

Stakeholder Consultation on converting to Academy status and subsequently joining Wellsway Multi Academy Trust

The Governing Body of Saltford School established a Strategic Direction Group (SDG) to look at all the models of collaboration available to Saltford School in response to significant changes in the educational landscape. After thorough research which considered many different models of collaboration, and meetings with the Bath & Wells Multi Academy Trust and Wellsway Multi Academy Trust (WMAT), the SDG has concluded that it is in the best interests of pupils, parents and other stakeholders to apply to convert to become an academy and join WMAT.

At their meeting on Wednesday 13th January 2016 the Governing Body voted in favour of initiating the consultation with our key stakeholders and submitting an application for an academy order to convert the school to an academy and to join WMAT. An academy order would confirm whether the Department for Education (DfE) was, in principle, supportive of this option. This is not a final decision. The decision whether or not to proceed will depend on the outcome of the consultation process and on the conditions negotiated with WMAT in conjunction with the Bath and Wells Diocese.

The consultation process will begin by providing information via the attached Academy Conversion – Frequently Asked Questions and Answers document in order to inform stakeholders about academies, multi-academy trusts (MATs) and about the opinion of the Governing Body. Stakeholders are invited to submit comments and questions and the responses to this consultation will be used to further assess the case for proceeding with academy conversion and joining WMAT.

The Governing Body is currently seeking the views of:

- Pupils, parents and carers
- Staff and their union representatives
- Partner schools
- The local community
- Other interested parties

How you can contribute your views:

Consultation will last for six weeks, concluding on 11 March 2016, so that everyone has time to consider the issues properly and, if they wish, to express their views using any of the following methods:

- Email: governors@saltford.bathnes.sch.uk

- Letter – marked ‘Private and Confidential – Academy Proposal Consultation’ and addressed to Clerk to the Governing Body, Saltford Primary School
- A drop-in consultation evening for parent/carers – to be held in the school library on 8th February 2016 from 3:30 - 7:00pm

Only once all stakeholder comments and representations have been collated and considered will the Governing Body decide whether or not to pursue academy status and join WMAT. We welcome all of your comments via the channels listed above by Friday 11 March 2016.

Thank you.



Miss D Elliott
Headteacher



Steve Glavin
Chair Of Governors

Academy Conversion

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

This document has been specially prepared by the Governing Body to inform stakeholders about academies, MATs and the current intentions of the Governing Body of Salford School. The questions are grouped into the following sections:

- A. General Questions about Academies
- B. Consultation and Decision-Making Procedures
- C. Salford School and Academies
- D. Governance and Accountability Arrangements
- E. Impact on Pupils and Parents
- F. Miscellaneous Questions

A. GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT ACADEMIES

1. What is an academy?

Academies are schools that are state-funded and state-governed, but are not under the direct control of the Local Education Authority (LEA) and so have more independence over what they teach, how they operate and how they spend their budget. All academies are charities and therefore are entirely non-profit making.

2. What is a multi-academy trust (MAT)?

A MAT is a group of two or more academy schools working in a legally agreed formal collaboration called an academy trust. The MAT is the legal employer for all staff and determines a number of common practices and procedures across the MAT, whilst still encouraging each academy to have its own individual identity. MATs are usually run by an Executive Headteacher (or similar title) with a Headteacher or Head of School in each member academy.

3. Where are the other local academies and MATs?

Ten of the thirteen secondary schools in Bath and North East Somerset (B&NES) are academies; all three B&NES special schools are academies (and one has set up a MAT). A number of B&NES primary schools have become academies but many more are likely to do so over the next year. Both the LEA and the Bath and Wells Diocese are strongly encouraging primary schools to establish formal collaborative arrangements with other schools.

4. What is the position nationally on academies?

The Labour government introduced the first academy schools in 2002. At the time, academies were only for long-term under-achieving secondary schools in inner city areas and for brand-new secondary schools in areas where there was a shortage of high achieving schools. They were sponsored by charitable organisations such as religious bodies, or by entrepreneurs and companies.

The Conservative-led coalition government moved quickly after the election in 2010 to offer academy status to all good and outstanding schools and introduced the free schools programme (legally a free school is an academy).

