

**CONVERSION TO ACADEMY STATUS
FORMATION OF CONCORDIA MULTI ACADEMY
TRUST**

CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

February 2017

Introduction

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 independent academies. Nearly all secondary schools have already converted to academies as have some primary schools, and the number of local primary schools converting is gathering pace. The governors of Wolverham Primary and Nursery School have been considering our position very carefully and have concluded that it is important for us to engage in this change. In common with many other local primary 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 Academy trusts, visited schools that have converted to Academy status, and sought information from numerous sources. Importantly we have been holding discussions with other primary schools about the possibility of joining together to form an Academy comprising of a small number of like-minded primary schools. It is our aspiration to form a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) with other schools who share our ethos and vision for the future. The governors have now decided that we should consult formally on whether Wolverham Primary and Nursery School should proceed with conversion to Academy status.

Consultation Process

The consultation will be carried out with as many stakeholders, staff, parents and pupils as possible to provide the Governors with a clear picture of the school community's views about this potential change.

The final decision on whether or not to convert to Academy status lies entirely with the Governing Body once they have consulted with and considered the views of all the stakeholders mentioned above. Please note that the formal consultation process is now open and will be so until 12pm on 31/3/17 and we encourage you to present your support, views, questions and concerns. All submissions received by this date will be considered at a meeting of the full Governing Body. Please submit your views either by email to the school office or in writing to the school's address. Please mark letters and emails 'Academy Consultation' so that they can be quickly forwarded.

In order to inform you as fully as possible, an outline of what academies are is included below. We have also set out our thinking on why we believe that becoming an Academy is right for Wolverham Primary and Nursery School and we have tried to answer some of the questions we think you might have.

What is an Academy?

Academies are schools that are funded directly by the DfE. That means that they have greater freedoms and flexibilities as they are independent from their local authority (LA). Schools that are performing well can apply to become academies.

- Freedom from LA control
- Flexibility in delivering the curriculum

- Greater control of their budget as they are funded directly by the DfE. In particular academies are able to receive and spend money currently held back by the LA for management and services.

Each Academy or group of schools within a single Academy usually takes the legal form of a charitable Academy Trust which holds the ownership of the school's site, and is the conduit for funding. The Trust does not 'own' the school and it cannot make a profit from the wider Academy. The Academy Trust appoints the governing body of each school. Academy members have a legal duty to act in the interests of the Academy. The freedoms, rights and responsibilities of the Trust are set out in a Funding Agreement between the Trust and the Secretary of State. Academy Trusts are 'exempt' charities and are not required to register with the Charity Commission.

Why should Wolverham Primary and Nursery School become an Academy?

As other schools have become Academies, the LA's funding and resources to support those still LA maintained has reduced. Many of the support mechanisms we might once have benefited from have either been greatly reduced or simply no longer exist. This means that "do nothing" is not an option.

The governors share a vision for Wolverham Primary and Nursery School, and we believe converting to Academy status will provide the greatest chance of allowing us to continue with our current values and ethos. It can be hard to articulate our vision since it involves the "feel" of the school to a considerable degree. But broadly we think Wolverham Primary and Nursery School is special, as are its staff, and that our ethos of being very inclusive and our location at the heart of this community contribute to what is unique about the school. Our aim is to provide a stimulating learning environment in which children are excited to learn and are given the confidence to achieve their potential. We aim to foster strong links between home and school, actively encouraging parents to be closely involved in their child's education. We believe that if we do not take action on this issue now we may well lose control over our future destiny as the direction of government policy remains that all schools will eventually become academies. We have concluded that the best chance of preserving all that is special about us is to embrace the opportunity of converting to an Academy as part of a Multi Academy Trust, enabling us to form partnerships in the future with other like minded schools.

The advantages to Wolverham Primary and Nursery School forming the Concordia Multi Academy Trust (MAT)

In addition to preserving as much of our independence as possible, there are a number of practical advantages:

- The schools will continue to function with the same leadership structure as they do currently.
- The school will be forming a MAT with similar ethos, vision and values.
- As an Academy, we will be required to offer a broad and balanced curriculum, as we do now, including Maths, English and Science. Although we are likely to continue to

use the National Curriculum as our guiding document within our curriculum, there may be benefits in this flexibility that we would wish to explore in the future.

- Academies have control of all of their spending. We will be better able to ensure our focus and investment in the core business of the school – teaching and learning. We will be better able to ensure better value for money both in the services that we choose to buy in to support ourselves and being able to negotiate services as part of a group.
- Managing budgets becomes more transparent as the funding becomes aligned to an academic year rather than the financial year.
- Importantly, as more and more schools have become academies we have seen the support provided centrally by the LA reduce and we believe that this trend will continue and accelerate. We feel that we will be able to use the strengths of each school to maximise the opportunities available to provide the best education for all children educated within the partnership and to develop and maintain the highest standards of teaching. We will strive to retain our current ethos whilst recognising and respecting the individual qualities of each school in the partnership.

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 from the Department for Education available to all schools going through the process.

What would not change?

Very little if anything will change in the day to day running of Wolverham Primary and Nursery School. Keeping all that is special about us is one of the drivers for conversion. Children, parents/carers and staff should not notice any differences.

We do not intend to alter radically the basis of selection admissions and intend to remain a welcoming and inclusive school in line with the Admissions Code and fair access protocol.

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

There will still be a Governing Body – with governors drawn, as now, from a range of backgrounds and skills. 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. However, the governors of Wolverham Primary and Nursery School are 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. Pupils will still continue to be subject to the same national statutory assessments and end of Key Stage assessment requirements in line with current arrangements.

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

Please submit your views by 12.00 noon on 31st March 2017.

Email: admin@wolverham.cheshire.sch.uk

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