

WOODFORD GREEN PRIMARY SCHOOL
A PROPOSAL TO CONVERT TO ACADEMY STATUS AND
JOIN THE ARBOR ACADEMY TRUST

CONSULTATION DOCUMENT
July 2018



The Proposal under Consultation

The proposal is for Woodford Green Primary School to convert to academy status and join the Arbor Academy Trust.

The Governors of Woodford Green Primary School want the very best for all the school's pupils, staff and the wider community of parents, carers and families.

So, we have been considering carefully the future strategy for the school given the challenges we are likely to face. We have also thought about this strategy in the context of government policy for schools and a changing educational landscape.

The Governors have come to the view that it is best for Woodford Green Primary School to convert to academy status and join the Arbor Academy Trust.

The Challenges Facing the School

Like all schools in England we are dealing with four inter-linked challenges:

1. Pupil funding is not keeping up with cost increases, which mean each year we have to find more savings.
2. Staff retention and recruitment is becoming harder and harder, especially for teaching staff.
3. Support from Local Authorities is reducing as their budgets are cut and they focus on the neediest schools, and
4. Greater external scrutiny of school performance and pupil outcomes putting more pressure on the Headteachers, teachers and teaching staff.

The Governors have been considering how best to meet these challenges bearing in mind three specific issues for Woodford Green Primary School.

1. Coping as a small school

We know that the children, staff, parents and carers value that Woodford Green is a small school where children, staff and parents/carers are part of a community that cares for everyone. Being a small school also means;

- the staff have a personalised knowledge of every child: their character, their unique abilities, and their way of learning,
- teaching staff are able to plan the learning of each child in a bespoke way to support their development, and
- the parent/carer community support each other and the school collaboratively.

However, as a small school we are less able to manage those financial pressures. In the past the London Borough of Waltham Forest provided excellent support for all its schools but, through no fault of its own, has less funding and resources, which it has to target at the weakest schools. The school does not get as much support as it used to and our location on the absolute edge of the borough probably doesn't help.

2. Sustaining and raising school performance and pupil outcomes

The governors recognised that the school's performance and pupil outcomes had been variable, especially when compared to national averages. We want the results to be more consistent year by year, subject by subject and teacher by teacher. We also want pupil outcomes to reflect more accurately the abilities of our children. That was our ambition when we appointed Mr Prince in January 2015 and we are so pleased to see an upward trend 2016-18. The challenge, as a small school with limited resources, is to sustain that improvement.

3. Retaining the best staff team

At the heart of every good school is a strong team of leaders, teachers, teaching staff and support staff who work together to support and develop every child so they flourish. As a small school with a diminishing Local Authority support for school, the opportunities for professional development, career progression and mutual support and challenge are reduced. We need to retain, develop and recruit the very best staff team to achieve the best outcomes for the children. We also need to help staff achieve a better work/life balance.

Exploring options for the future

The Governing Body, recognising that Woodford Green would benefit from school-to-school support and having been strongly advised by the Local Authority schools team to explore collaboration, did set up a partnership with a nearby school in November 2016. Unfortunately, the relationship did not have the impact everyone had hoped for and so it came to end.

The Governing Body did look at a mixture of local and larger multi academy trusts but felt none of them were quite right for Woodford Green. The Governing Body also noted that several other local community schools are already in partnerships and have joined or are considering joining other multi academy trusts.

This process has given the Governing Body a clear sense of what kind of partnership would be right for Woodford Green and our principles and non-negotiables for a partnership.

Our partnership with Arbor Trust

In July 2017, encouraged by the Local Authority, the Governing Body commissioned the Arbor Academy Trust and Davies Lane Teaching School with Acacia Nursery and Snowberry Nursery to work with the Headteacher, Mr Prince and the staff. Working with Davies Lane Teaching School provides a wider collaborative opportunity with Tollgate Teaching School (Newham), St Mary's Teaching School (Waltham Forest), and Whitefields Teaching School (Waltham Forest).

