

Sowerby Community Primary School  
'Sowing seeds of success: growing courageous learners'



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## Sowerby CP School Frequently Asked Questions – Academy Status

Our school is consulting with our parents, carers, students, staff, trade unions and the local community on the proposals to convert to 'Academy' school status and join a multi academy trust (MAT) along with likeminded schools.

To learn more about what this will mean for you, your child and the wider community, we have provided over the next few pages, some frequently asked questions and answers about Academies. The closing date for responses is **5pm Friday 13<sup>th</sup> October 2017** and details of how to respond are also included.

### What is an academy?

Academies are publicly funded, independent schools, free from local authority control. Funding is received directly from the Department for Education, instead of the Local Authority, giving the school more control over its spending and decision making.

Originally, underperforming schools were turned into academies to help the school improve rapidly, however in 2010 the Government extended the opportunity to convert to academy status to all schools that are successful and performing well, and as a result, there are now over 6,000 academies in the country.

An Academy Trust is a charitable trust run by a board of trustees. Academies are expected to work with and support other schools, including lower-performing schools.

### So, what is different?

Academy Trusts have additional responsibilities and freedoms that 'maintained' schools do not enjoy. These include:

- Freedom from Local Authority control;
- Freedom from following the National Curriculum;
- Ability to change length of term and school days;
- Greater control over school budgets;
- Access to dedicated capital funding

## **Why are the Governing Body and Leadership Team of the school considering Academy status?**

The Government signaled their desire to see all schools move to academy status in time, to enjoy greater freedom and flexibility in how they can deliver education. Like many other schools both locally and nationally, our school has looked at the benefits and freedoms Academy status can bring and feel it is something we should explore.

## **Do converting schools need to have a sponsor?**

Schools that are performing well such as ours are not required to have a sponsor.

## **Why are we considering joining Elevate Multi- Academy Trust (MAT)?**

Effective collaboration can benefit everyone. Through the sharing of excellent practice, shared resources and training opportunities and future economies of scale we can further improve the provision for our learners.

## **Which other schools are part of Elevate MAT or are considering joining Elevate MAT?**

Elevate Multi Academy Trust currently includes the following schools:

- Meadowside Academy
- Aspin Primary School
- Topcliffe C of E Primary School
- In addition, Knayton C of E Primary School is due to join on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2017

## **Schools that are currently consulting to join Elevate MAT are:**

- Sowerby Community Primary School
- Carlton Miniott Primary School

## ***About Elevate Multi Academy Trust***

At the heart of Elevate's ethos is the desire to work in collaboration with each other and other schools, and each school will still be involved in this, whilst each keeping its own distinctive ethos.

Elevate MAT believes strongly that all children have the right to a high-quality, stimulating education, and it is their moral duty to provide this, ensuring that under the new more stringent assessment regime that now exists, that children 'keep up' in their education, and that children, parents and the school all have their own role to play.

Through working together, we can use our money wisely to put more money into teaching and learning. Our key purpose is to provide education for primary-aged children, and Elevate is a Primary Academy Trust. The Trust has developed a highly-skilled workforce, and all schools are experienced in recognising that its staff has to have a stimulating and supportive workplace as much as the children do.

## ***Ethos of Elevate Multi Academy Trust***

Elevate's mission is "All achieve together", with well-developed strategic aims to:

- Deliver educational excellence to support every child to thrive and succeed;

- Provide a broad, holistic range of learning opportunities for pupils to allow them to develop their moral, spiritual, cultural and social understanding;
- Forge strong, meaningful partnerships rooted in a shared commitment to improving and supporting schools and the communities they serve;
- Champion a culture of continual professional development that thrives on positive challenge;
- Provide a high-quality fully inclusive school for the local community;
- Be a school which would follow the National Curriculum and give students the best chances of achieving their potential and competing in the local and wider jobs market;
- Provide personalised learning in order to develop young people for transition to secondary education and onwards into the world of work;
- Develop very close links with the local community so that mentoring and experience opportunities would be available for all our students.

