

# The Oak Partnership

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## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is our collective vision?**

*We have spent much time considering our shared vision and values and a document is also enclosed which outlines these.*

### **What is the proposal?**

*The proposal is for our three primary schools and one special school to form a partnership called a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) and for the schools to convert to Academy status.*

*The four founding members of the Trust, in alphabetical order will be*

- *Blackbrook Community Primary School*
- *Ruishton C of E Primary School*
- *Selworthy Special School*
- *West Monkton C of E Primary School*

*The four schools have been working closely together for some time and have already benefitted from this collaboration and partnership.*

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

*To shape the provision to meet the future needs of our children, families and communities based on a local and collaborative proposal of working together and building on existing good practice.*

*We will remain in charge of our own destiny as the government has a goal to encourage all schools to be academies or working towards academy status.*

*The Local Authority (LA) capacity is diminishing. Pooling the resources of a number of schools means we can re-create some of the services once received from SCC. The Oak Partnership will also give us the capacity to hold each other to account.*

*To develop the expertise of all staff to further improve effectiveness and outcomes for children.*

*To generate financial efficiencies to invest back into the classroom for the benefit of the children.*

### **What is an Academy Order?**

*An Academy Order in respect of a school is an order for the purpose of enabling the school to be converted into an Academy. A maintained school is "converted into" an Academy if Academy arrangements are entered into in relation to the school or an educational institution that replaces it.*

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## **What is an Academy and what is a Multi-Academy Trust?**

An Academy is an independent state school that is run by an Academy Trust. The Academy Trust enters into an agreement with the Secretary of State for Education that sets out its responsibilities and accountabilities for the effective running of the Academy. The Academy is funded directly by the Government and is no longer run by the Local Authority. The Academy Trust is given charitable exemption, which means it must operate much like a charity. A Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) has two or more academies as members.

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

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

## **How would this proposal benefit our school?**

We believe that stronger partnership between schools that share a similar vision, ethos and values and the same commitment to raising standards, would help our schools in a number of important ways, including;

- extending learning opportunities and activities for all pupils
- enriching the curriculum through partnership working and shared resources
- sharing excellent practice in teaching and learning
- enhancing the professional development of teaching and support staff
- building mutual support and accountability between the Headteachers and between the Governors

We believe that we can bring enhanced benefits and opportunities to parents and pupils by formalising these existing working relationships.

## **How will the children benefit?**

If the schools convert to Academy status and establish the MAT, the children will still wear the same uniforms as before and will be taught in the same classrooms by the same teaching staff. So they won't notice any immediate difference. Each school will continue to strive for a great education for all our children.

However, in time the children may notice changes and improvements in the way that they learn, mostly as a result of training opportunities given to teaching staff to innovate and improve the children's education. In particular, the children will benefit from the sharing of excellent and innovative practice in teaching and learning between the partner schools. They will also have wider opportunities to learn new skills and experience new activities and have access to better resources.

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## **What do parents need to know?**

*The school is not proposing to change its character and will continue to look, feel and be the same as it is now.*

*The School Leadership Team and Governing Body will continue to run the school daily as they do now, and parents will continue to be represented on the Local Governing Committee.*

*The name of the school will not change and the school will not change its admissions policy.*

*Children with special needs will continue to receive additional support in the way they do now.*

*Our local schools will continue to work very closely together for each other as well as your children and will be provided with more support to help them become even better.*

*The Multi-Academy Trust arrangements will share some central services across the schools which will help them be more efficient and make sure that funding is focused on teaching, learning and support for children.*

*The Multi-Academy Trust will work very closely and co-operatively with local partners, including other schools, community groups and organisations, and the local authority.*

## **What will be the impact on staff?**

*Currently, all staff are employed by Somerset County Council. After conversion, all staff will be employed by The Oak Partnership. Staff are legally protected to transfer under the same employment terms and conditions, including pensions.*

*Being part of the MAT will provide greater opportunities for career progression and development. Already staff are working together on a range of teaching, learning, curriculum and pupil support projects. The schools will have joint INSET days to enable the sharing of great teaching, resources and best practices to promote exceptional pupil development.*

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

*The Governing Body of the school.*

## **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.*

## **How will the MAT and the Academy schools be run?**

*The MAT will have a Board of twelve Directors made up of a mixture of current Governors, Executive Headteacher and people with particular skills and expertise to help it run efficiently, effectively and compliantly.*

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Although the Board have a number of legal and regulatory powers it delegates many of its powers to Local Governing Committees. Local Governing Committees would continue to have a mixture of representatives from parent, staff and local communities.

Each Headteacher would still be responsible for running their own school. The four Headteachers along with the Executive Headteacher (CEO) together form a Strategic Leadership Group to develop plans for partnership working and collaboration.

