

The proposed new EQUA Multi Academy Trust

Frequently Asked Questions – Autumn 2018

This paper sets out a number of frequently asked questions (FAQs) about academy status and being part of a multi-academy trust. This will be developed and added to as questions are raised, more information is gathered during our research, and our plans are further developed.

Academies

What is an academy?

An academy is a state-funded school operated by an academy trust, which is directly funded and regulated by the Department for Education, rather the local authority. It must offer, free of charge, a full, broad and balanced curriculum, but it has more freedom to determine how it spends its budget, to deliver that curriculum than local authority-maintained schools.

What is an academy trust?

An academy trust is a charitable company which is funded by the Department of Education to run academy schools. It is funded through an agreement and must follow strict rules on how that funding is used. As a charitable company, nobody can make a profit from it. Because it is funded from public money, it must follow rules to ensure that it obtains good value for money and it is subject to the Freedom of Information Act.

What is a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT)?

A multi-academy trust (MAT) is a single academy trust charitable company which runs more than one academy. This enables groups of school who share similar values to work together as part of a single organisation, but each school retains its individual ethos and identity and a local governing body.

What is EQUA MAT ?

The EQUA MAT will be a brand new multi-academy trust for Wiltshire that will be set up by the founding schools to support and run the schools. Together our schools will establish the structure of leadership and governance and we will determine the way trust works and how it supports the schools. One of the founding schools, Lavington School, is already run by a “single” academy trust, so that trust will be transformed, by changing its name, constitution (“Articles of Association”), governance structure and Funding Agreements, into the Equa Multi Academy Trust.

What are the benefits to our school of joining the EQUA MAT ?

Being part of the EQUA MAT, will allow member schools to achieve strong collaboration and to use this collaboration and accountability to drive up school standards. Where there are underperforming schools in the group, representation in the trust can ensure there is sufficient challenge and support to turn those schools around. Equally where there are strong high performing schools in the Trust, being part of a MAT enables closer sharing of best practice to improve standards further.

Being part of the EQUA MAT provides the following benefits:

- **Dedicated Leadership Team:** The creation of a senior and experienced leadership team with a dedicated CEO, Trustees, and Management Team will allow the collective expertise to be used to formulate more effective strategies and plans, which could not be done at an individual school level.

- **Independence:** The Multi Academy Trust is independent from the Local Authority which gives more control and flexibility over how the schools in the Trust are run. As a result of this, the academy can focus on those areas that are important to their students and staff.
- **Shared Staffing:** Human resources within the Trust can work across multiple sites. This can help overcome short term recruitment challenges, offer more varied opportunities to staff and leverage key skills and expertise across the Trust.
- **Specialist Resources:** With the combined funding model of the Trust, specialist knowledge can be bought in and used across many different areas, including academic, extra-curricular and operational functions.
- **Professional Development:** This can be organised across multiple schools, thus spreading the cost per school and upskilling as many individuals as possible per session.
- **Economies of Scale:** The Trust is able to optimise its purchasing power, thereby achieving economies of scale which would not be achievable by individual schools. This can be done across IT, transport, school supplies, catering etc. With ever tightening budgets, this can help schools maintain and build upon the resources and standards they aspire to.
- **Sharing of best practice:** The sharing of best practice (processes, ways of working etc.) can be done quickly and effectively across the Trust so that standards are raised and time can be freed up to be allocated to improving student outcomes.

Geographically the founding schools are very close to each other. We have benefited from some collaborative working in recent years and we now wish to formalise and expand these opportunities.

It is our belief that each school within the multi-academy trust can bring a good deal to the other schools in the group through our collaborative approach.

Who decides which schools convert to an academy or when a single academy joins other schools to form a multi academy trust?

Except in the limited circumstances referred to in the next question, the decision for any school to become an academy, or to change from a single academy to a multi academy trust, rests with its governors. Before a school may convert to Academy, parents whose children attend the school in question, along with local community stakeholders, must be consulted on their views about the proposals.

Before this consultation, when the governors of a school make an application for a school to become an academy, or to change to a multi academy trust, the application is considered by the Department for Education. The Secretary of State for Education delegates the decision making to the Regional Schools Commissioner.