At the start of September 2015, over 5,000 schools had become academies and a further 782 had applied for conversion. This represents around two thirds of all secondary schools and about a fifth of primary schools.

The Government has repeatedly said that it hopes all schools will become academies.

B. CONSULTATION AND DECISION-MAKING

5. Whose decision is it whether or not we become an academy?

The decision to apply to become an academy lies with the school's Governing Body. The decision to accept or reject the application lies with the DfE and the Regional School Commissioner for the South-West. As we are a Church of England school, we also need the consent of the Diocesan Board of Education to proceed.

6. Is everything already decided?

No. Applying, or even having the application accepted in principle, does not automatically mean that Salford School will become an academy. As outlined in the timetable below, there is a period of roughly four months for further development, consultation and consideration of the issues. At any point up to the signing of the Funding Agreement, the Governing Body or the DfE could decide to stop the process.

7. Who will the Governing Body be consulting?

The Governing Body will be consulting with all staff at the school, parents and various other stakeholders such as B&NES LEA, local schools, St Mary's Church and the Diocese.

8. How will you be consulting? How can I share my views?

We will be holding a drop-in consultation evening on 8th February 2016 from 3:30-7:00pm where the Governing Body and Headteacher will be available to listen to your views and answer any further questions that you may have.

You can also write to, or email, the Governing Body at any time at governors@salford.bathnes.sch.uk. Please put 'Academy Consultation' in the subject line in the email or on the front of the envelope, which can then be delivered to the school office.

9. What is the view of B&NES Council?

B&NES is strongly encouraging all of its schools to establish strong collaborative partnerships with other schools. It is neutral on the particular form of that partnership. It is keen to retain the sense of a 'family of schools' with no school isolated. For many years Saltford School has been part of the B&NES family of schools and we have worked closely with the LEA over a number of issues. There is no desire on the part of governors or staff to break this connection.

10. What is the view of the Diocese of Bath and Wells?

The Diocese of Bath and Wells is also strongly encouraging all Church of England schools (which represent about half of the primary schools in B&NES) to form sustainable local partnerships. The Diocese has set up its own MAT, which already includes ten primary schools with more approved to join in the near future. Saltford School Governing Body considered the option of joining that trust but felt that it would be better for Saltford School to join a MAT which has schools in our locality. We do know, however, that the Diocese welcomes our intention to progress to a MAT.

11. What will you do with any responses you get?

The responses will be reviewed by the SDG, and therefore will be a factor in the decision making process. Responses will be made to each question raised either directly, or through a newsletter, and an updated Q&A document that will be hosted on the school's website on the Academy Consultation page located here: <http://www.saltford.bathnes.sch.uk/aboutus/academy.htm>.

12. The question I want to ask is not in this Q&A document. How can I ask my question and get an answer?

We will be holding a drop-in consultation session on 8th February 2016 from 3:30-7:00pm. Please come along and ask any questions that you have. We will update this Q&A document as new questions come in. Alternatively, comments and questions can be submitted through email or by letter as described above.

C. SALTFFORD SCHOOL AND ACADEMIES

13. Which academy trust does the Governing Body want to join?

Saltford School Governing Body is consulting to decide whether to join Wellsway Multi Academy Trust. This conclusion comes after careful consideration of the only other viable alternative, the Bath & Wells MAT.

14. Why do the Senior Leadership Team and Governing Body think that it is in the best interests of the school to join a MAT? And why now?

PULL Factors:

Converting to an academy and joining WMAT would be positive with a number of benefits and improvements because:

- It would give us more flexibility and creativity to develop the curriculum that we provide because we would not be obliged to follow every detail of the national curriculum; it would allow us to continue to teach in the way that we think is best. The new curriculum from the DfE introduced from September 2014 gives those schools with academy status the freedom to continue to offer a value based curriculum, designed to be engaging, relevant and appropriate to the needs of the children whilst promoting and maintaining the very high standards achieved by the school. In conjunction with WMAT, Saltford School would be free to continue to develop innovative approaches that enhance children's skills and aptitudes alongside their expanding knowledge in an 'all through school' environment (i.e. in an organisation such as WMAT that offers a 4-19 educational phase progression). At the same time safeguards would be put into place to protect the important Christian ethos and identity of the school.
- It would give us responsibility for more of our finances. As an academy, Saltford School could use its money to buy-in the services that it wants and uses. WMAT is a single legal entity, promoting strong collaboration among member schools and accountability to drive up standards and quality. It can negotiate contracts and services that achieve much better value for money than each school negotiating individually. This means that more of the school's funding can be focused upon teaching and learning.
- It would enable us to build stronger relationships and partnerships with key local educational organisations.
- It would enable our quality of education to extend beyond the 400 pupils who attend Saltford School because being an academy would allow greater sharing of resources and expertise. This is a unique opportunity to join a progressive MAT which includes two secondary schools (Wellsway School and Sir Bernard Lovell School), Aspire Academy (behaviour support), the Bath Studio School (specialising in creative and media-related industries), the IKB Studio School (specialising in science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and St John's Church of England Primary School. Joining WMAT would improve the important transition from the primary phase to the secondary phase of a child's education and has the potential to raise standards in all schools in WMAT. The move to become an academy within WMAT would provide the widest range of opportunities for all staff, parents and governors we may ever be offered – a 'one off' opportunity in a very local context.
- Joining WMAT would not prevent us from working in partnership with the LEA. We would be able to continue that relationship in the areas that we consider most beneficial for the school.

- Staff would benefit from being part of a larger organisation because there would be more career opportunities within that organisation and more home-grown opportunities for professional development. Both of these things are good for staff, which in turn means that they are good for pupils.

PUSH Factors

There are several factors that are pushing us (and other schools) towards academisation:

- The number of academies is steadily growing and government policy is likely to be continued over the lifetime of the current Parliament.
- Many conversations are taking place across B&NES amongst schools trying to work out how best to align themselves within formal partnerships.
- School funding has reduced over the lifetime of the present Parliament. The Institute for Fiscal Studies estimates that funding per pupil will fall by about 8% over the next 4-5 years which means that further collaboration and sharing of resources with other schools will become even more important.
- Continuing reductions in Local Authority budgets means that B&NES will be able to provide less for the schools in its jurisdiction. Schools must find alternative sources of support that the LEA is no longer able to provide.
- The new education law that will come into force in 2016 will require the Secretary of State for Education to convert any school which 'fails' its Ofsted inspection into an academy, as well as other schools that are deemed to be coasting and not improving. Although these provisions do not affect Saltford School, they may affect other schools in B&NES who would then be looking for a local MAT to sponsor them.

For all of the above reasons, both the LEA and the Diocese are urging all B&NES schools to form strong, sustainable collaborative arrangements (such as MATs) with other schools. There is a risk that failure to act in a timely fashion may mean we have less choice about the MAT that we join.

15. Why would it not be better to remain with B&NES?

Government policy in recent years has steadily reduced the role and funding of local authorities in education. There is no sign that this historic trend will stop or go into reverse; the 'austerity' programme will affect local authorities even more than schools over the next four years. As set out in previous questions, B&NES is actively encouraging schools to form new structures and arrangements.

16. If the proposal to join WMAT goes ahead when would it all happen?

The timetable could look like this:

- January 2016:
 - Application submitted to become an academy

- Formal consultation process with key stakeholders including staff, parents and the wider community

Note that submitting an application does not commit Saltford School to becoming an academy and joining WMAT.

- March 2016:
 - Approval in principle received from the DfE
 - Regular meeting of Saltford School Governing Body and its Strategic Direction Group to review responses to consultation and any other developments relating to the academisation process.
- April – May 2016
 - Ongoing discussions and preparations finalising such matters as:
 - Saltford School's role on the Trust Board
 - The articles of association of the Trust
 - The transfer of staff to the new employer
- May 2016
 - Meeting of the Governing Body to finally decide to convert to an academy and join WMAT

If all these matters have been addressed satisfactorily then a Funding Agreement will be signed with the DfE – this is the legally binding contract between the Trust and the Government. It sets out the framework in which the academy has to operate and when the Government can intervene in the running of the Trust. Once signed the decision for Saltford School to become an Academy will be a binding agreement.

