



Frequently Asked Questions – Multi Academy Status

Our school is consulting with our parents, carers, students, staff, trade unions and the local community on the proposals to form a multi academy trust (MAT) along with like minded schools.

To learn more about what this will mean for you, your child and the wider community, we have provided over the next few pages, some frequently asked questions and answers about Academies and MATs.

Wider information on the Academies programme is available on the Department for Education website at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/academy-conversion-process>

These will be updated regularly as we receive feedback. The updated FAQs will be in a different colour within this document.

Have your say

- Complete the response form provided with the consultation letter;
- Attend an interactive online information meeting;

The closing date for responses is 5:00pm on Wednesday 7th October 2020.

What is an Academy?

As you'll be aware, Whickham School became an Academy in 2011 and Riverside became an Academy in 2012. Being an academy means we are state schools, funded directly from central government, but no longer directly under the control of the Local Authority. Academy status has given us more freedom to be innovative and creative with the curriculum, timetabling, staffing and governance. We've continued to be inspected by Ofsted and comply with the same rules as other schools on special educational needs, exclusions and admissions.

There are now over 9,000 academies in the country, including many schools in the north east of England and in the local authority.

An academy is part of a charitable trust run by a board of Directors. Academies are rightly expected to work with and support other schools.

As a stand-alone Academy we have continued to work closely with our local schools and have strong relationships that have developed over time for the benefit of all involved. After much thought and consideration we believe now is the right time to strengthen these partnerships and to join forces with other Academies to create a multi academy trust together.

What is a Multi Academy Trust (MAT)?

A MAT is formed when two or more academies legally come together in partnership. Each school keeps its own name and it is possible for other schools and academies to join the Trust in the future. The partnership ensures that the schools can share skills and best practice and make optimum use of resources ensuring best value for money for each school.

How will the children benefit?

In becoming a MAT we envisage that in many ways the children will not notice any immediate difference, they will be in the same uniform, in the same classrooms with the same teaching staff. However, in time the children will perhaps notice changes and improvements in the way that they learn for example and have greater links with each school within the Trust.

How would this proposal benefit our school?

The Trust's aim is to build upon the existing strengths of the partnership with our schools and to offer "outstanding" education provision so that every child succeeds and reaches their potential.

Why have primary and secondary schools in the same MAT?

A child's educational journey spans from age 3 to 19, but our school system tends to break that journey up into phases. Whilst there is some logic to doing this it introduces the potential for inefficiencies and loss. By working more closely together primary schools have the benefit of the subject expertise of secondary and are better informed of exactly what to do to best prepare the children for secondary education (whatever secondary they go to). Primary schools have significant teaching and learning expertise in developmental learning and differentiation that secondary schools can learn much from. From working more closely in partnership the start to secondary education will be much more efficient and effective (whatever primary school they come from), leading to accelerated learning and ultimately greater success across the whole of a child's educational journey.

What are the plans for MAT growth?

We are committed to a MAT with both primary and secondary schools because of the advantages that this brings to the schools and their pupils. Whilst we will start with the two schools that are proposed in this consultation, we have the ambition to grow to incorporate multiple primary and secondary schools. This recognises the additional benefit of schools withing the same phase working closely together on implementing a high-quality curriculum and sharing the expertise that they will bring.

We believe that:

Everyone should be inspired to be the best that they can be.

We will always strive to be the best we can be and in doing so we will resolve to ensure that all students in the Trust are given access to a range of exciting experiences that support personal development. We will place great emphasis on ensuring students are supported in developing the personal qualities that enable them to be people we are proud to know.

Education is more than just academic results. How you develop is as important as what you achieve.

Academic achievement is important and we will be proud of the success our students achieve but we believe that education is more than examination results, and we will ensure that every student develops into a well-rounded citizen who is able to make the most of their unique talents and abilities.

Equality, diversity and inclusion should be embraced without question.

We will be a Trust that cares about everyone in our community and values everyone for their unique contribution. We will celebrate difference [equality, diversity and inclusion are part of everyday life and not just a policy on a shelf]. Within our schools we will pride ourselves on the basis that every child is known and valued across both academic and pastoral teams.

There is strength in unity. Collaboration is at the heart of everything we do.

We believe that strong and positive relationships with all stakeholders, especially parents and carers are critical in ensuring a partnership is built that supports the success of each student. Collaboration across our trust will enable governors and trustees to draw on each other's experience to formulate strategic approaches. School leaders should work collaboratively to support each other and build on individual strengths.