## **What information is there about the other schools in the proposed Trust?**

<i>Name of school</i>	<i>Blackbrook Primary School</i>	<i>Ruishton C of E Primary School</i>	<i>Selworthy Special School</i>	<i>West Monkton C of E Primary School</i>
<i>Age Range</i>	<i>4 - 11</i>	<i>4 - 11</i>	<i>4 - 19</i>	<i>4 - 11</i>
<i>Further Provision</i>	<i>Breakfast and After School Clubs</i>	<i>Woodlands Pre School Ruishton Hub</i>		<i>Little Herons Nursery Kingfishers Wrap Around Care</i>
<i>Location</i>	<i>Ashbourne Crescent Taunton TA1 2RA</i>	<i>Newlands Road Ruishton Taunton TA3 5JZ</i>	<i>Selworthy Road Taunton TA2 8HD</i>	<i>Bridgwater Rd Bathpool Taunton TA2 8FT</i>
<i>Pupil Numbers</i>	<i>243 1 form entry</i>	<i>193 1 form entry</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>407 2 form entry</i>
<i>Headteacher</i>	<i>Barney Rycroft</i>	<i>Chris Kamin</i>	<i>Mark Ruffett</i>	<i>Ian Robinson</i>
<i>Most Recent Ofsted</i>	<i>Good April 2018</i>	<i>Good June 2018</i>	<i>Good December 2017</i>	<i>Good March 2018</i>

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## **What is the role of the MAT Chief Executive Officer?**

*They are the Accounting Officer for the trust and the strategic support for schools. The CEO is the key contact for the Regional Schools Commissioner and the DfE and acts as the point of first contact to ensure schools are not distracted from their core purpose of teaching and learning.*

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

*Not necessarily, Academies have more freedom to try different things in the curriculum and make sure that what is taught is relevant to our pupils and their specific needs. The Academy would still need to demonstrate a broad and balanced curriculum.*

## **Would the Academy have to change its name, logo or uniform?**

*No, none of the schools will be changing their name, uniform or logo.*

## **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.*

## **As an Academy, will it still work with Somerset County Council?**

*Academies are independent of the local authority. However, we would continue to work with SCC, other local schools and other local partners, such as other Trusts and Teaching Alliances.*

## **Will we get more money as an Academy?**

*Academies receive the same amount of per-pupil funding as they would receive from the Local Authority as a maintained school. The whole of the school budget would come direct to the school from central Government allowing the school to control the whole of their spending. As part of a Multi-Academy Trust, we may also achieve greater efficiencies over time, through increased buying power and joint commissioning of services; such as school equipment, catering and cleaning. The schools are in the process of preparing future budgets and are confident of the proposed MAT's financial viability.*

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

*An Academy is governed by the rules and regulations for charitable trusts. We will be required to produce and file accounts and Directors cannot be paid. There will be robust systems with an audit conducted by an external independent auditor.*

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## **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. In addition The Oak Partnership has secured a MAT Development and Innovation Fund of £99,700 which supports any upfront costs required to establish our Trust.

## **How will admissions to the Academy school be affected?**

The application process for parents and carers will remain the same. The MAT will become the admitting authority for the four schools but each would have its own admissions policy as now. Any future policy changes would need to be clear and fair and in line with the admissions law and the School Admissions Code. The Local Authority will continue to have responsibility for making sure there are sufficient school places locally and to coordinate the admissions process for all schools.

## **Will our responsibilities in relation to SEND and exclusions change?**

No. Responsibilities as an Academy in relation to Special Educational Needs & Disability (SEND) and exclusions will be just the same as they are now.

## **Can a child with an Education, Health and Care Plan nominate an Academy as their school of choice?**

Yes. Schools converting to Academy status can retain the admissions criteria they currently use. These arrangements and related processes must at all times comply with the School Admissions Code.

## **Will Academies be free from the Ofsted inspection regime?**

No. Academies are inspected in the same way as maintained schools. Each school will continue to be inspected individually. The performance of all schools will continue to be monitored and if there are signs of deterioration, or other factors likely to cause concern, these could trigger an inspection.

## **What is the process to become an Academy?**

The four schools established a working group of Governors and Headteachers and, over the past years, have been exploring MAT status.

In March 2018 the four schools were awarded their Academy Order from the Regional Schools Commissioner.

All four Governing Bodies are now consulting on the proposals with parents, pupils, staff and unions. Governing Bodies must consider the responses to the consultation before signing any Funding Agreement.

## **What date would the Academy open?**

The proposal subject to approval from the Department for Education is for The Oak Partnership to form and the four schools to convert to academy status on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2019.

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