- June – July 2016
 - If the Funding Agreement has been signed, Saltford School becomes an academy and our staff transfer their employment to the Trust
 - The school would be called Saltford Church of England Primary School

17. Is it possible to withdraw from the MAT and go back to being an LEA-maintained school?

The Governing Body does not anticipate that conversion back from an academy to an LEA-maintained school would be feasible. Once the funding agreement is signed there is a legally binding agreement between the Secretary of State and the academy, and termination would require a seven year notice period. Although technically it may be possible to reverse the agreements, since LEA support is diminishing, there may be no organisation to whose control we could return by the time such a process was completed.

Even though conversion to an academy is effectively an irreversible process, in principle it is possible to obtain the support of the MAT Board of Directors to withdraw from the MAT. The school could then attempt to join another MAT or potentially exist as an independent academy. The Governing Body does not envisage circumstances where this course of action would be pursued because if

Salford School does become a part of WMAT, we will be absolutely committed to ensuring that our relationship with WMAT develops and flourishes.

D. IMPACT ON PUPILS AND PARENTS

18. Will my child's education at Salford School be better or worse?

When the SDG considered all of the options that are available to Salford School, the principle concern was to recommend a strategy that would provide the best outcomes for current and future pupils. The Governing Body is convinced that converting to an academy and joining WMAT will offer children a better education than that which would be available through any other strategy, including doing nothing and remaining under LEA control.

Salford School has an excellent record of recruiting, developing and retaining high quality staff. As WMAT grows, there will be a larger, but still tight-knit, group of staff who can share ideas and collaborate on initiatives. In a tightening financial situation, we will be better placed to make sure our financial and other resources are targeted on improving the education of our pupils.

19. My child has special educational needs. I am concerned that this might mean changes for the worse.

The motivation for the proposed changes is securing and improving the standard of education that the school is able to provide to all children. The Governing Body is not aware of any reason why the educational experience offered to any group should not be maintained and improved through joining WMAT. There is no reason why children with special educational needs should experience negative changes.

All academies must comply with the legally binding Code of Practice on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and that is the 'safeguard' that all pupils and parents will continue to have.

20. What will change if we become an academy and what will stay the same?

The educational experience which children will experience would continue to improve through initiatives that are developed or supported by the teaching staff at Salford School. Being an academy means that Salford School would be able to work with WMAT to implement a curriculum that it feels will offer the greatest potential for learning and development, without enforced implementation of new National Curricula from the DfE, as discussed in question 14.

There are no plans to change the school uniform or any other day-to-day arrangements, although inset days would be co-ordinated across WMAT.

21. Does that mean that nothing will ever change?

No one can – or should – say that nothing will ever change. Since it moved to its present site in 1962, there have been many changes at Salford School. The next

change will be the building of our six new classrooms – the plans should be ready to share around the end of February. Being an academy gives us the opportunity to change or develop more aspects of the school but, just because we can change, does not mean we will. If there is a need to make significant changes to the running of the school, staff, parents and pupils will be consulted.

22. How many other schools will be in WMAT in years to come?

There is currently no set limit on the number of schools that can become part of a MAT. However, WMAT intends to remain a small, locally based trust. The vision of WMAT Board of Directors is that all schools within the trust will be located within a reasonable driving distance of the hub school, Wellsway, so that school-to-school support is possible.

23. Will it be harder for local families to get their children into Saltford School?

Conversion to an academy should not influence the admissions process because all academies have to comply with the legally binding Code of Practice on School Admissions in exactly the same way as state maintained schools. Academies are still required to comply with the relevant codes in respect of admissions, exclusions and special education needs.

In terms of administering the application process for school places, the school will almost certainly continue to use B&NES' services for admissions.

E. GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY ARRANGEMENTS

24. How are MATs governed and run?

Saltford School has the opportunity to join an academy trust that is already established and one that brings a commitment to excellence, quality of leadership and vision to the running of other local schools. This means that WMAT would support the school in becoming an academy without the need for the school to establish a separate Charitable Trust and a Limited Liability company. The school would still have a governing body, but it would be accountable to the Trust rather than the LEA, whilst remaining accountable to the Diocese.

