



INTOUCH

THE GREYSBROOKE SCHOOL GOVERNORS' NEWSLETTER – OCTOBER 2019

THE
ACADEMISATION
EDITION

Securing a sustainable future for Greysbrooke

Following the feedback from last week's presentation to parents about the academisation journey we have been on, and the options available to us, we have produced this newsletter to explain in a little more detail where we're at and why, and what we believe the next steps are.

Whether you were able to attend the meeting or not, we understand that there are many questions, so we're going to try and answer as many of these as we can here. If there are additional questions or queries, feel free to speak to your parent governors Andy Skidmore or Jo Swinton, both of whom are on the academisation team.

A whistle-stop history of our journey



Greysbrooke joined forces with local school, Little Aston, to form The Aston Brooke Co-operative Learning Trust.



The government introduced pending legislation to force all schools to become academies by 2022.

At this point, the governors formed an academisation group to begin to explore our options.

Later in 2016 the government dropped the legislation, but many schools (particularly high schools) were already in the midst of the conversion process.



The academisation group continued to explore options, but at a less 'urgent' pace.



The governors carried out an in depth analysis of the school as part of producing a five year strategic plan.

In doing so, it became apparent that Local Authority support and funding were reducing year on year, and that to ensure sustainability, we needed to pick up the pace of exploring our long term options.



The academisation group explored alternatives and visited various academies and multi-academy trusts to gather information, understand what other local schools were intending to do and determine what was the best course of action for Greysbrooke.

In July 2019, Little Aston informed us of their intention to leave the Co-operative Trust, and join Staffordshire University Academy Trust. Little Aston leaving the Co-operative Trust meant that Greysbrooke governors were able to focus on what is the right decision for Greysbrooke, rather than worrying about other partners, and has enabled us to make significant progress over the last few months.

We are now in a position where the academisation group is ready to recommend a way forward to the Governing Body and enter a formal consultation process – more about this later.

A bit of general information about academies

WHAT IS AN ACADEMY?

An academy is a school that is directly funded by central government and independent of direct control by local government. Academies are inspected by Ofsted.

IS AN ACADEMY LIKE A BUSINESS?

No. A business makes profit for its shareholders. An academy is a charitable trust which cannot make profit.

WHO MAKES THE DECISION TO BECOME AN ACADEMY?

The governing body, in consultation with staff, parents and all other interested stakeholders.

DO ACADEMIES FOLLOW THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM?

Yes, although they have more freedom to make sure what is taught is relevant to pupils and their specific needs.

DOES IT COST TO BECOME AND ACADEMY?

Yes. There are legal costs associated with becoming an academy. However, the government gives each converting school £25k to cover these costs.

DO THE STAFF STAY THE SAME?

When a school converts from a Local Authority maintained school to a new academy, all permanent staff are entitled to transfer to it under the same employment terms and conditions as part of TUPE arrangements.

WHAT HAPPENS WITH REGARD TO STAFF PENSIONS?

Staff pensions continue as part of the teacher's pension scheme.

ARE ACADEMIES FOR SCHOOLS THAT NEED SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENT?

No. The majority of schools convert to an academy of their own accord due to the enhanced benefits of joining a MAT (see below). However, some schools are requested by the Department of Education to convert and join a MAT because they have fallen into special measures and they will benefit from working with partner schools who help turn them around.

WHAT IS A MAT?

A MAT is a Multi Academy Trust. This is where a group of academies come together to form a charitable company.

WHY WOULD AN ACADEMY JOIN A MAT?

Predominantly for economies of scale, but also to help keep abreast with teaching and learning opportunities, and in order to share resources.

HOW IS A MAT STRUCTURED?

There is an appointed board of trustees/directors who are responsible for the operation of a MAT, but each academy within the MAT can have its own Governing Body.

What does all this mean for Greysbrooke?

Why is the time right for Greysbrooke to consider becoming an academy and joining a Multi Academy Trust?

Over the last few years, the number of schools in Staffordshire converting to academies has increased and consequently, the level of services and support from the Local Authority has consequently been steadily reducing as financial cuts have been made. This in turn is impacting on our ability to offer the best to Greysbrooke children and will ultimately impact on our ability to achieve our school vision.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS TO THE SCHOOL OF JOINING A MAT?

- Better value for money on services. As an academy within a MAT, the MAT can negotiate on the school's behalf and maximise economies of scale (on bought in services such as grounds maintenance, cleaning and catering).
- Greater access to educational advisers who can work alongside the school to develop the learning strategy and to drive improvements.
- Quicker access to services like specialist educational needs advisers and educational psychologists.
- Easier access to training and continuous professional development for staff.
- Greater collaboration between schools. For example, schools in the MAT have the option to collaborate on curriculum and the sharing of ideas and resources.
- The headteacher's time is currently often tied up dealing with managing tasks such as finance, legal, HR and outsourcing. Joining a MAT will release some of this time, allowing the headteacher to concentrate on achieving the school's vision, especially with regard to teaching, learning and educational standards.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS TO THE CHILDREN OF JOINING A MAT?

