



26/1/26

Consultation On Joining Pyramid Schools Trust

Dear Stakeholder

As you may be aware, The Firs is a standalone Academy and as such, we are independent from the local authority as an institution and responsible for all aspects of the provision we make. At The Firs we are always seeking to enhance that provision, to achieve the best outcomes for children. Despite the fact that this independence carries many benefits, it also has its challenges. The Governors and Senior Leadership Team have, after very careful consideration, decided that joining a Multi Academy Trust is in the best interests of all our children.

Following rigorous investigation of a number of different possibilities we have come to the conclusion that joining The Pyramid Schools Trust would be the best option for The Firs.

The governing body of The Firs Lower School has committed (in principle) to join The Pyramid Schools Trust (PST) and we are therefore consulting on this proposal with all our stakeholders.

As a member school, The Firs Lower would retain its current name and those aspects that are so dear to us, for example our caring Firs' Way ethos and the approaches to teaching and learning that have enabled us to make The Firs a successful school for many years.

We will, however, be able to begin to benefit from being part of a Multi-Academy Trust, with opportunities to further improve outcomes for our children by developing and enhancing the curriculum we offer, sharing best practice between schools and teachers, receiving direct support from the central services team at PST and making significant financial savings on the procurement of key services.

General information is attached along with the vision and values of The Pyramid Schools Trust and the answers to some 'frequently asked questions'. There will also be a consultation event, at The Firs on **Tuesday 3rd February at 7:00pm** when parents will have an opportunity to hear from Steve Kelly, The Chief Executive Officer of PST and members of the central team. So we can gauge numbers, we will send

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out a Google Form in the next few days, so that you can let us know if you are intending to join us for the presentation.

We want to hear your views, which the Governing Body will consider when making their final decision. If you would like to comment on this proposal, or if you have any suggestions or observations you would like to make, please email office@firslower.org. The consultation period will end on Friday 20th February.

We hope the information provided offers clarity about the proposal and the reasons for joining The Pyramid Schools Trust. We look forward to hearing your views.

Yours sincerely

Adam JG Campbell
Headteacher

The Vision of The Pyramid Schools Trust

Working in partnership, so future generations Achieve, Belong and Contribute

We will:

- Ensure the highest standards for safeguarding and pastoral care and develop a central resource to support staff, pupils and families.
- Develop a collective focus on wellbeing and personal development, working together to support physical and mental health and build resilience, confidence and independence.
- Develop coordinated provision to offer the most effective support to our most vulnerable pupils (such as those with Special Needs) and their families.
- Enhance school improvement and enrich the curriculum, by continuing collaborative curriculum development, appointing leaders of both primary and secondary school improvement and identifying Pyramid subject leaders with a focus on achieving outstanding outcomes across the full curriculum.
- Provide excellent continuing professional development, drawing on the best quality support from within and outside the Trust, to develop best practice in all aspects of our work, particularly teaching.
- Set challenging, aspirational targets for pupil achievement, (including for disadvantaged groups), monitor and support staff and pupils to deliver these, so that our standards rise even higher.
- Establish a central resource to manage our finances, starting with combining shared services such as payroll, insurance and tendering and bringing together a team to deliver services, including legal, HR, IT, utilities, buildings and grounds work as well as purchasing. This team will achieve efficiencies and reduce burdens on headteachers, so that they can focus on education.
- Provide effective strategic Trust governance, working openly and collaboratively with our Local Governing Boards to enable successful local leaders to continue to deliver effective school improvement.
- Achieve efficiencies through effective management and financial prudence, taking advantage of natural staff changes and providing new opportunities for staff.
- Ensure that no decision is to the detriment of learners in any setting.

Frequently Asked Questions

Consultation

Do schools need to consult before converting?

Yes. All schools are required to carry out a consultation, 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.

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

- Parents/carers
- School staff
- Local schools and the local community
- Other local trusts
- Local businesses
- Local councillors and politicians

Academies

What is an academy?

