

Bishops Cannings
Church of England aided
Primary School



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Headteacher: Miss C Vardy

21st September 2018

Dear Parents, Carers and Community

Proposals to become an academy and develop a new multi academy trust with some of our neighbouring schools to be called the EQUA Multi Academy Trust.

As you will be aware our Governors and Headteacher have been exploring the possibility of creating a school partnership with six other local schools to create a new multi-academy trust (MAT) to serve our community. These schools are:

- Lavington School
- Downland School
- Woodborough Primary School
- All Cannings Primary School
- Rushall Primary School
- Chirton Primary School
- Bishops Cannings Primary School

Over the past 2 years we have worked with our colleagues to evaluate opportunities and benefits, undertake early due diligence and develop a strategy, plan and structure for how we can deliver our vision to deliver excellence in education, a strong Christian ethos in all Church Schools and tackle rural deprivation by ensuring every child has every chance to succeed.

Last term the schools collectively submitted the proposals to the Regional Schools Commissioner and we are delighted to inform you that we have now received formal notice of support from the Department for Education for the development of the new MAT. The six maintained schools have been granted their Academy Orders and for Lavington School their academy transfer agreements to proceed. This will now release the grant funds to enable the schools to undertake the detailed work that is required to develop the new Trust and move our school towards becoming an Academy.

The DfE's support for our strategy now gives us the opportunity to formally consult with you and others on the proposals for the new multi academy trust and the conversion and transfer of the schools, and you will receive details shortly of how we intend to do this across the seven schools and within the wider community during the coming weeks.

Before then we wanted to take this opportunity to let you know about our thinking, to share some early information with you, and to offer you the opportunity to ask any initial questions you may have. During this process the governors are committed to considering the views of all parents, carers, staff and other interested groups and individuals. We have enclosed with this letter some further information in the form of some general 'Frequently Asked Questions' (FAQs) about what becoming academies may mean for our schools, and a copy of this letter and the FAQs are also available via each of the school's websites.

We look forward to sharing more details with you later this term. In the meantime, please feel free to email any questions you have to info@equa.org.uk so that we can include these in our consultation planning. We will do our best to respond to all queries directly and to keep you informed of progress. However, we may not be able to answer all questions straight away as some may require more planning or research and therefore we will respond and publish your questions/comments and responses as appropriate as the plans develop on our academy communication web pages and we will consider them before a final decision is made.

What happens next? We will now develop the transfer plans more fully and undertake further due diligence across areas such as the land and buildings, contracts and services, and will prepare for the consultation with all stakeholders - parents/carers, students, staff, unions, governors, the Diocese, the Local Authority, the local community, including churches where appropriate and local schools. We will write to you again soon with the information on this. The multi-academy trust is committed to maintaining, celebrating and valuing the unique nature of all of the schools within the Trust and this partnership will ensure that we can continue to deliver excellent education in our community. Thank you for your continued support and commitment to the schools. We will be in touch with more information as our plans progress.

Kind regards,

Yours sincerely,



Mr. Nick Bancroft
Chair of Governors
Bishops Cannings Primary School



Miss Catherine Vardy
Headteacher

The proposed new multi academy trust EQUA MAT Frequently Asked Questions Autumn 2018.

Why become an Academy within EQUA?

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.

What is an academy?

Academies are classed as independent state-funded schools, which have the freedom to determine their own policies on such things as the curriculum, school hours, term dates and staff pay. They aim to provide a free, first-class education for pupils of all abilities through a fresh approach to school leadership, teaching and learning. They offer a full, broad and balanced curriculum. This is enabled by the Academies Act 2010. Primary, infant, junior, secondary and special schools are all able to apply to convert into an academy and are then accountable to the Secretary of State rather than the Local Authority.

All academies are managed by their own academy trust (a charitable company limited by guarantee) and are not the responsibility of the Local Authority. Academy trusts are given directly the money which would have been given to the Local Authority, so academies can choose how best to spend that money on the provision of education.

What is a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT)?

A multi-academy trust is a single trust which runs more than one academy and is the statutory governing body of each of the academies that it runs. The multi-academy trust is a charitable company limited by guarantee, which means it may not make any profit, and because it is publicly funded it is subject to judicial review and to the Freedom of Information Act like any other public body/organisation. The multi-academy trust has a formal agreement (like a contract), with the Department for Education (DfE) which sets out the parameters in which it must operate. It must also abide by charity law, public law (being publicly funded) as well as general company law.

By entering into a MAT, the founding schools will become part of one legal entity with, it is important to note, each school retaining its individual identity and a local governing board/committee. In practical terms there will be very little visible change in the way that the school operates. Each school's values and ethos will also be maintained and our goal will remain to provide the very best education possible for our children.

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 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 convert or in the case of Lavington School transfer and retain its distinctive ethos and status as either a faith 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.

What is EQUA MAT and why become an academy in the new trust?

The EQUA MAT will be a brand new multi-academy trust 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. This will be a new trust for Wiltshire.

There are a number of benefits of being part of the EQUA MAT

- **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.

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

The new 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 to run the MAT, and are the only people able to amend the Articles of Association of the Company (and for this they require consent from the Secretary of State).

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, eg; 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 the new 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.

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 all 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. The new MAT must be established following the legal requirements. The key areas of work are related to any legal transfers of land, buildings and assets and establishing appropriate leases, a 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, and 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.

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 new MAT. Following the detailed planning and consultation steps, we would anticipate the schools becoming academies within the new EQUA MAT in the spring term of 2019.

Will the schools be changing their names and uniforms?

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