MATs usually have three layers of governance to ensure accountability and scrutiny:

Level 1:

First of all there are the Members of the Company. Members are sometimes likened to shareholders (but as a charity they do not own the company or receive money from it). Members can be individuals or named bodies such as a diocese, or a local teaching school. Although they are ultimately responsible for all of the schools in the MAT, they have very limited functions, although in the event of a crisis they would probably be called upon to act. Members vest the strategic functions of the MAT in the hands of Directors.

Level 2:

The strategic governance of the MAT is the responsibility of the Board of Directors (who are also known as Trustees). Academy boards usually have a representative mix of people with a composition similar to that of a regular school's governing body.

In WMAT there are 12 directors. Individuals become directors through appointment, nomination or co-option. Outside bodies, as well as the Members, are able to appoint or nominate members; the Chief Executive Officer is automatically a Director. Directors are able to co-opt people onto the Board to ensure that there is the right mix of skills and experience. The present Board of Directors is fortunate in having members who are, or who have been, senior figures within local and central education, in higher education, in finance and human resources. The Diocese of Bath & Wells is well represented on the WMAT Board with three approved directors. The Diocesan Director of Education is a Member of the company.

Level 3:

Usually in MATs, each school has its own local governing body (LGB) that will focus on issues pertaining to its own school. Those LGBs would have a similar composition as Saltford School's current Governing Body i.e. parents, staff, Headteacher and church etc. As such, we do not envisage any changes to the composition of the current Governing Body.

25. How are the accountability and the competence of the MAT assured?

Academies are still very accountable. Although they have more autonomy than schools under the control of the LEA, they arguably have higher levels of accountability.

The Chief Executive Officer is accountable to the Board of Directors/Trustees and to the DfE through the Regional Schools Commissioner for the South West. The Board of Directors must report annually to the Members and must publish annual accounts as well as a report on their stewardship of the MAT over the previous year.

Individual academies are subject to Ofsted inspections and, under the regulations governing inspections, the MAT itself can also come under the scrutiny of Ofsted. If standards in any of the academies within a MAT are falling, the MAT can be challenged and scrutinised by the DfE through the system of Regional School Commissioners.

The Academies Financial Handbook governs the financial conduct of academies and the MAT. Budgets and accounts have to be submitted to the Education Funding Agency. The accounts have to be audited externally by independent auditors. Annual accounts and all details of directors have to be submitted to Companies House.

26. What happens when the present governors and senior staff move on?

The Governing Body believes that by joining WMAT, we would be setting up the kind of organisation that capable staff and trustees will want to join. The Governing Body believes that there will always be a strong pool of talent and experience on which to draw. There are specified periods of office for all the directors/trustees and any member of the LGB, with clear rules about how replacements are appointed.

In the case of senior staff, being part of a larger MAT means that there would be a large pool of teachers who are already experienced in our way of working and already share our ethos and who would potentially be able to step up to fill any vacancies. New staff would, of course, be appointed on the basis of ability.

F. MISCELLANEOUS QUESTIONS

27. If Saltford School becomes an academy, how will it affect other schools?

Saltford School's decision to academise and join WMAT is not likely to affect other primary schools, which are, in any case, considering their own future options and acting accordingly. It is possible that other local schools might express an interest in joining WMAT.

Saltford School's active participation in Keynsham Area Family of Schools (KAFOS) will continue and is encouraged by the WMAT Board.

28. How will becoming an academy affect the school's finances?

In LEA controlled schools, the LEA provides the school's budget and retains a proportion of that budget to fund some central functions. Maintained schools also purchase some services from the LEA such as payroll services, financial management systems and buildings maintenance. Schools then choose how to spend the rest of their budget. The vast majority of a school's budget is spent on staffing and essential services, such as utilities.

Academies receive their entire budget directly from central government from the Education Funding Agency without any 'top slice' being taken by an LEA. An academy is then free to choose how to purchase services. Academies can still opt to buy services from the LEA if they choose. Academies are therefore responsible for securing best-value in the procurement of a wide-range of supplies and services. A MAT is funded by a contribution of a certain percentage of the participating schools' budgets. As larger organisations, MATs should be able to realise economies of scale that lead to savings for individual schools, through such activities as joint purchasing and procurement. The SDG carefully reviewed the services that WMAT would provide in return for the contribution and established that it does provide good value for money compared to what is currently provided by the LEA. Further detailed analyses will be completed prior to signing the funding agreement that commits Saltford School to academisation.