The Firs is already 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 offer a full, broad and balanced curriculum. The Academies Act 2010 enables this. They aim to provide a free, first-class education for pupils of all abilities through a fresh approach to school leadership, teaching and learning.

Academies are managed by their own academy trust and are not the responsibility of the local authority. Academy trusts are directly given 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.

Multi Academy Trust (MAT)

What is a multi academy trust?

A MAT is a single charitable company which operates a group of schools. In this case, each school will continue to have a local governing body to which the MAT will delegate certain functions. The MAT will ultimately be accountable and responsible for the performance of all schools in the trust.

Funding for 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 funding agreement for each school within the MAT.

Having a single trust governing all schools results in there only being one employer for all staff which allows the sharing and movement of resources through schools in the chain.

MATs may operate so that, within the parameters of the funding agreement, some of the individual school's budget is combined and used to fund shared services such as contracts. This helps the chain to share best practice and achieve economies of scale.

Why would a school want to convert as part of a Multi Academy Trust?

A MAT, as a single legal entity, allows schools to achieve a strong collaboration and to use this collaboration and accountability to drive up school standards. Where there are underperforming schools in the chain, representation in the trust can ensure there is sufficient challenge and support to turn those

schools around. Equally where there are strong performing schools in the chain, being part of a MAT enables closer sharing of best practice to improve standards further.

The MAT can also agree to delegate as much or as little power down to the local advisory boards or local governing bodies of the schools involved, which again allows each MAT to define where 'power' should sit according to the circumstances of the schools involved.

Being part of a MAT can also help the schools to target intervention resources more directly to improve outcomes for children.

Having the MAT as the employer of staff also allows flexibility around sharing resources to meet the needs of the individual schools involved. The MAT can also provide a clear, consistent strategy and vision across a group of schools working together. MATs can often negotiate contracts and services that achieve much better value for money than if each school was to negotiate individually.

What are the main responsibilities of a MAT?

Typical activities include:

- Setting a strategic direction for improvement of educational attainment.
- Ensuring that the right infrastructure is in place to deliver the necessary changes to support the education improvement (leadership & management).
- Challenging progress in all areas of the schools' 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 academy life.
- Leading involvement with parents and the wider community, to promote the MAT and support community regeneration.
- Ensuring value for money and good use of public funds, and leveraging in 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.

Can the MAT be forced to take on schools?

No, but it can be requested to do so by the DfE.

Can we leave the MAT if we don't like it?

Both sides should be committed to making the partnership work. At the moment, there is no straightforward process for an academy to leave a MAT. If there were serious issues, we would try to resolve matters with your school and the DfE. We all want what is best for the children in your school. On occasion, some schools have moved from one multi-academy trust to another.

The Governing Body and Governance of the Academy Trust

Who runs the academies and the Trust?

An Academy Trust runs the academies within it, which is the statutory Governing Body. This is a charitable company limited by guarantee. The trust has a formal agreement or contract with the Department for Education (DfE) which sets out the parameters in which it must operate, and is also subject to charity law, public law (being publicly funded), as well as general company law. Each academy within a trust also has its own Local Governing Board.

How will the Academies Trust be governed?

The MAT has a group of Members and a Board of Trustees, and each school/academy will have its own local governing board.

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. 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.

How will the role of governors change if our school joins a MAT?

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 delegate many of its functions to the local governing board for each of its academies. The MAT remains accountable for these functions.

Local governing boards will continue to carry out many of the functions they already undertake; they will monitor and report on outcomes, contribute to setting challenging targets, offer challenge and support to leadership, maintain their role as the link with parents and the community and ensure the sound financial management of the school. They will also be able to spend a greater proportion of their time on 'pupil focused' activities, rather than establishing and agreeing policies and being involved in bureaucratic exercises.

Will the school keep the same headteacher and leadership team?

