

## ARBOR ACADEMY TRUST

### WOODFORD GREEN PRIMARY SCHOOL ACADEMY CONSULTATION

#### QUESTIONS & ANSWERS FROM PARENTS MEETINGS

##### **Introduction**

Consultation meetings on the proposal to join the Arbor Academy Trust were held for parents and carers of children attending Woodford Green Primary School. The meetings took place on Wednesday, July 11<sup>th</sup> and Thursday, July 12<sup>th</sup>.

This document is a summary of the questions asked at the meetings and the answers given. Where helpful, questions have been collated and additional information has been provided in response to the questions raised.

##### **Q1. Is there any extra money? Will the budget grow?**

Academies are funded on the same basis as Local Authority maintained schools: there is no additional funding apart from the conversion grant of £25k to cover the conversion costs. So, Woodford Green Primary School will be funded on the London Borough of Waltham Forest formula for primary schools as now.

However, the school will be able to make its budget go further by accessing the resources and services of the Arbor Academy Trust, which will be more cost-efficient through the economies of scale they can secure.

##### **Q2. Will the training for autism also cover other special needs? How will SEN improve?**

Woodford Green's SENCO has already been supported by the Arbor Academy Trust. SENCO this school year, as have other staff. If the school joins the Trust then the SENCO will be further supported. Teachers, Teaching Assistants and other staff will also benefit from the wider SEND training the Trust provides for its staff. This will enhance the school's provision to meet the needs of all its pupils.

##### **Q3. Is the autism unit (at Davies Lane) separate to the school or are the children integrated in the classroom?**

There is a separate unit, which is necessary to secure additional funding but the children are integrated into mainstream carefully to meet their particular needs.

##### **Q4. Are there any potential pitfalls? What would happen to the school if this didn't go ahead?**

There are two different pitfalls or areas of risk.

The first area of risk is continuing as a stand-alone, small primary school within a Local Authority with diminishing support for its schools when faced 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 second area of risk is in joining the wrong multi academy trust. Once a school becomes an academy and joins a trust it cannot revert to being a Local Authority maintained school and it is a complex process to leave one Trust to join another.

The governors are aware that there have been examples of ineffective and failed multi academy trusts. So, 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 has had to weigh up these two areas of risk, putting to one side any views they may have on the Government's policy for schools to become academies. They have focused on what is going to be best for the children and staff of Woodford Green Primary School.

The Governing Body do not believe that 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.

**Q5. How soon after the meeting in October will WGPS join Arbor Academy Trust?**

If the Governing Body decides to proceed with the proposal for Woodford Green to join the Arbor Academy Trust and convert to academy status, then the target date for conversion would be January 1<sup>st</sup> 2019. However, this is subject to completion of a range of legal and regulatory tasks.

**Q6. Why is the consultation document biased/one-sided? Why will there be no binding referendum/ballot?**

The Governing Body has the responsibility and authority to determine what is in the best interests of the school. 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, they have been considering carefully the future strategy for the school given the challenges the school faces in the context of government policy for schools and a changing educational landscape.

The proposal for Woodford Green to join the Arbor Academy Trust and convert to academy status to convert is a strong recommendation of the Governing Body and comes after two years of consideration and investigation.

Therefore, the purpose of consultation is to establish the views of the school's stakeholders including parents and carers on this proposal.

The consultation proposal sets out the reasons for and benefits of the proposal for Woodford Green to join the Arbor Academy Trust and convert to academy status. It also includes the risks of continuing as now and the risks of joining a multi academy trust.

The consultation includes a survey of all parents and carers and the Governing Body will consider the outcome of that survey alongside the survey of staff. If a majority of the

universe of parents/carers (based on the number of pupils on roll) and/or a majority of the universe of teachers and staff objected to the proposal then this would be considered a significant objection that the Governing Body would want to consider in making a final decision.

The project manager will write a consultation report which the Governing Body will consider in making their final decision in October 2018. Once the decision is made the consultation report will be published by the Governing Body on the schools website and submitted to the DfE.

Finally, the Academies Act 2010 sets out the requirements for the Governing Body to consult on the question of academy but does not stipulate how it should be done. A referendum or binding ballot is not required nor is it the practice of the vast majority of schools.

**Q7. What weren't parent governors elected on an academy mandate?**

The most recent parent governors were appointed without election because the number of parents that put themselves forward equalled the number of vacancies. The last elections of parent governors preceded the academy agenda.

It is worth noting that the Governing Body has only recently come to the collective view on the proposal for Woodford Green to join the Arbor Academy Trust and convert to academy status. It was only agreed by the Governing Body on July 9<sup>th</sup> 2018 so there was no academy mandate that prospective parent governors would have had to support or reject.