At Elevate Multi Academy Trust we are committed to improving the life chances of all children. Where we have the capacity to make a difference, we are morally bound to do so. Members of the Trust strive together for excellence in partnership, so that our children, staff and Academy communities benefit from excellent teaching, learning and leadership.

### **How will the Governance Model for the MAT and our School operate?**

Elevate has a highly skilled Board of Trustees, approved by the Department for Education. The Board of Trustees delegate decision making for certain functions to a Local Governing Body for each school. Our school will have a Local Governing Body, largely made up of existing governors. The Local Governing Body will continue to ensure that the needs of each school are monitored closely.

This 'mixed MAT' model means that Elevate MAT is allowed to include a mix of community schools and Church of England school. Within the MAT the community schools will remain as community schools, and the church schools as church schools. The structure of Elevate MAT allows for more formalised, collaborative working whilst allowing the individual characteristics and ethos of each school to continue.

The MAT has a very small group of Members who are named for legal purposes but don't have a great deal to do with the daily running of the schools. The MAT Board of Trustees has overall responsibility and accountability in law for the performance, site and overall running of the Trust and each of the schools.

### **What about working with other schools?**

Our school already has strong partnerships with other local schools. We are therefore very interested in models that allow us to build on these partnerships through academy status. For this reason, we are seeking to join a multi academy trust.

This will allow us to continue the strong and established partnerships we already have, provide better opportunities for our learners and save money by benefitting from economies of scale. We shall continue to build and strengthen our existing school partnerships with schools outside the proposed MAT.

### **What do the Members do?**

The standard company structure for multi-academy trusts is five members who are similar to shareholders in a company, there is then also a Board of Trustees who are responsible

for the strategic running of the trust. The Members sign the company documents for the company (which set out its core purpose, i.e. provision of education etc.), they also have the power to appoint the Trustees and amend the company documents. The Members should attend one annual general meeting each year and sign off the audited company accounts. The chairperson of the Board of Trustees is also a member of the company to ensure a link between the two layers.

### **Role and basis for appointment of Trustees**

The core governance functions of the Multi-Academy Trust, (i.e. setting the direction of the Trust, holding the CEO and head teachers to account and ensuring sound use of finances) are carried out by the multi-academy trust Board of Trustees.

Trustees have been appointed on the basis of the skills they can bring to the trust board, as it is essential that this is made up of skilled individuals to ensure the success, both academically and financially, of the trust and the best outcomes for the learners within the trust. Some of the Trustees are Church of England representatives in order in line with the Department for Education requirements of a “mixed MAT”.

### **Legal protections of our unique school character**

Each of the schools and the church are fully committed to ensuring each school’s own unique ethos and character is protected, i.e. that the community schools cannot be turned into church schools and vice versa. However, as part of our proposals we have also carefully looked at the formal legal protections available to ensure the continued individual unique character of the community schools within the proposed MAT. The Department for Education template funding agreement (which set out how funds are paid to the MAT) offers protection in that it states that the MAT must maintain the non-religious character of a community school. To do otherwise would breach the funding agreements and hence risk losing the MAT’s funding from the Secretary of State. The Academy Trust company documents also make it clear that the MAT Board of Trustees must protect the individual ethos of any school within the MAT and this is the legal responsibility of all Trustees.

The local governing bodies, set up for each of the schools within the MAT, maintain their existing representation and are tasked with protecting the individual ethos of the school. Parents are elected to these local governing bodies and so maintain an input into the governance of their school. However, as mentioned above it will also be the responsibility of the MAT Board of Trustees to ensure it protects the individual ethos of each school within the MAT (whether church or community) in accordance with the company documents.

### **Would community schools continue to be community schools?**

Yes, it is a non-negotiable requirement that community schools remain community schools and that church schools remain church schools if they become an academy within Elevate MAT.

### **Does it mean more money?**

Academies are funded in a similar way to other schools, however, becoming an academy would open up additional capital funding opportunities for us to explore. Joining a MAT will

allow us to achieve savings through the sharing of services and resources across the academies within the MAT. The best value protocols currently in place in our schools will be further developed in order to improve the quality of provision at a much more competitive cost. Economies of scale will be sought.