Since then a wide range of programmes and activities have taken place including:

- Teacher training – INSET days
- Teacher moderation
- Year group conferences
- Teaching Assistant training
- Interschool quality assurance across 4 schools
- External quality assurance
- Recruitment Support
- Benchmarking
- Leadership Support
- SEND and SENDCO support
- Early Years & Foundation stage (EYFS) Support
- Ofsted preparation support
- Assessment and Data support
- Governor training
- Interschool football competitions

The positive impact of the collaboration seen by Governors and the Headteacher, was evidenced in the Ofsted inspector's letter to the school in November 2017:

"Currently, you are working with a local outstanding teaching school alliance, which is providing opportunities for staff to share expertise and take part in assessment moderation activities. The benefits of this partnership can be seen in pupils' work in their books and the raised expectations of what can be achieved."

Working with Arbor Academy Trust has also given Governors, the Headteacher and staff the opportunity to get to know the organisation better, to meet colleagues, to understand the trust's

vision and ethos and to find out more about their ways of working. The more time the schools have spent together the more convinced we are that the Arbor Academy Trust and Woodford Green share important values, principles and beliefs about how best to enable every child and member of staff fulfil their potential.

The Benefits of Joining the Arbor Academy Trust

Woodford Green has already seen the benefits first hand of working in partnership with Arbor Academy Trust. By converting to academy status and joining the Trust, we would be able to deepen these ties and strengthen the collaboration and joint working between headteachers, senior leaders, staff and governors.

Davies Lane Primary School, a founding school of the Arbor Academy Trust is also one of four teaching schools in the London Borough of Waltham Forest. This means that new teachers can be trained in the schools as well as more experienced teachers being provided with high-quality professional development.

As part of the Arbor Trust we will:

- Share and develop excellent practice in teaching and learning,
- Enhance our provision for pupils with additional needs,
- Broaden and deepen the curriculum,
- Enhance the professional development of teaching and support staff,
- Increase the range of learning and enrichment activities for pupils,
- Help retain and attract the most capable staff,
- Increase mutual accountability, challenge and support for Governors and Headteachers,
- Secure financial efficiencies through coordinated resource planning and joint commissioning of services, and
- Respond to changes in Government policy proactively and efficiently.

Trust Vision and Values

Arbor Academy Trust describes its vision and values in the following way:

“We are a family of learners dedicated to growing excellence for all children and staff. In our family of schools, this is a non-negotiable. We aim to develop a strong sense of self and build pupil’s confidence, allowing them to be independent global citizens who develop life skills and achieve their full potential. We provide a safe and caring environment where children flourish and have the opportunity to build positive relationships, make reputable choices and be inspired to become life-long learners.”

We are an inclusive group of schools, which celebrate the social and cultural diversity of our children.

We have high expectations for our children academically and take equal care to develop their all-round abilities and personal confidence through a rich and exciting curriculum and a wide range of sporting and creative activities.

Parents and carers are an integral part of our school family and we strive to work with them to make positive contributions to our local community.

We are proud of our long history of school improvement and this continues to provide inspiration for us and sits alongside our absolute commitment to provide the best for schools in our trust and their communities.”

Trust governance, leadership and management

The Arbor Academy Trust is governed by a single board of trustees including both independent trustees unconnected with the founding schools alongside governors from the founding schools. The trustees have the range of important knowledge, skills and expertise needed to oversee an organisation of 1,500+ students, 228 and around £9m+ of public funding.

The CEO of the Trust is Mrs Maureen Okoye, who is the former Headteacher of Davies Lane, a National leader of Education (NLE), an Ofsted Lead Inspector, and in this role is responsible for the performance of the Trust schools and outcomes for its pupils as well as overseeing the trust’s legal, financial, governance and HR functions. Supporting Mrs Okoye are an Executive Principal, Jason Cook and two Headteachers, Lisa Bogle and Bronwen Chalmers.

The Trust has overall accountability to the Department for Education (DfE) but each individual school remains subject to individual Ofsted inspection.