The governors of the seven schools proposing to form the new EQUA MAT resolved to become academies and set up a multi academy trust in [DATE], submitted their academy conversion and transfer applications to the DfE and have been given approval to establish the trust.

Can Church of England and Community schools be part of the same Multi Academy Trust?

Yes. We understand that the legal constitutions for Multi Academy Trusts enable this mix but each group is subject to the prior agreement with the Church of England through the local Diocese. The EQUA MAT is committed; both in terms of its vision and legal obligations, to maintaining the individual ethos of each school, and the Articles of Association of the MAT will allow that the individual ethos of each type of school will be maintained. Each of our schools will retain its distinctive ethos and status as either a Church or non-faith school. The structure of the Local Governing Board for each school in the MAT will be reflective of its current status as a Voluntary Aided, Voluntary Controlled or Community school.

The Diocese of Salisbury fully supports the proposed plans put forward by the seven schools, and has given its consent for the CofE schools to become academies, within the EQUA multi academy trust.

Can a school convert or change to a multi academy trust without the support of the governors?

Generally, no. Anyone can register an interest in their school becoming an academy but the governors have to agree for the school to apply to become an academy, or to move to a multi academy trust. In limited circumstances, when a school is judged inadequate by Ofsted, the Secretary of State is able to make an Academy Order without an application from the governors. This is not the case for any of the seven schools proposing to join the EQUA MAT.

Will the schools be changing their names and uniforms?

No. Our schools value our individual uniqueness' as well as our shared vision and objectives. We have already agreed that we have no plans to change school uniforms or school names.

Governance of the Academy Trust**How will the role of governors change if our school becomes an academy within a multi academy trust?**

All academies in a MAT are governed by one trust and a single Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees is responsible for decisions relating to how each academy is run, from the curriculum to staffing. The MAT will establish a Local Governing Board for each of its academies, to which it will delegate some of its functions. The MAT remains accountable for these functions.

The exact delegation of these functions is being worked out at the moment through the development of a Scheme of Delegation, but the core principle behind this scheme is that while schools are functioning and performing effectively, i.e. financially, in terms of local governance, and in terms of educational achievement - they will be given delegated authority to continue. However, if key areas of performance are not met, these delegations can be removed. Additionally, there will be some functions that will be managed centrally such as aspects of HR, finance, buildings (again, not yet fully agreed). This means that local governing boards are freed up to focus on ensuring their school achieves all it can within their local community, and ensuring the school delivers the best it can for its pupils, rather than potentially spending excessive time on administrative tasks that are delivered centrally in a MAT.

How will the Multi-Academy Trust be governed and managed?

EQUA MAT will have a group of Members and a Board of Trustees.

The "Members" are like shareholders in a commercial company, they appoint the Trustees, (who are the directors of the company) to run the MAT, and are the only people able to amend the Articles of Association of the Company. (They require consent from the Secretary of State to make amendments and, for a change to the "Objects", i.e. the purpose of the MAT, consent from the Charity Commission is required).

The "Trustees" are those people who actually run, determine policy, and make decisions for the MAT. They are the statutory governing body of each academy within the MAT. They do this by appointing the right individuals to be the executive leaders for the trust, e.g. the Chief Executive and Chief Finance Officer for the MAT and delegating the responsibility for the day-to-day running of the MAT to them.

For EQUA MAT, we will establish a structure of executive leadership that is appropriate for our schools, and each of the schools within the MAT will have its own local governing board/committee.

What are the main responsibilities of the MAT once the schools have converted and the trust opened?

Typical activities include:-

- Setting a strategic direction for improvement of educational progress and attainment.
- Ensuring that the right infrastructure (people & resources, leadership & management) is in place to deliver the necessary changes to support the educational improvement.
- Challenging progress in all areas of the trust and its academies' operations whilst providing support and guidance aimed at promoting success.

- Responsibility for the performance of the academies, including monitoring and where necessary establishing a plan of action to improve performance.
- Setting up committees with a specific focus to monitor aspects of trust and academy life.
- Leading involvement with parents and the wider community, to promote the MAT and support community engagement.
- Ensuring value for money and good use of public funds and leveraging other finance and resources when needed.
- Championing the MAT in the wider community, in order to bring new resources to the schools and the trust, for example through holding events, arranging mentoring, and building links with business.

