



Consultation to join White Hill Trust, the local Multi Academy Trust

You will be aware from the press, or your own experience of education, that the government are encouraging good and outstanding schools to gain academy status or join Multi Academy Trusts. Many schools have already chosen to either convert or are in the process of converting. After careful consideration, the Newtown Governors have decided to start a consultation process before deciding whether our school should convert to academy status and would very much welcome your views.

Over the last few years it has become clear that academies are here to stay and many other schools have already converted from local authority maintained to academies. Nearly all secondary schools have converted to academies as have some primary schools, and the number of local primary schools converting is gathering pace. Governors recognise that the Government are closing the traditional additional funding routes available to community schools. To secure the future of the school we believe it is important for us to take control of the academy process. We do not expect the academy status to increase the funding we currently have available; however we do hope that it will reduce the impact of the education budget cuts in the years ahead. Converting to academy status has a number of implications for the management and governance of the school. In particular, the school will be funded directly by the Secretary of State and have additional freedom to spend the money as it sees fit.

The Newtown Governors have been considering the school's position very carefully and have concluded that it is important for us to engage in this change now. In common with many other schools we have been discussing the potential advantages and routes towards academy status. We have registered an interest with the Department for Education (DfE), met with existing local and regional Academy trusts, attended expert seminars, visited schools that have converted to academy status and sought information from numerous sources.

The Newtown Governors passionately believe that the right route, for Newtown, is to join a local Trust, with a local focus, that has aspirations to grow locally. Each school governing board needs to make the academisation decision independently, and it is our hope that local schools will come together to work within one Multi Academy Trust, when the time is right. We have been working with Brushwood Junior School, to keep them informed of our progress. We do however respect each schools' independence and right to choose its own path. It is now our desire for our school to join The White Hill Trust, our local Multi Academy Trust (previously Chesham Grammar School Trust).

Our consultation paper describes our aims of continuing to provide an excellent education for all children, regardless of background and ability. The many strengths of Newtown School will be protected and please be assured we are not seeking to change the values or character of the school.

Consultation - Why academise now?

The simple answer is choice. At this moment in time we have the opportunity to academise in the way that we want and which best suits our philosophy and needs of our learners. We believe if we don't exercise this choice we will be directed down a route which may not best meet our needs. We want to maintain and develop our strengths without outside constraints.

An Academy is a state school, funded directly by the Department of Education, rather than funded via the local authority. Academies are run by a board of trustees overseeing a governing body and enjoy greater freedoms than schools run by a local authority. I have attached a 'frequently asked questions' appendix to

this letter which I hope you will find informative. Further useful information is also available at <http://www.education.gov.uk/academies>

The governors and trustees are committed to ensuring that the school continues to focus on meeting children's needs first, placing them at the heart of the learning process and ensuring that all barriers to their learning are removed. With this in mind, our governors are giving very serious consideration to joining a MAT because they wish to:

- Continue the excellent progress made at the school and maintain our good and excellent qualities.
- Further our commitment to ensure that children enjoy high quality learning opportunities, and become confident, resilient and socially aware citizens of tomorrow.
- Continue the schools excellent progress by having the freedom to follow the curriculum most suited to our children's needs.
- Further enhance children's experiences and their achievement, by gaining flexibility to improve teaching and learning, develop leadership in school and maximise professional development.
- Make full use of collaborative opportunities with local schools and other partners to improve the educational outcomes for children.
- Control the budget according to our priorities, to ensure we provide an excellent education and all our staff are well trained, motivated and rewarded appropriately.
- Be responsible for our success at a time of uncertainty, enabling us to contribute and shape local educational developments.

As part of the process of joining the Trust, staff will have to transfer to the employment of the Academy Staff and their representatives are therefore entitled under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE), to be provided with certain information by their current employer in relation to the transfer of their employment. TUPE consultations cannot start until the governing body has formally approved the proposal to convert to academy status (to do otherwise would pre-empt the governing body's decision). The school is keen to hold informal discussions with staff and unions as part of this informal consultation period.

When responding, please bear the following very important points in mind:

- Staff, governors and trustees are strongly committed to continuing to provide an outstanding educational experience.
- Newtown is committed to working within the framework of national conditions for school staff.
- Newtown is in a challenging place at a time of rapid change in education. However, we have been successfully collaborating with other local schools and we are keen to maintain this in the future. We are also committed to maintaining our positive working relationship with the local authority.

Governors will make a final decision following the consultation period, having first fully considered all feedback. I will write again to keep you informed of all developments.

To respond to the consultation you can either email [XXXXX](#) or send a letter to the school addressed to the Chair of Governors or ring the school to make an appointment with Mr Mason or Mrs Antrobus.