Fundamentally, a better education and primary school experience, due to:

- Allowing the headteacher more hands on time to focus on how we can nurture, inspire and grow each individual child.
- Higher quality teaching and learning as a result of more personal development and improvement opportunities for the staff.
- Improved school resources available through being able to maximise the value in our budget.

THERE HAS BEEN SOME BAD PRESS ABOUT A MINORITY OF MULTI ACADEMY TRUSTS. WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Some academies and MAT's have had bad press for:

- Standards dropping not improving.
- Financial scandals.
- Limited educational experience in trustees and board members.
- Removing the autonomy of a school to make its own decisions on things like curriculum, staff appointments.
- Dictating staff replacements.

WHAT ARE THE GOVERNORS DOING TO PROTECT GREYSBROOKE AGAINST THESE RISKS?

We know as a school we're currently in a strong position. We're a desirable partner and we have been able to use this strength to rigorously explore and interview the MAT's we are talking to.

We have been very clear about the fact that if a MAT wants us to join them, they must show us that they:

- Have a mission and culture that is compatible with our vision.
- Are well established, financed and experienced.
- Have the necessary people and resources in place to drive school improvement – across all schools in the MAT.
- Have a good reputation and a record of improving standards.
- Are 'like minded' with Greysbrooke and have other local schools nearby to facilitate the collaboration.
- Allow autonomy for academies in the MAT.
- Have a plan for the MAT's growth which is sustainable - they will not get so big that resources are diluted.
- Have significant educational experience in the trustees and board members and are 'children' not 'business' focused.

To validate these requirements, multiple meetings have taken place with members of the Multi Academy Trusts being considered, the headteachers of schools within the trusts, as well as with the CEO's themselves.

WILL THE SCHOOL NEED TO CHANGE ITS NAME?

It is unlikely that the school will change its name from Greysbrooke. Usually when a school converts it simply replaces the word 'school' with 'academy'.

WILL THERE BE A NEW UNIFORM?

No, certainly not as a result of becoming an academy.

WILL TERM DATES CHANGE?

No. In the immediate term, there will be no need to consider any changes to the school calendar which will continue to follow the Staffordshire holidays timetable.

WHAT ARE OTHER SCHOOLS DOING?

Little Aston who has been a partner school with Greysbrooke for many years as part of the Co-operative Trust has announced that they will be converting shortly and will join Staffordshire University Academy Trust.

Academisation rates vary across the country but we believe conversion rates remain significant in Staffordshire, currently in the region of 40-45% of primaries and 70% of secondaries have already converted or in the process of converting.

We are keen to ensure that any conversion decision is made by us, rather than being forced to join an unsuitable MAT at later date because we have not been proactive.

WHAT DO THE TEACHING STAFF THINK?

The staff have given very positive feedback around becoming an academy. They have followed our journey over the last two years, as well as maintaining an interest in announcements from the Department of Education, so this comes as no surprise to them. The staff are also supportive of both the MAT's on the shortlist, and can see the personal benefits of the change.

“ I'm really excited to be talking about joining a MAT and the opportunities it will give us to improve outcomes for children. We trust the governors to make the right decision and support us through the change. ”
Richard Storer

Who are the Multi Academy Trusts being considered?

Many MAT's have been explored, and based on what we believe to be the best fit for Greysbrooke in terms of ethos, values and our requirements, we have narrowed it down to the following two. Their websites are available for more information so feel free to have a look.



Staffordshire University Academy Trust (SUAT)

www.suatrust.co.uk

Currently 1 x secondary school and 15 x primary schools



Arthur Terry Learning Partnership (ATLP)

www.atlp.org.uk

Currently 5 x secondary schools and 8 x primary schools

What will happen next?

As mentioned at the parent meeting last week, a full Governing Body meeting will be held on the **9th October** where the academisation team will present to all governors their findings and suggestions. The aim of this meeting is to:

- Decide if we believe Greysbrooke should become an academy and part of a Multi Academy Trust.
- If this is the case, which Multi Academy Trust is our preference.

Following this meeting, we will enter a formal consultation process, during which we will share the outcome of the meeting with parents and staff, continue to make ourselves available for questions, and address any concerns. We anticipate the consultation period being four weeks.

The governing body will not make a formal decision until the end of the consultation period.

And finally...

We understand there is a huge amount of information to take in here, and we are anticipating you will have further questions, but we hope this goes some way towards helping you understand our current position and the journey we have been on to get to this point.

As always, please be assured our primary concern is to ensure the future sustainability of our school and therefore the best possible option to enable us to achieve our vision –

“ We will consistently be an exceptional provider of educational excellence and enrichment opportunities. ”

As part of the consultation process, we would like to invite you to submit any queries or concerns either in writing or via email to the school office marked for the attention of The Academisation Group. We will also be holding the first information and Q&A session on the **15th October** at 6.30pm for anyone who would like to attend.

We will continue to communicate with you throughout the consultation process, and hope that by the end of this period, we can all reach a decision that feels right for the Greysbrooke of today and of the future.