The process of forming the MAT

What does the conversion process involve?

The conversion process for schools to become academies has been made as simple as possible for all schools. The key steps the school must take are explained in the Department for Education's conversion guide at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/academy-conversion-process> and may differ according to the type of school and who owns the buildings and land.

EQUA MAT must be established and follow legal requirements. These are the key areas of work:

- land, buildings and assets; establishing appropriate leases and other agreements;
- financial review and budget setting;
- staff TUPE transfer (whereby all staff transfer with continuity of service, retaining as closely as possible their existing terms and conditions);
- transferring and establishing contracts for services
- establishing new policies and procedures at the MAT level.

In addition, activities to transition the governance structure from a single school governing body to a multi-academy trust model is also undertaken.

Most schools are able to convert in around six months.

Where one or more of the schools forming the new MAT is already an Academy, the academies must follow either the 'Academies Significant Change' process – <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/making-significant-changes-to-an-existing-academy> or apply to become a sponsor to develop the MAT: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/sponsor-an-academy>.

Do schools need to consult before converting?

Yes. All schools are required to carry out a consultation before converting to an academy, but it is up to them to decide with whom and how to consult. There is no specified length of time for the consultation and schools have flexibility in how it is conducted.

Schools/Academies may wish to consult with a range of people and organisations, for example:

- parents/carers
- school staff
- local schools and the local community
- the Diocese and other local trusts
- local businesses
- local councillors and politicians

This document is part of that consultation

When might this all happen if the plans are approved and the MAT goes ahead?

We want to take our time to get this right for all the schools joining the EQUA MAT. Following the detailed planning and consultation steps, we would anticipate the schools becoming academies within the EQUA MAT in the spring term of 2019.

Can the school withdraw from the conversion process?

Schools are able to withdraw right up until the point that they sign the Commercial Transfer Agreement, and strictly up until the point where the Secretary of State signs the Funding Agreements. Once these are signed, there is a legally binding agreement between the Secretary of State and the academy, and as such, the termination would require a long notice period (seven years). However, each school only receives the £25,000 conversion grant (referred to below) once, so pulling out at the last minute might mean that much of that grant has been spent.

Who pays for the cost of converting to an academy?

Once schools are granted permission to convert by receiving their academy order, each school in the group receives a £25,000 grant towards the conversion costs.

Total costs for conversion will vary from school to school. 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.

Where a number of schools are converting together and forming a MAT, additional grants are sometimes made available to support the development of the new MAT arrangements. As at October 2018, there are currently no additional grants available.

For Lavington School which is already an academy, they will not receive a grant for the change to become a Multi-Academy Trust, as they received the £25,000 grant when they originally converted, however, because it is already an academy, and we are changing rather than replacing the academy trust which runs it, there is very little costs added to the project by the school.

Church School Status**Will our school have to change its church school/ non-church school status?**

No. Each of the schools will convert and retain its distinctive ethos and status as either a church or non-church school. The structure of the Local Governing Board for each school in the MAT will be reflective of its current status as a Voluntary Aided, Voluntary Controlled or Community school.

As referred to above, the MAT enters into a “supplemental funding agreement” for each school, and these vary according to the type of school. In addition, the constitution of the MAT (it’s “Articles of Association”) distinguish between Church of England and Community Schools.

The MAT is committed, both in terms of its vision and legal obligations, to maintaining the individual ethos of each school, and the Articles of Association of the MAT stipulate that the individual ethos of each type of school shall be maintained.

Special School joining the MAT**If a special School joins the MAT what will happen to its status?**

Special schools follow the same process as for other schools and they become a Special academy within the MAT and follow the agreed accountability framework. Schools cannot change status through the conversion process. As with Church / non Church schools, there are differences in the Supplemental Funding Agreement to reflect the status of a Special School.

Special Educational Needs

My child has special education needs. How can I be confident that they will be given the same level of support, attention and care?