29. What financial 'buffer' would exist if the LEA is no longer supporting the school?

Academies are not allowed to run a deficit budget without having in place a remedial action plan which will eliminate the deficit. Any academy which opens with a transferred deficit will need to agree, at the earliest opportunity, with the Education Funding Agency, a plan to repay the deficit in instalments from the annual budget. This is comparable to the way that schools, which find themselves in financial difficulty, have to agree a recovery plan with their LEA. Saltford School is not currently running a deficit budget.

30. Will the school be in a more secure financial position as an academy in WMAT?

When the SDG assessed options available to Saltford School, an improved financial position was not the principal concern; however, to ensure that the chosen strategy was feasible and sustainable, the financial implications were investigated and continue to be thoroughly examined.

The Governing Body expects the school to be in a better financial position as a result of becoming an academy and joining WMAT. This is because money, that is held centrally by the LEA, would come directly to the school and the school would benefit from some of the services that WMAT is able to provide at a lower effective cost than the LEA. However, the school would also have to pay for some services which are currently 'free' or not currently required. Neither Saltford School nor WMAT are profit-making organisations, and any financial advantage that is realised now or in the future as a result of extra funding or economies of scale would be invested in the school to enhance educational provision.

The costs incurred while converting to an academy are compensated by a conversion grant.

31. Will Saltford School still be a Church of England School?

Yes. We strongly value our links with St Mary's and the Diocese, and we will certainly continue this relationship with the same characteristics as our current status of a Voluntary Controlled school. The letters "V.C.", as part of our school's official name are not applicable as an academy and would therefore need to be dropped. We would be called Saltford Church of England Primary School.

32. What will be the impact on the staff?

One of the 'freedoms' afforded to academies is the right to set their own terms for staff pay and conditions. Understandably this is, and has always been, an issue of great concern for all teaching and support staff and their unions.

The Governing Body wants to make it clear that we fully recognise and appreciate the enormous effort and commitment of current Saltford School staff in contributing to the school's success and our pupils' outcomes. The concerns and

welfare of our staff have been very much to the fore throughout the Governing Body's deliberations.

It is quite clearly in the best interests of Saltford School and our pupils, in particular, to continue to have motivated, contented and engaged staff and this remains a priority for the Governing Body throughout this process. Although academies have the freedom to set their own pay and conditions, the WMAT Board has no plans to move away from the present nationally agreed pay and conditions. In any case all current staff at Saltford School have the right to retain their present posts, as well as conditions of service, should the school become an academy as a result of the TUPE regulations.

33.What is TUPE?

All qualifying staff would transfer from the employment of the LEA to the employment of WMAT. Qualifying staff are generally those who have contracts of employment at a converting school on the date of conversion to academy status. This transfer takes place within the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 (TUPE) for staff transfer, which ensures that staff retain all of their existing rights, terms and conditions and pension arrangements, including continuity of service. The pension arrangements for staff would be unaffected by the transfer.

The TUPE Regulations provide that the current employer's rights and obligations arising from a contract of employment existing on the date of transfer shall, by reason of such transfer, be transferred to the new employer.

There will be full consultation with staff as part of the academisation process, including a meeting for all staff to discuss their views. In addition there will be a further formal consultation process (involving trade unions) as stipulated by the TUPE regulations.

34.Where can I find out more?

You can find out more by coming to the consultation on 8th February 2016 from 3:30 - 7:00pm at Saltford School or reading the Academy Consultation page on the school's website. Independent sources of information can be accessed by:

- Reading 'Forming or Joining a Group of Schools: staying in control of your school's destiny' – published by the National Association of Governors, the Association of School & College Leaders and the legal firm Browne Jacobson. It can be found on the web
- Going to the website of The National Association of Governors which has a lot of documentation available:
www.nga.org.uk/Guidance/School-structures-and-constitution/Academies-and-free-schools.aspx
- Going to the Government website to read all about academies. Start at:
www.gov.uk/guidance/convert-to-an-academy-information-for-schools