Yes. The Firs Academy will retain its current headteacher and leadership team. There are no current plans to force schools to replace any existing staff members.

The Firs Academy local governing board and senior leadership will retain autonomy over how staffing is organised. If, at some point in the future, it becomes apparent that a different way of organising senior leadership is required e.g. executive headteachers with responsibility for more than one school, it will be considered collaboratively by the Trust and Local Governing Boards.

What about other staff?

As with headteachers, there are no plans to enforce staffing changes on any individual school. Over time, the central operating team of the MAT will be able to carry out some of the functions currently undertaken at school level, which may mean staffing can be reorganised on a school level. Local governing boards and senior leaders will retain the autonomy on how to organise staffing in their schools.

Complaints

Who deals with complaints about schools that have converted to academy status?

Parents/carers who have a complaint about their child's academy school will need to contact the academy directly. Academy schools are independent of the local authority. **The local authority has no authority to investigate complaints.** 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 education needs is the same for academies as for maintained schools.

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, from September 2014, 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, once again, 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 SENDCO. (This does not apply to 16 to 19 academies.)
- inform parents when they are making special educational provisions for a child
- prepare a 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 governing body or a sub-committee with specific oversight of the school's arrangements for SEN and disability. School leaders should regularly review how expertise and resources used to address SEN could be used to build the quality of whole-school provision as part of their approach to school improvement.

School Names and Uniform

Will the school name change?

No.

Will we all have the same name and logo?

The Firs will retain its own name and logo. However, the MAT has a logo that will be used on all school correspondence as well.

Will the schools' uniform change?

No.

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 the 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 Funding Agency (EFA), based on a formula provided by your local authority. The EFA will tell you how much GAG funding the Trust and the schools will get and how the grant has been calculated. The GAG is made up of:

- school budget share - calculated on a comparable basis to the running costs of maintained schools in the same local authority
- education services grant - allocated to academies based on the number of pupils they are responsible for, to buy services no longer automatically provided by the local authority.

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

Academies will need to look at the contracts their 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, they will need to discuss with them how to transfer it to the academy trust. Software licenses will 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 provide 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. When the MAT reaches a certain size, capital funding will be provided centrally.

What happens with money raised by parents for an individual school?

The money that is raised by parents, members of the community and the school's PTA for an individual school will be retained by that school.

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 and Schools Funding Agency (ESFA) for emergencies, in the same way the local authority 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.

It is also possible that the MAT will hold a contingency for such emergencies.

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 an ongoing Grant ('General Annual Grant') which covers the running costs of the school. The EFA 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.

Conversion Process

Land

How will ownership of the land work if our school joins a MAT?

For the schools joining The Pyramid Schools Trust we expect most schools should convert very much 'as is' with as little disturbance to existing arrangements as possible. Therefore, where it is considered preferable for existing foundations (such as those at many voluntary-aided schools) holding land to continue to do so, we are in favour of this arrangement provided there are no legal restrictions.

Admissions

Will the admissions arrangements change for our school?

No. Academies retain the admission arrangements: they are required to comply with the Admissions Code and can only change their admission arrangements following the procedures set out in the Code.

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 admission to your reception year would prejudice the ability of the Local Authority to meet this statutory requirement).

Will academies have to take part in the local authority's co-ordinated admissions processes?

Academies are required through their funding agreements to participate in the local authority's co-ordinated admission arrangements in the first year of opening.

Curriculum

Who will decide on the curriculum content for our school?

The MAT has created a cohesive, all through curriculum from ages 3-19. All schools in the MAT play an active role in developing this curriculum and will decide on a local level how best to implement it.

School Improvement Partner

Will individual schools be able to appoint their own School Improvement Partner?

The MAT is developing its own school improvement team. This will be more cost-effective for schools and improve consistency in expectations and monitoring.

Ofsted

Will the MAT be inspected by Ofsted?

No. Academies are inspected individually by Ofsted using the same framework and timescales as for maintained schools.

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>