The Academies Act 2010 and the Children and Families Act 2014 (Part 3) require academies to follow the same statutory framework for special needs as local authority schools.

Schools will receive funding for children with existing statements of special educational needs and/ or Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans in the same way, whether they are academies or local authority schools. If children have statements/EHC plans with an enhanced package of support, both types of school will get additional funding directly from the local authority, again, in the same way.

Where children have special needs, but do not have an EHC plan, academies are required to have regard for the SEND Code of Practice 2014, in exactly the same way as local authority schools. This means that in both types of school, children will be supported according to the level of need and involvement of external agencies.

Under the 0-25 SEND Code of Practice 2014, all schools, including academies, are required to identify and address the SEN of the pupils that they support. Mainstream schools, which include maintained schools and academies that are not special schools, maintained nursery schools, 16 to 19 academies, alternative provision academies and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), must:

- use their best endeavours to make sure that a child with SEN gets the support they need – this means doing everything they can to meet children and young people’s SEN;
- ensure that children and young people with SEN engage in the activities of the school alongside pupils who do not have SEN;
- designate a teacher to be responsible for co-ordinating SEN provision – the SEN co-ordinator, or SENCO. (This does not apply to 16 to 19 academies.);
- inform parents when they are making special educational provision for a child;
- prepare an SEN information report and their arrangements for the admission of disabled children, the steps being taken to prevent disabled children from being treated less favourably than others, the facilities provided to enable access to the school for disabled children and their accessibility plan showing how they plan to improve access progressively over time.

There should be a member of the Board of Trustees or a sub-committee with specific oversight of the schools’ arrangements for SEN and disability. School leaders should regularly review how expertise and resources used to address SEN can be used to build the quality of whole-school provision as part of their approach to school improvement.

Uniform and School Names

Will the schools be changing their names and uniforms?

No. There are no plans to change school names or uniforms.

Our schools value our individual, unique qualities as well as our shared vision and objectives. We have already agreed that school uniforms and names will not be changed. The one small exception to this is that the Church of England Schools will no longer have “VA” or “VC” in their title. (They will still retain all the characteristic of a VA or VC school, and will still be called “Church of England”, but in legal terms VA and VC refers specifically to maintained schools).

School uniforms or names may still change in the future, but as with any school, this would follow a process of consultation.

Complaints

Who deals with complaints about schools that have converted/transferred to academy status within a multi academy trust?

Parents/carers who have a complaint about their child's academy school will usually contact the school directly, as you would now. Academy schools are independent of the local authority, so the local authority has no authority to investigate complaints about the operation of the schools except in relation to specific areas:

Safeguarding - academies still refer serious safeguarding issues to the Local Authority – as with a maintained school, you would refer a safeguarding issue to the designated safeguarding lead at the school, or you may refer to the MAT Safeguarding Lead (if, for example, the complaint is about the Designated Safeguarding Lead or the Headteacher. If you are not happy with the response, you are still able to raise it with the Local Authority because it has a statutory obligation to safeguard children and vulnerable adults everywhere, including in school.

The Local Authority is also still responsible for high level SEND funding, home to school transport, eligibility for free school meals, and the administration of admissions to schools (first year September intake).

All academy schools should have a complaints procedure and parents/carers are advised to request a copy.

What if my complaint is around my children's Special Educational Needs?

The procedure for complaints around special educational needs is the same for academies as for maintained schools.

Extended Services

If there are extended services provided by an academy or on the same site, for example a Children's Centre, will these be affected by the change?

When a school becomes an academy the local authority has to take a detailed look on how extended services are provided. These services will continue to be available for parents, pupils and the wider community but we need to ensure that they operate on the correct legal basis. Parents should be assured that academy status is not about removing important extended services that may be offered in your locality. In this case, none of the schools converting have a Children's Centre or Sure Start facility on site. Community groups who currently use school premises for clubs or group meetings will still be able to.

Finance

Funding to the schools within a 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.

How is academy funding calculated?

Most funding for the running of academies comes from the general annual grant (GAG). This is paid to academies by the Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), based on a formula provided by your local authority. The ESFA will tell the Trust and schools how much GAG funding the Trust and the schools will get and how the grant has been calculated.