Thank you in anticipation of your continued support.

David Mason
Chair of Governors

Julia Antrobus
Headteacher

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the major differences between a maintained school and an academy?

An academy is no longer under the control of the local authority, although they continue to have a statutory responsibility to provide certain services under Special Educational and Disabilities Framework (SEND). Pupil admissions and the element of the budget related to pupil need, top up, are still controlled by the local authority. The top slice (money the LA takes off schools to fund services) would be devolved into the school budget, although the Trust has a wider set of responsibilities to finance.

The White Hill Trust is a limited company and audited as such. The Trust has greater autonomy, have control over the curriculum and services and resources necessary to achieve better value for money. The roles and responsibilities for governors would also change, for example, a decreased role on policy development and increased focus on curriculum and learning.

What would not change?

Very little, if anything will change in the day to day running of the schools. Keeping all that is special about us is one of the drivers for conversion. Children and staff should not notice any significant differences in the early years of the conversion.

Initially there will be no immediate or significant changes in our curriculum delivery. We would expect any changes that come about because of Academy freedoms to be gradual and evolutionary.

The governors are committed to retaining the existing name of the school – and at this stage there are no plans to alter the school uniform or anything else concerned with the day to day delivery of what we do.

There will still be a Local Governing Body – with governors drawn, as now, from a range of backgrounds. There will still be an opportunity for elected parents to join the governing body. Academies have a range of explicit freedoms not available to LA schools including setting the pay and conditions of staff and term dates of students. However, the Trust is committed to adhering to national agreements on pay and conditions.

It should also be noted that the employment rights of all current members of staff will be protected by TUPE, the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations. This means that these employment rights will transfer to the Academy Trust under the same terms and conditions of employment. Pension rights and continuity of service record will be preserved.

The school will be subject to the exact same regime and cycle of Ofsted inspections.

The Local Authority retains a monitoring role for all maintained schools in their area including academies.

Potential risks to becoming an Academy

- There will be leadership, administration and support time needed during the application and conversion process. After conversion there will be additional time and responsibilities placed on our financial and business management staff.
- There will be costs involved in conversion, although these will be covered by the conversion grant available to all schools going through the process.

There could, in theory, be potential additional financial liabilities. For example, we will become fully liable for the cost of maintaining our buildings; however, in practice we are already responsible for most of these costs now. Currently we 'bid' for money from the Local Authority to refurbish and repair our buildings. We would continue to bid for funding, however we would be bidding directly to the Education Funding Agency.

What if there is a change of government?

If there were to be a change of administration, we believe they would not reverse the academies agenda. This process has advanced too far. We believe that the academies process would march on but in a manner which would be more prescriptive. We could end up being attached to a Multi Academy Trust who have little or no understanding of our values, beliefs and ethos.

What are the implications of joining a Trust with Grammar schools?

Joining a Trust with a Grammar school will not change the ethos, values or behaviours of our school. Newtown children will continue to transition to multiple schools and these children will transition to multiple secondary school environments. We hope to work more closely with Brushwood Junior School, Chesham Grammar School and Chiltern Hills Academy.

Leadership and management

Leadership and staffing of the proposed academy are likely to adjust in line with the demands and expectations of the Multi Academy Trust.

Other staff

The teaching and support structure is already planned to change in September, with a new Deputy Head Teacher, who will also take on the role of Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO). However, we do not expect this new structure to change, subject to further budgetary influences. The administration is likely to change to meet the demands of working within a MAT.

Admissions

Pupil admissions to the academy would continue to be determined by Buckinghamshire LA.

What will happen to our governing body?

The Trustees / Directors of the academy are accountable to the Secretary of State for the performance of the school but this does not mean the Board will take over the day-to-day running of the school. Local Governing Committee's will continue to operate for the school where appropriate, including parent representatives. The White Hill Trust operates on the basis of earned autonomy for each Governing Committee – if a school is good or outstanding it will operate with an increased delegated authority. We will operate a model of delegated local governance and accountability for the Trust through the Local Governing Body, but ensure the MAT Directors / Trustees retains accountability and control of the schools within it. If a school is in special measures then the Directors / Trustees are legally required to directly intervene to ensure that it improves and would want to do so to protect the education of pupils.

What will happen to our Headteacher?

We would, of course, hope Mrs Antrobus would wish to continue to lead the school.

Do staff have to re-apply for their jobs?

No. By law all staff will be TUPE'd over to the new academy on the same terms and conditions.

What happens to pensions? Is length of service respected?

Yes, pensions are retained and length of service is maintained.

What about TA's

We can't do our work without highly motivated, skilled staff. We need TA's, teachers, middle leaders – we wouldn't expect to treat any of our staff differently simply because of school status as an academy.