**Q8. How long will the non-negotiables be in place?**

The non-negotiables put on the table by the Governing Body have been agreed by the Arbor Academy Trust, not least because they are in place for the founding schools. So, any changes to non-negotiables would impact on all member schools and their Local Governing Bodies. The Trustees have no plans to change the way the Arbor Academy Trust is governed, led and managed but it is unrealistic to believe there will never be change given the fast-changing educational landscape. The Trustees have a responsibility to act in the best interests for all pupils.

**Q9. How will being part of an academy impact on the children?**

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 specific benefits for children of the school being part of the Trust include;

- Being taught by teachers using excellent practice developed with other teachers,
- Those pupils with additional needs receiving enhanced SEND provision,
- Learning through a broader and deeper curriculum,
- Wider range of learning and enrichment activities for pupils, and
- Continuity of staff as the school is more able to retain and attract the most capable staff.

**Q10. Where are the extra-curricular activities going to take place?**

The vast majority of extra-curricular activities will take place on at Woodford Green. As a small school with a small pool of staff and tight budgets there is a limit to the range of activities that can be offered. Being part of a larger Trust means access to greater resources to support extra-curricular activities.

Some activities such as sports competitions and music, drama and arts events will take place elsewhere but will be managed sensibly so as not to disrupt the school or inconvenience parents and carers unnecessarily.

**Q11. Are children in your academy under pressure to perform and experiencing mental health issues?**

Arbor Academy Trust does not apologise for expecting high academic standards which are so fundamental to progress of children at secondary school, in further education and in the world of work.

However, as its vision (below) makes clear the development of the whole child including their emotional health and well-being. There is a strong framework of support for all pupils including those experiencing pressure and stress. Pupils have participated in a wide range of activities including theatre productions, orchestras, choirs, arts event and sporting competitions.

*"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."*

So, pupils at Davis Lane and Selwyn are not under any inappropriate pressure to perform.

**Q12. Will the level of support remain the same? Is the level of education going to stay the same?**

The level of support the school will receive from Arbor Academy Trust will certainly continue and in some areas actually increase. The impact of their support over the last school year has been very clear with the Ofsted judgement of Good and the increase in 2018 Key Stage 2 outcomes for pupils. The Headteacher and CEO believe that further improvement is both achievable and the right of all children and staff.

**Q13. What will happen to the land?**

The London Borough of Waltham Forest will continue to own the freehold of the land. The Trust will enter into a 125 year lease with the Local Authority giving it the right to occupy and use the land and buildings. The lease has protections for the continuing use of the land and buildings for education and the Trust cannot sell off the land or change its use without the consent of London Borough of Waltham Forest.

**Q14. What is a MAT?**

The Trust will be a Company Limited By Guarantee with charitable exemption. This means the Trust must comply with both company and charity law and comply with its charitable Objects as set out in the Articles of Association (in simple terms - the rules of the Trust).

The Trust does not have shareholders and cannot pay dividends. Any surpluses must be retained to be spent in ways consistent with the charitable objects. The Trustees and Trust

Members are unpaid with the exception of the CEO. Their salary is published in the annual accounts.

It will have a Board of Trustees who are registered as directors at Companies House and Members who are listed in the Memorandum and Articles of Association.

The Trustees are accountable in four ways. First, to the Secretary of State who has the power to intervene in the Trust and/or terminate the Funding Agreement that allows the Trust to run schools. Second, to Ofsted which has the same rights of inspection. Third, the Trust is accountable under company law with responsibilities such as publishing audited accounts. Fourth, the Trustees are accountable under charity law.

**Q15. What have you not looked at working with Redbridge schools?**

Woodford Green is a London Borough of Waltham Forest maintained school and it is the Local Authority that is ultimately responsible for the school. It is the Local Authority that directed the school to collaborate with other schools and organised the support from Davis Lane (part of the Arbor Academy Trust), a school judged *Outstanding* by Ofsted and one of four teaching schools in the borough. Some of the support provided by Davis Lane to Woodford Green and other schools has been funded by the Local Authority.

It is worth noting that the London Borough of Redbridge has no statutory responsibility for Woodford Green.

The school has approached Redbridge schools to work collaboratively but the response has not been positive not least because Redbridge schools have their own partnership arrangements.

**Q16. Can the parents have an independent advisor like the Governing Body?**

The Governing Body have commissioned the support of a project manager to ensure that they follow the correct process for the possible academy conversion including consultation. The project manager also supported the due diligence carried out by the Governing Body.

The school will not be appointing an independent advisor to provide guidance to parents throughout the consultation. There are organisations that will support parents in this process but they will not be appointed by the school.