Will we 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 much money will my school have to contribute to the running of the EQUA MAT?

Each school will contribute a percentage of their budget to the central running costs of the MAT – this is called a top slice. This will vary by school, i.e. Secondary schools will contribute a larger percentage as they have a larger budget. At the moment, the current forecast is a 4-5% top slice. The individual schools budget contributions will be offset by the savings that will occur through driving savings by centralising some of the services and functions.

Can schools convert with a budget deficit?

The DfE will consider conversion applications from schools with deficits, but approval to convert will be subject to a number of additional checks. If a school is predicted to continue to operate in deficit after the conversion, then the academy trust must be able to show how it can recover this deficit to the DfE as part of the process for the DfE to approve the application to become an academy.

After the conversion your local authority must finalise each school's closing balance within 3 months of the conversion date.

If the agreed closing balance is a surplus, your local authority must pay it to the academy trust within 1 month of finalising the amount.

If the agreed closing balance is a deficit, by agreement between the Department for Education, the Trust and the local authority, the Department for Education will either settle that amount with the local authority, and the academy trust will set up a repayment plan with the Department for Education after conversion; or the academy trust must have formal arrangements in place to repay the deficit directly with the local authority.

What will happen to a school's surplus budget when it converts to an academy / joins an academy trust?

The academy trust will inherit the closing financial balance at the date the school ceases to be maintained by the local authority. This will apply whether the balance is a surplus or a deficit. Where an academy transfers to become a multi academy trust, the financial position carries forward into the MAT.

Will academies be forced to buy in expensive services?

No. Academies are not forced to buy in any type of service by particular providers. The experience of academies, and particularly multi academy trusts, to date is that they can buy in services more effectively for themselves which leads either to better quality or lower prices meaning they can make savings and re-invest money elsewhere. They are free to buy back the services from the local authority or find them elsewhere.

All academies are required to take out insurance and have arrangements in place to help academies secure best value for money.

All academies must abide by the rules and regulations laid out in the Academies Financial Handbook - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/academies-financial-handbook>. This sets out the financial management, control and reporting requirements with which academy trusts must comply and requires academies to follow public procurement regulations and therefore have a procurement policy. A key aspect of this is that academies are required to make decisions that are in the public interest, and to submit to accountability through openness and transparency.

What will happen to the various service contracts that a school has in place?

We will need to look at the contracts the schools hold with external suppliers and the local authority, for services such as catering, cleaning, security and ICT. If they want to keep a contract with an existing supplier, we will need to discuss with them how to transfer it to the academy trust, but this is not usually complex. Software licenses will also need to be renewed or transferred to the trust.

Academy trusts must also decide whether their existing financial and management information systems are suitable for the requirements of an academy and multi-academy trust, as they will have to produce management accounts, cash flow reconciliations and balance sheets.

Will we have to raise our own capital funding as an academy?

No. All schools, including academies, will be able to apply for Government capital funding.

Capital spend for VA schools is part funded by their Diocese. On academy conversion, the Diocese will transfer any capital funds held for the school, or inform the trust of any capital owed to the Diocese by the school. This is part of the procedure of “due diligence” through which the MAT ensures that each school is financially viable. After conversion, VA schools no longer need to find the 10% “Governor Contribution” to capital projects.

What happens if there is a capital emergency at the academy? Would it have to cover costs?

Academies are eligible to seek an earmarked annual grant from the Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) for emergencies, in the same way the LA can pay a maintained school a contingency payment.

Academies are required to take out insurance at specified minimum levels of cover to protect against potential capital emergencies. The DfE would expect schools to use their existing budgets to cover the cost of this.

What support is available to academies if they get into financial difficulty?

Academies, like all schools, are expected to maintain strict budgetary controls and are required by their funding agreement to balance their budgets.

The academy receives ongoing Grant (‘General Annual Grant’) which covers the running costs of the school. The ESFA monitors academies’ financial position on behalf of the Secretary of State, and if a deficit occurs or appears likely, will intervene. It will provide advice and support to the academy to find an appropriate solution to bring costs and income back into balance, usually in the form of a restructuring plan, and will give additional contingency funding if absolutely necessary.

