



## COCKWOOD PRIMARY SCHOOL



Reflection



Teamwork



Learning Journey



Perseverance



Grow and Succeed

January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017

To Parents/Carers

### **Consultation regarding Conversion to Academy Status**

I am writing to inform you that following the unanimous agreement of the governing board, Cockwood Primary School is now actively pursuing their conversion to academy status. An academy is a state school, funded directly by the Department of Education, rather than the Local Authority. If successful, we would aim to become an academy by September 2017.

The majority of schools in Devon are now becoming academies and since the last General Election, the government policy is clear that all schools will, at some point, join a multi-academy trust. This appears to be a cross-party mandate.

It is down to the staff and the management team that Cockwood Primary School has had excellent results over the last few years and has continued to manage their budget successfully, meaning that the school is in a strong position to negotiate terms with a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT).

The governors at Cockwood are totally committed to ensuring that the school continues to focus on meeting students' needs first, placing them at the heart of all decision-making and ensuring Cockwood continues to provide the very highest standards of teaching and learning.

The conversion to academy status will enable us to better utilise precious resources, set up systems of support that are appropriate for the children of Cockwood and with each school, continually improve teaching and learning.

We are very keen for you to share your views which you can do by:

- Submitting them in writing addressed to the Chair of Governors, Nick Tallamy, at the school.
- E-mailing us at [governors@cockwoodschool.co.uk](mailto:governors@cockwoodschool.co.uk) (please add "Academy Consultation" as the subject).
- Attending our Academy Consultation Evening on a date to be arranged in February 2017.

I am also available most days at drop-off and at pick-up to answer questions (where I can), that you might have.

After the consultation period, having considered all feedback, I will write again to keep you fully informed of all developments.

Very many thanks for your continuing support.

Yours sincerely

Nick Tallamy,  
Chair of Governors, Cockwood Primary School

## **ACADEMY CONVERSION – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

Please see a list of questions and answers below relating to the Academy conversion process.

### **What is an academy?**

Academies are publicly-funded schools that are independent of local authority control with greater autonomy given to the head teacher, staff and governing body. Academy head teachers and governors are able to use the freedoms this brings to innovate across all aspects of their work and to run their schools as they see fit to provide the best education for their pupils. This can take in the curriculum, discipline, pastoral care, staff development and assessment. They also have greater control over their budget, all of which comes directly to them, rather than a proportion being held back by the local authority.

Academies are required to follow the law and guidance on admissions, special educational needs and exclusions as if they were local authority maintained schools. Academies are required to have at least two parent governors.

### **What does the conversion process involve?**

The conversion process has been made as simple as possible for all schools. The key steps the school must take are all explained in the Department for Education's (DfE's) conversion guide. It may differ according to the type of school and who owns the buildings and land.

All schools converting must:

- Submit an expression of interest form.
- Submit an application form and hard signed copies of supporting documentation for approval and granting of an Academy Order.
- Have agreement to convert from the governing body (and foundation and trustees, if applicable).
- Hold a consultation with parents, pupils, teachers (including arranging for the undertaking of TUPE consultation), and the community.
- Commission a solicitor and begin talks with the local authority about any matters which it needs to action.
- Establish an academy trust as a company by registering with Companies House – this is done by the Memorandum and Articles.
- Open a new bank account for the trust to enable the academy to receive funding from the Education Funding Agency (EFA).
- Transfer, renew or procure new contracts, service level agreements, licences and purchase insurance as appropriate. This is done by the Commercial Transfer Agreement (CTA).
- Make arrangements for the continued use of the school land and premises.
- Confirm the support of another school.
- Agree its Funding Agreement with the Secretary of State.
- Transfer staff to the new academy.

Each converting school will have a named contact in the DfE to guide them through the process and arrange for the clearance of draft documents. Schools can seek further assistance from their named contact in the DfE.

### **How long will conversion take?**

The minimum time frame for straightforward applications is three to four months. It may take significantly longer if there are complicated issues relating to matters such as land or where a school has a PFI contract.

### **Do schools need to consult before converting?**

Yes. There is a statutory requirement for the governing body to consult with interested parties. Schools are free to choose how they wish to do this, and with whom to consult. Schools should consider involving local bodies or groups which have strong links with the school. There is no specified length of time for the consultation but it is important that interested groups, individuals or organisations have a fair chance to respond and ask questions. The consultation period must be completed before the Funding Agreement is signed by the Secretary of State.

### **Do schools have to cover the full cost to convert to an academy?**

No. A flat-rate grant of £25,000 is available. This may not cover the entire cost involved, but the expectation is that schools will devote some of their own resources to the process. To reduce potential legal costs the DfE has produced model legal documentation.

In exceptional circumstances (for example if the school is involved in a PFI contract and needs additional legal advice) support above this level may be agreed.