Woodford Green, like the other schools in the Trust, would continue to have a Local Governing Body, with representation for parents, staff and the wider school community. Governors and Mr Prince would continue to decide how the school is run with the vast majority of decisions still made locally, the same as the Trust’s other schools, Davies Lane and Selwyn.

The school would also be able to put forward a Trustee with appropriate skills and expertise to join the Trust’s Board. It is worth noting that all Trustees are responsible for all schools, pupils and staff and so represent all schools not one school.

Mr Prince would be part of a leadership group with the other headteachers, to be responsible for developing and implementing Trust plans for school-to-school support and collaboration. (During the last year Mr Prince has already benefitted from part of the Trust leadership group as part of the support agreement.)

School funding will still be calculated and allocated on a school-by-school basis with each school contributing to the central costs of running the Trust, which would be kept as low as feasible. The Trust’s finances are subject to close scrutiny by the DfE’s Education Funding Agency and independently audited accounts are published. The Arbor Academy Trust would become the employer of Woodford Green staff.

To find out more about Arbor Academy Trust please visit <http://www.arboracademytrust.co.uk>

Key information about the Trust’s member schools

<i>Name of School</i>	Davies Lane Primary School	Selwyn Primary School
<i>Type of School</i>	4 form entry	3 form entry
<i>Age Range</i>	2 – 11	2 - 11
<i>Location</i>	Leytonstone E11	Highams Park E4
<i>Pupil Numbers and classes/year groups</i>	900	675
<i>Headteacher</i>	Bronwen Chalmers	Lisa Bogle
<i>Most Recent Ofsted</i>	Outstanding	Good

School management and operation after conversion and joining the Arbor Academy Trust

At Woodford Green, our pupils will continue to be taught by the same teachers in the same classrooms, wearing the same uniform. Over time children may notice changes in the way they learn and be able to access a wider range of opportunities, as we benefit from trust-wide initiatives to enhance teaching, learning and the curriculum.

The school name and identity will remain the same and we will retain control over the admissions policies and processes, which must be compliant with the national admissions code.

All staff would continue to work in our current school with the same responsibilities and terms and conditions as now. There would be opportunities for some staff to take on wider responsibilities across schools to enable the trust to function effectively and efficiently. Staff would also have access to enhanced professional development. There are no plans to make any posts redundant as a result of joining the trust.

The balance of risks

The Governing Body has had to weigh up the risks of converting to academy status and joining the Arbor Academy Trust versus the risks of continuing as a Local Authority maintained school.

The Governors have put to one side any views they may have on the Government's policy for schools to become academies and determined what is going to be best for the children and staff of Woodford Green Primary School. As there have been examples of ineffective and failed multi academy trusts the Governing Body has carried out a thorough due diligence of the risks of joining the Arbor Academy Trust. This has highlighted the strength of the Trust, particularly in impacting on pupil outcomes and school performance.

The Governing Body do not believe continuing as a stand-alone, small primary school within a Local Authority with diminishing support for its schools, is viable given the range of challenges the school is facing.

Therefore, the Governing Body believes joining the Arbor Academy Trust and converting to academy status is in the best interests of the school's pupils and staff. On July 9th the Governing Body voted in favour of this proposal, subject to the outcome of consultation.

Next steps

The Governing Body is consulting on the proposal from Tuesday, July 10th until Monday, September 24th.

Parent and staff meetings are being held on Wednesday, July 11th and Thursday, July 12th, for which provisional notice was given on July 2nd.

After the meetings the presentations and a summary of the questions asked and answers given will be published on the school's website. There will also be a survey of parents and staff after the meeting with a closing date for responses of September 24th, 2018.

In early October the Governing Body will then consider a report on the consultation and if satisfied with the outcome, will proceed with the proposal.

After that there would be a number of legal, regulatory and operational tasks to be completed by January 2019 and the transition would be carefully managed to ensure day-to-day running of the school is not affected.

Parents, carers and staff will be kept fully informed throughout.