Land

How will ownership of the land work if our school becomes an academy?

The buildings and hard play areas at the Church of England schools are owned by the Diocese. The Diocese will enter into an agreement for each Church of England school allowing the trust to use the site for the purposes of operating the school only. This agreement does not have a fixed period, but runs with the Funding Agreement for the school, so the basic notice period is 7 years but in reality, it is indefinite. Again, the trust cannot sell, share or sub-licence the site to anyone. These agreements are another means by which the distinctive religious characteristic of the Church of England schools is protected.

The playing fields at Church of England schools are owned by the local authority. The local authority will grant a lease allowing the MAT to continue to use the playing fields for the purposes of the schools.

For the community schools, the sites and buildings are all owned by the local authority who will grant a 125-year lease, rent free, to the MAT for the purposes of running the school only. The trust cannot sell, share or sub-let any site or any part of it without the consent of the local authority and the Secretary of State.

Transfer of staff

What happens to the staff when a school becomes an academy?

When converting to Academy status, all employees of a school, whether they are employed by a local authority or a school’s governing body, are entitled to transfer to the employment of the new academy trust at the point the school converts. This takes place via the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 (commonly known as ‘TUPE’) which protects employees’ terms and conditions of employment when their

employment is transferred from one employer to another. In the case of a multi-academy-trust (MAT) - all the staff in all of the schools are then all employed by the MAT.

For the staff at Lavington School, as the existing academy trust will become the new EQUA multi-academy trust, the staff are not changing their employer because the existing Academy Trust which employs them now will become the MAT, and continue to employ them. However, staff at Lavington School will be included in the discussions and consultations about the changes to ensure that they are fully informed about the plans.

For the proposed EQUA MAT, during the conversion process, staff and the Trade Unions will be consulted with about the transfer. As there are currently four employers involved across the six schools and the existing academy there will be a process of due diligence undertaken to ensure all staff details are understood to enable effective transfer plans to be shared. The schools are working with specialist advisors to ensure this takes place effectively and detailed and specific FAQs will be developed for the staff at this time and meetings arranged with all schools for all staff.

Will staff be able to work in the different schools?

Across the MAT there will be opportunities in the future, either moving from one school to another, or working across more than one school depending on the type of role.

Academies don't have to follow national pay and conditions for staff, so will the MAT change them?

No. All of the staff already employed in the schools will, in any case, be protected by the TUPE regulations. We are keen to attract and retain the best staff, for which it will be necessary to offer competitive pay and conditions.

All staff in academies must still be offered the same pensions (Local Government Pension Scheme/ Teachers Pension Scheme) as if they were local authority schools, and they are still public sector employees for all other purposes.

The TUPE Regulations also protect trade union recognition agreements, which means EQUA MAT must negotiate any proposed changes to terms and conditions with those unions.

Admissions

Will the admissions arrangements change for our school?

Academies retain the admission arrangements they had as maintained schools when they become academies: they are required to comply with the Admissions Code and can only change their admission arrangements following the procedures set out in the Code.

We do not envisage changing admission arrangements when our schools become academies and when we join the new EQUA MAT.

As their own admissions authority, academies are required to consult on their Published Admission Number (PAN) where they propose either to increase or keep the same PAN. This means that:

- The MAT will be responsible for consulting on and determining ('finalising') each school's admission arrangements in accordance with the School Admissions Code.
- The MAT becomes responsible for organising admission appeals in compliance with the School Admission Appeals Code, not the local authority.

Once admission authorities have determined their admission arrangements, they must notify the appropriate bodies and must publish a copy of the determined arrangements on their website, and the website of each individual school, displaying them for the whole offer year (the academic year in which offers for places are made).

The MAT may not decrease the “PAN” without the consent of the local authority (because the local authority still has a statutory duty to ensure that it offers enough places for all of its children, so reducing your admissions to your reception year would prejudice the ability of the local authority to meet this statutory requirement).

My school is a church VA school. Can we continue to admit children on the basis of faith?

Any converter academy which currently admits pupils, or a portion of pupils based on faith, will be able to retain those arrangements (and must retain them unless they follow the protocol for changing their admissions policy).

