood to have its own unique qualities, and is encouraged to express them. Each one has a 'Local Governing Body' with duties and responsibilities delegated by the Board of Trustees, and continues to make decisions at local level. Local Governing Bodies are aided by a combination of high quality school improvement guidance and partnership working across the Trust. Operationally, schools in the Trust are supported to enable staff to concentrate on delivering high standards of teaching and care to all pupils. This support is given through central services which are funded through a top slice from the academies' income. ODBST academies will automatically be provided with support on the curriculum, school improvement, human resources, financial management and finance software, training, governance, premises and admission appeals.

ODBST is a charitable company. No one can make any money from the it. The company is limited by guarantee. It does not pay dividends and makes no profit. It is linked to the Diocese of Oxford through the appointment of its Members, who are all volunteers, and who act in effect as the 'owners' of the company.

There is more information about ODBST in the document "ODBST Presentation for Woodside Junior Parents", which is in the parents' section of the school website. You will see that among the local schools which have already joined ODBST are Chesham Bois Combined and Thomas Harding Junior School, with whom we already work closely. Our own participation in ODBST would strengthen our relations with them and help to form a natural local cluster.

Some frequently asked questions and answers to them are set out at the end of this letter. If you have further questions please let us know, preferably by email at



SCHOOL GUIDE RATING



office@woodside.bucks.sch.uk.

What will be different?

While academy status would give the school additional responsibilities (for example, for admissions into the school) and provide greater freedoms (for example, the school would be able to be more flexible with the curriculum), in its day-to-day functioning the school will not be noticeably different. In particular, there are no proposals to change the uniform or the admissions arrangements. Deeper changes will come in the way the teachers and non-teaching staff (particularly the headteacher, governors and the Business Manager) are supported to deliver the best possible outcomes for the children in the school.

Next steps

This consultation will end on Wednesday 31 October. The governors will then examine the questions and points raised by parents and interested parties and consider whether to continue with the process. If the decision is to proceed, the Secretary of State for Education will need to approve the conversion, and ODBST will also need to approve our school to join the Trust. If everyone is agreed, the project to change the school into an academy will take between four to nine months, and will be managed by ODBST.

If you wish to respond to this consultative letter please let us know by Wednesday 31 October, by contacting the school office at office@woodside.bucks.sch.uk.

Stuart Smith

DM

Stuart Smith: Chair of Governors
Dorota Milner: Headteacher



Frequently Asked Questions

How many academies will be in ODBST?

Six schools are already in the Trust, with three further schools in public consultation to join it. It is envisaged that, eventually, the Trust may grow to as many as 30 schools, but this will be determined by demand from schools within Bucks and subject to the permission of the Department for Education.

In light of the removal of 'enforced' academisation, is it still a requirement or expectation that schools will have to convert?

Although the government has decided to no longer impose a deadline for schools to become an academy, or to have the process in place to become an academy, by 2020, it is still advocating that all schools become academies. In the most recent government paper, "Schools that work for everyone", the Department for Education states:

"It remains the Government's ambition that all schools ultimately benefit from the autonomy and freedom to innovate and to meet the needs of their community that academy status brings, and we will be supporting schools to make this transition."
(Schools that Work for Everyone, Government Consultation Document, September 2016, p7)

What will happen to local links and partnerships that we already have?

These will continue. Joining ODBST does not preclude the school from being part of local partnerships which are for the benefit of the school. In particular, there will be no need for the school's relationship with its feeder infant school, St George's, to change.

How long does it take for a school to become an Academy?

Most schools are able to convert to academy status in around five-nine months after achieving the initial approval to proceed from the Department for Education.

Do schools need to consult before converting?

Yes. All schools are required to carry out a consultation but it is up to each school to decide whom and how to consult. There is no legally specified length of time for the consultation and schools have flexibility in how it is conducted.

How is the governing body consulting with stakeholders?

We wrote to parents on 14 May to tell them about the proposal. An information evening was held on 17 July, and a further session with the Trust was held on 18 September. At the end of the consultation period the Governing Body will consider the feedback received and take a vote on whether to proceed with a change to academy status. Parents and other interest parties will be informed of the decision forthwith. We will continue to communicate



SCHOOL GUIDE RATING



and consult through a variety of methods to ensure that everyone is kept up-to-date and all views are considered.

If parents, staff and the community have additional questions to ask, they should email the school. Responses will be provided as soon as possible.

What does the conversion process involve?

The key steps we must take are as follows:

- the Governing Body formally agrees to consult on becoming an academy and within which MAT;
- secure approval, in principle, from the Trust and any land trustees to convert to academy status;
- carry out the necessary consultation and decide to proceed;
- obtain the Secretary of State's initial consent by securing an "Academy Order";
- agree a supplementary funding agreement with the DfE and ODBST;
- ensure that the school site is made available to the Academy Trust via leases and/or supplemental agreements;
- ensure that financial systems are in place to manage funding;
- transfer, renew or procure new contracts, service level agreements and licences and purchase insurance as appropriate;
- transfer under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE) all contract arrangements for staff. This is a formal legal consultation process which is separate from the consultation with all stakeholders. It would not start until after the vote by the Governing Body to apply for academy status;
- agree and transfer surplus balances held by LA to the academy;
- ensure appropriate admissions policies are in place.

Does the school have to change its name or uniform?

No. The name of the school does not have to change and the uniform requirements do not have to change either. There are no plans to change the school name or uniform requirements should we do decide to convert to academy status.