The Trust should be a great place to work for colleagues, enabling them to achieve their full potential.

We wish to create a genuine family atmosphere across the trust rooted in a strong value system. We believe in providing excellent opportunities for professional development and career progression. We will embrace a diverse and friendly staff body across all schools who will benefit from cross-collaboration between a growing network of teaching professionals across the Trust's schools. We want to make our Trust schools the place where outstanding educational professionals want to join and contribute to our shared vision.

How will we benefit from working with other schools?

Our school already has strong partnerships with other local schools. We are therefore very interested in models that allow us to build on these partnerships, for this reason, we are seeking to form a multi academy trust with like-minded partners.

The formation of a MAT will allow us to continue the strong and established partnerships we already have, provide better opportunities for our learners and save money by benefiting from economies of scale. We shall continue to build and strengthen our existing school partnerships with schools outside the proposed MAT.

What will be the impact on staff?

Currently, staff in each school are employed by their separate individual Academy Trust Board. After conversion, all staff will be employed by the new MAT. Staff are legally protected to transfer under the same employment terms and conditions, including pensions. Staff will be provided with further information on how they are affected.

Being part of the MAT will also provide greater opportunities for career progression and development. [Staff who currently have a defined place of work in their contract could not be asked to work elsewhere without agreement. For new staff who join after any change it may be that their place of work covers the MAT as a whole as part of their job role.](#) Staff are already working together on a range of teaching, learning, curriculum and pupil support projects.

How will the MAT Trust and the schools be run?

The MAT will have a highly skilled Board of Trustees, approved by the Department for Education, made up of people with particular skills and expertise to help it run efficiently, effectively and compliantly.

Although the Board would have a number of legal and regulatory powers it would delegate many of its powers to Local Governing Bodies and Committees. Each school will have a Local Governing Body which will continue to ensure that the needs of each school are monitored closely. Local Governing Bodies would continue to have a mixture of representatives from parent, staff and local communities.

Each Headteacher would still be responsible for running their own school. The Headteachers together would form a leadership group to develop plans for partnership working and collaboration.

Financial implications - how financially secure is the MAT, what happens if one of the schools in the MAT gets into financial difficulty

[Each Trust is currently financially secure and has its own reserve which is ring fenced to that school. Budget setting will be carried out well in advance so that any changes which needed making can be implemented in good time to seek to achieve a balanced budget for each school. Budget monitoring would be carried out 6 times a year by the Trust board, and they would receive monthly update reports. Budgets will also be monitored at school level by local governors. If a school in the MAT is projecting an in-year deficit, we would work with the school to look at cost savings and if appropriate may permit an in-year deficit provided there was a financial recovery plan and the central reserve could allow this. This could result in financial delegation being limited under the scheme of delegation if this was not an agreed position so that directors have even more oversight of the position.](#)

Would the school have to change its name, logo or uniform?

No, none of the schools will be changing their name, uniform or logo.

Will the times of the school day and holidays change?

We have no plans to change the times of the school day or the term dates. Any future changes would be subject to extensive consultation with parents and carers.

Will admissions arrangements change?

Each school would remain responsible for setting the admissions arrangements for their school, with oversight from the Trust. The Local Authority would continue to co-ordinate the annual application process for admissions.

It should be stressed however, that the admissions criteria must have regard to the national Admissions Code of Practice.

We are not proposing to make any changes to the current admission arrangements for either school and families are still able to make a preference for any school they wish.

What will be the impact on other schools?

This is an exciting time for us and we believe that our proposals significantly add to the rich and varied educational offering in Gateshead. The Trust we are looking to form is rooted firmly in the core beliefs and values that we share as schools with our Local Authority. As a MAT it is our intention to grow over time, not to compete, but to contribute.

What is the process to become a multi academy trust?

The two schools have established a working group of Governors and Headteachers and, over the past few months, they have been exploring MAT status.

Based on the initial areas considered by the working group, both Governing Bodies have agreed to consult on the proposals with parents, carers, pupils, staff, unions and the wider community.

When the consultation period is over, the Governing Bodies of each school will consider the feedback received. They will then decide, individually, whether or not to proceed with the proposal to form a MAT. If the decision from Governors is to go ahead then an application will be submitted to the Department for Education, with the ambition of receiving approval to proceed by December 2020. In the new year the legal formation of the MAT would be completed including the completion of an agreement with the Secretary of State, more detailed and formal consultation will be undertaken with Staff and the internal processes required for forming a MAT would be completed. At this stage we believe the MAT could be established towards the end of the spring term 2021.