Two of the VA schools in the group have a faith element in their oversubscriptions criteria, one does not.

Will academies have to take part in the local authority’s coordinated admissions processes?

Academies are required through their funding agreements to participate in the local authority’s co-ordinated admission arrangements for new intake. However, in year admissions other than under the “Fair Access Protocol” arrangements and decisions are determined by the Academy Trust which will usually delegate that decision to the school

As an academy, would our school be able to increase the number of pupils in the school?

Academies are subject to the provisions of the Admissions Code. This allows schools to increase their admission numbers through the process set out in the Code for changing Admission Arrangements. This would require the trust to consult those bodies set out in the Code for any 8 weeks between 1 November and 1 March and then determine the arrangements as final before 15 April prior to the relevant academic year.

Schools with sixth forms, can admit additional pupils over their admission number for post-16.

Does the academy trust have to participate in Fair Access Protocols?

Yes. Academies are required under their funding agreement to participate in Fair Access Protocols.

The fair access protocol is operated by the local authority and all schools must participate. The protocol enables children who are hard to place to be allocated a school place quickly.

What is an academy required to do in relation to admission appeals?

Academies are required to offer all pupils refused admission the right to an appeal in front of an independent appeal panel.

Academies are responsible for setting up the appeal and must do so in accordance with the Appeals Code. The panel must be independent of the school.

The difference for an academy is that the trust is the “Admissions Authority” rather than the local authority, but Appeals Code applies to them just the same.

Who handles objections to academy admission arrangements?

Objections to proposed admissions arrangements during the consultation period will be handled by the MAT as part of the consultation process. Appeals against admissions decisions will be handled by an independent panel in accordance with the Appeals Code.

The Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) is the government agency responsible for investigating complaints about academy panels. The ESFA can only investigate complaints about panels that did not follow the procedures set out in the [School Admission Appeals Code 2012](#) (the ‘Appeals Code’).

Factsheet: Complaints about an academy independent admission panel:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/293017/Academy_independent_admission_appeal_panel_complaints_factsheet_0314.pdf

The schools adjudicator considers objections to academy admissions in the same way as he considers those to maintained schools

Ofsted

Will the school be inspected by Ofsted?

Yes. Academies are inspected by Ofsted using the same framework and timescales as for maintained schools. EQUA MAT will also be subject to Ofsted inspection, just the same as a local authority is inspected.

Term Dates

Will the school follow the Wiltshire Council school term times and holidays once it has converted to an academy?

There are no plans to change term times, and any future discussion around term times will take other local schools into account, in particular the impact on families with children at other local schools.

What will change for pupils' parent and carers after we join EQUA MAT?

For pupils, parents and carers, staff and governors day to day, the operation of the school, its leadership and governance will not feel different. When a school becomes an academy, all of the pupils on roll transfer automatically to the academy and so do any applications for places. Parents and carers do not need to do anything differently.

Our purpose is to improve collaborative working between these already good schools, which will enable us to continue to improve the experience and outcomes for pupils in our schools, not any dramatic changes to any individual school.

Will the schools be changing the length of the school day, or term times?

There are no plans to change, and if we do ever change in the future it would have to be after a significant consultation with staff and parents/carers.

If we raise money for our school, will it be shared with the other schools?

No. Money from fund raising activities is separate from other school funds, and can only be used for the purpose it was raised for.

Miscellaneous Questions

How can we be sure that the Equa MAT will be a success ?

The Equa MAT has all the key elements to be a high performing MAT. These include strong leadership from the CEO and Board, a clear accountability framework, effective financial controls, robust growth strategy and rigorous focus on positive pupil outcomes.

Will more schools be joining the MAT ?

The EQUA MAT will look for opportunities to partner with schools that share its vision and strategy to deliver excellence in education, a strong Christian ethos in the Church schools and to tackle rural deprivation by ensuring every child has every chance to succeed. Growth of the MAT will only be achieved in a sustainable way.

Please see the DfE website at the following link for more information and to keep up to date:-

<https://www.gov.uk/become-an-academy-information-for-schools>