TEACHING AND THE CURRICULUM

Will the school be able to set its own curriculum?

Academies are able to offer a more flexible curriculum, but they are required to provide a 'balanced and broadly-based curriculum'. The teaching of English, Maths and Science would, of course, remain central. The teachers and governors will work with ODBST to implement the curriculum to best meet the needs of its pupils using the freedoms available to it.

What would happen to SEN provision?

We would continue to provide the same support for pupils with an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) and the funding for this continues to be provided by the Local Authority. The



SCHOOL GUIDE RATING



Local Authority retains its responsibility for statutory duties, and its obligations and procedures remain in place when a school converts to academy status.

Will academies be free from Ofsted inspections?

No, academies remain fully under Ofsted's inspection arrangements.

PERSONNEL

What happens to all of the staff?

All staff are entitled to transfer, under TUPE, to the Academy with their same terms and conditions as at present.

Can academies alter the pay and conditions of employees?

When a school converts to a new academy, employees are entitled to transfer under the same employment terms and conditions. There is a legal process to go through under TUPE whereby staff maintain existing pay, conditions and length of service. Alterations can be made only as they would have been by the Council (for example, changes to pay and annual leave negotiated with employee's representatives). This position will continue unless and until the contract of employment is varied with the agreement of the employee.

It is important to note that there are no plans to alter the pay and conditions of staff. Of course, any changes made nationally would apply.

How will union membership (NUT, NASUWT, Unison, etc) work?

Union recognition would remain as it currently stands; all employees are entitled to be part of a union.

Do we have enough support staff to cope with the change of status?

Many of the additional tasks associated with conversion and academy status are met by the Trust. We do not expect that further support staff would be required, but the Governing Body would keep this under review.

Would we be able to buy services such as HR and payroll more cheaply if the school was not buying from the local authority?

ODBST will procure some services on behalf of schools in the Trust and will be able to negotiate better deals for a group of schools. The Governing Body will be able to procure services from a wider range of providers (and can continue to buy some services from the Local Authority – where they are still available).

How do the staff feel about conversion as part of ODBST?

Staff are being fully involved in the discussion regarding conversion. Meetings for staff with representatives from ODBST are being held in order to answer questions both about the process and being part of the Trust. The views of staff are held in the highest regard by



SCHOOL GUIDE RATING



the governors and school leaders. Ensuring that all viewpoints are listened to and all concerns addressed is a critical part of the conversion process.

ADMISSIONS

What are the admission requirements for schools converting to become academies?

No changes are proposed to the admissions criteria or catchment area. Becoming an academy will mean that we become the admissions authority which will mean that the school will set its own admissions arrangements. However, if any changes are proposed in the future to admission arrangements there would be a full consultation before they are made. We will continue to publish our admission arrangements on our website well in advance of each academic year.

The Local Authority retains responsibility for co-ordination of admission arrangements for entry into Year 3.

FINANCE

What is the financial impact of becoming an academy?

There are two aspects to the financial impact of academy conversion – the impact on how an academy is funded, and the impact on the amount available to spend (additional costs or potential savings).

How are academies funded?

Academies receive the same level of per-pupil funding as they would receive from the Local Authority as a maintained school. Most school funding will come directly to the multi-academy trust (MAT) from central government and is then passed on the academy after a proportion is retained. The amount retained and how that is managed differs from MAT to MAT. Most of the funding is received in monthly instalments, and so managing cashflow is a new and important responsibility for both MATs and their academies. SEN and Early Years funding still comes to the academy directly from the local authority.

What extra costs are there?

All MATs must retain some proportion of its academies funding to pay for the staff and resources they need to provide services and support to their academies – this is often referred to as a service charge, retention or top slice. The amount retained will vary from MAT to MAT as will the level of service provision.

What savings can be made?

- Some local authorities such as Buckinghamshire retain an amount of school's funding under the heading of de-delegation – this no longer happens after conversion.
- The amount payable by the school for non-teaching staff's pensions contributions will differ from the LA rate – in the case of Buckinghamshire there is currently a saving of 3.6%
- Some costs previously met from the school's budget may be paid for from the



service charge. Some examples are subscriptions, IT licence fees and school improvement support.

- The larger the MAT the greater the opportunity to negotiate discounts from suppliers which can then be passed on to academies, such as via energy procurement and staff absence insurance packages.

Do we have to cover the full cost to convert to an academy?

No. The Department for Education currently pay a flat-rate grant of £25,000 and the conversion is not expected to affect the Academy's revenue budget.

Will there be a capital fund or a specific grant for insurance to cover for emergencies in academies?

Academies are required to have insurance at specified minimum levels of cover. ODBST will ensure that the necessary insurance is in place through the Government's approved insurance scheme (RPA).

Who would own the land and buildings?

The land and buildings remain in their current ownership but are made available to the Academy via a 125-year lease and/or a supplemental agreement.

Will we retain the existing financial systems?

The financial system will change to better reflect the requirements of an Academy trust and meet the company accounts requirements.

How would we get a capital building project carried out?

ODBST will be part of a pooled capital funding scheme co-ordinated through the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education and is awarded an annual allocation from the Department for Education. This is allocated to schools on the basis of our condition surveys. Our condition survey will be updated as part of the conversion process.

The school will continue to receive an annual devolved formula capital (DFC) allocation for small capital projects as we do currently.