### **Will admissions arrangements change?**

The Academy Trust would be responsible for setting the admissions arrangements for our school but there is no proposed change to the existing policy for admissions. The Local Authority would continue to co-ordinate admissions.

It should be stressed however, that the admissions criteria must have regard to the national Admissions Code of Practice.

### **When would the school change to become an Academy?**

Schools can change to Academy status within 3-4 months of consulting with parents and carers. It is for our Governing Body to decide whether the school should convert to Academy status. If we go ahead, we would aim to become an academy and join Elevate MAT on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2018.

### **What does it mean for staff?**

All staff would transfer their employment under TUPE legislation from their current employer, to Elevate Multi Academy Trust. We are also consulting with our staff and trade unions to seek their views.

### **How will it affect my child's education?**

The conversion to academy status will not mean any changes to your child's education, other than it will allow our Head Teacher more flexibility around protecting our successful curriculum and ensuring that we have high quality support services for all our children. We will be free to deliver and/or commission our own support for children with additional and special educational needs.

### **Will the name of the school change?**

We do intend to change the name of our school to Sowerby Academy however we are strongly committed to retaining the identity of our school within the Multi Academy Trust.

### **What will happen to the uniform?**

We do not intend to change the uniform colour or style, but will when ordering new uniform have a slight name change to reflect Sowerby Academy. All the other uniform being worn will be absolutely fine.

### **Will the times of the school day and holidays change?**

We have no plans to change the times of the school day or the terms dates. Any future changes would be subject to extensive consultation with parents and carers.

### **Are academies still accountable for their performance and are performance targets set?**

Like all schools, academies are in the first instance accountable to the learners they serve and their respective parents / carers. Academies still have to meet government performance targets concerning progress of all children across all key stages, and will still be inspected by Ofsted. Although Academies can innovate and change the curriculum, they still must ensure students leave having achieved their full potential across a broad and balanced range of subjects.

### **What services would remain under the control of the Local Authority?**

The Local Authority would still have responsibility for a number of services including:

- Home to school transport
- Assessing learners' needs (SEN)
- Coordinating school admissions
- Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)

### **What are the potential benefits for our school in joining Elevate MAT?**

The main benefits of academy status include:

- Ensuring all learners make better than expected progress, raising their aspirations and preparing them to be successful in a modern world.
- Staying in control of our own destiny and preserving the unique identity of our school within the MAT.
- The MAT model provides for a more formalised approach for our schools, with the opportunity to secure more tangible benefits as a result of being a single employer etc.
- Ability to access capital funding via the Academy Condition Improvement Fund, which is only available to academies.
- Removal of the requirement to follow the National Curriculum allows for greater flexibility and creativity when planning the school curriculum.
- In joining a MAT, we are responding to the Government's policy for providing school-to-school support.
- In joining a MAT, we are better able to respond to the budget pressures all schools are facing and will continue to face due to cost pressures exceeding levels of income, by securing economies of scale.
- The opportunity to offer more formalised support to other schools will provide professional development opportunities for staff, which will assist with the retention of high quality staff and succession planning.
- We will be better able to respond to any future reduction in LA services by developing our own capacity to meet the needs of our learners, or commission our own specialist support services e.g. to support learners with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND).
- We may make a saving on our current insurance costs by joining the Academy Risk Protection Scheme.

### **What additional responsibilities will academy status bring?**

- Some additional financial and legal responsibilities.
- Elevate Multi Academy Trust would employ our staff.
- Elevate Multi Academy Trust would be responsible for admissions.
- Elevate Multi Academy Trust would enter into a 125-year lease for the land currently owned by the Local Authority. We already have responsibility for the cost of maintaining the land and buildings.

## Have your say

- Complete the response form provided with the consultation letter;
- Attend a drop-in session;
- Wider information on the Academies programme is available on the

Department for Education website at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/academy-conversion-process>