### **What is the role of the academy trust?**

An academy trust is a charitable company responsible for the running of the academy and has control over the land and other assets. It has a strategic role in running the academy, but delegates management of the school to the governors.

### **What is a chain?**

A chain is used to describe a partnership between academies that have made a commitment to support each other and raise educational standards across the partnership. This could involve a mixture of different types of academy such as primary, secondary or special academies.

### **Why join a chain?**

Being part of a chain enables schools to benefit from the freedoms of academy status, work together, share expertise and improve standards. All schools are eligible to apply to convert in a chain but at least one school in the chain must be "performing well". The application process is similar to that of schools applying as standalone academies. Approval is not automatic, each school's application is considered on its merits.

Any school that performs well and plans to become an academy has to include plans to work with a weaker school on conversion to academy status and these plans can be complemented or strengthened by establishing or working with other schools in a more formal academy chain.

Some schools will be capable of converting alone, but may wish to benefit from academy status by working in partnership rather than going it alone. Converting in a chain allows schools to support one another once they are academies, sharing resources, experience and good practice. Such an approach is particularly valuable to small primary schools where joining together in a chain allows economies of scale to be achieved.

## **What is a multi-academy trust (MAT)?**

A MAT is one academy trust which governs a group of schools through a single set of members and directors. Each school will continue to have an advisory body which the MAT can choose to constitute as a local governing body to which certain functions can be delegated. The MAT will ultimately be accountable and responsible for the performance of schools in the chain.

Funding to the schools within the MAT continues to be allocated on an individual academy basis. Funding is governed through a master funding agreement between the Secretary of State and the MAT and a supplemental agreement between the Secretary of State and each school within the MAT.

Having a single trust governing all schools results in there only being one employer for all staff which allows the moving of resources through schools in the chain.

Some MATs operate so that, to the extent that this is permitted through the funding agreement, some of the individual school's budget is combined and used to fund shared services such as contracts. This helps the chain to achieve economies of scale and can be particularly beneficial for primary schools.

## **Why would a school want to convert as part of a MAT?**

A MAT, as a single legal entity, allows schools to achieve strong collaboration and to use this collaboration and accountability to drive up school standards. Where there are underperforming schools in the chain, representation on the trust can ensure there is sufficient challenge and support to turn those schools around. The MAT can also agree to delegate as much or as little power down to the advisory bodies or local governing bodies of the schools involved, which again allows each MAT to define where power should sit according to the circumstances of the schools involved.

Having the MAT as employer of staff also allows flexibility around sharing resources to meet the needs of the individual schools involved. It can help build better staff development across the chain by providing scope for academies to develop their staff with exchange schemes and provide more job opportunities and shared professional development.

The MAT can also provide a clear, consistent strategy and vision across a group of schools working together. MATs can often negotiate contracts and services that achieve much better value for money than if each school was to negotiate individually.

## **What funding will be available to help schools become academies and how can schools claim the money?**

Schools may incur costs such as obtaining legal advice on the documents necessary for setting up the academy, advice on the process for transferring staff, and new signage and stationery. As a contribution to these costs a flat-rate grant of £25,000 will be payable to the school's bank account once the school has secured an Academy Order.

## **Will schools be worse off financially if they convert to academies?**

The general principle is that schools are no worse off as academies than they would have been as maintained schools. Academies are funded on a like-for-like basis with local authority maintained schools, with the addition of funding for services that the authority provides free of charge to its schools.

## **Will a school get more money as an academy?**

Academies receive the same level of per-pupil funding as they would receive from the local authority as a maintained school plus additions to cover the services that are no longer provided for them by the local authority.

The Government is clear that becoming an academy should not bring about a financial advantage or disadvantage to a school. However, academies have greater freedom on how they use their budgets, alongside the other freedoms that they enjoy.

### **How will the role of governors change if we became an academy?**

The principles and responsibilities of governance are the same in all academies as they are in maintained schools but the governing body has greater autonomy.

The governing body can continue to delegate functions to committees, the principal or any other holder of an executive office. Academies can choose how many committees to have and decide what to delegate to them. For example, a large secondary school may need to have more committees than a small primary school.

### **What will the responsibilities of the governing body be?**

The governing body will be responsible for establishing the academy trust. The academy trust (a charitable company limited by guarantee) will then enter into a Funding Agreement with the Secretary of State for the running of the academy. The academy trust (made up of members) has a strategic role in running the academy and will be responsible for appointing the governors (also known as directors or trustees) to the governing body of the academy. It is the governing body that manages the academy on behalf of the members of the academy trust.

The key responsibilities are to:

- ensure the quality of educational provision
- challenge and monitor the performance of the academy
- manage the academy trust's finances and property; and employ staff.

It will be for the members of the governing body of the school to decide and agree, in discussion with the Secretary of State, who among them would wish to be members of the academy trust and which of them would wish to be governors of the academy trust (note that it is possible to be both a member and governor).