



Thursday 16th January 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

Re. Academy status

During the past year, the Governing Body and I have been exploring the opportunity for the Emmbrook School to convert to an Academy. The option of academisation has been open to all schools for some considerable time and we believe it is now the right moment for us to take this step.

No doubt, you are aware that many schools have already converted to be standalone academies. The Governing Body and I have concluded however, that there is greater advantage to be gained by joining an established Multi-Academy Trust (MAT). Furthermore, the Emmbrook School is committed to being part of this local community and is keen to work in partnership with other local schools. Consequently, we are proposing that the Emmbrook School joins a local all-through MAT called The Circle Trust. This Trust was selected following a thorough review process which involved evaluating a range of other MATs, including national MATs.

We believe The Circle Trust's vision, values and the partnership approach it offers is in keeping with our own ethos and way of working. A founding principle of The Circle Trust is that all schools which comprise this MAT retain and celebrate their own unique identity and ethos. As you will know it is very important to the Governing Body and myself as Headteacher that the Emmbrook School's vision, values and ethos are kept in perpetuity. Furthermore, we can see great advantages to be gained from working with a Trust that is committed to the Wokingham area and to local schools. More information can be seen about this Trust via their website www.thecircletrust.co.uk

In order to join this Trust, the Emmbrook School will convert and change its status from a Maintained School to become an Academy. We do not intend to exercise certain freedoms offered to Academies such as altering the timing or pattern of school holidays, nor there any substantial change regarding the admission arrangements for our school or any change to established terms and conditions for employees. The joining with other schools as part of a Trust allows us to continue our pursuit of providing an outstanding education for our pupils whilst allowing us greater financial freedom which will enable us to benefit from economies of scale, such as in purchasing services.

As part of the decision making process, our Governing Body is committed to undertaking full consultation with all parents and carers, as well as other stakeholders



and will take your views into account before any final decision is taken. The purpose of this letter is to formally present the proposal that the Emmbrook School converts to become an Academy and to signpost to you where you can find additional information and to explain how you can take part in the consultation. In addition, you are warmly welcome to attend an open meeting for all parents and carers on Wednesday 29th January at 7.45pm in the library where we will take the opportunity to provide a short presentation outlining the proposal followed by an open session where we will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Attached to this letter you will find a frequently asked question sheet, which explains the practical and legal changes associated with a conversion.

The formal consultation process begins today and will conclude after a six week period on **Thursday 27th February**. Parents and carers can contribute comments via our bespoke consultation email (consultation@emmbrook.wokingham.sch.uk)

This is an exciting time for us and we are very pleased to share this new development with you. We are keen to hear your thoughts and opinions as part of the consultation process.

Yours faithfully,

Nick McSweeney
Headteacher

Alun Hicks
Chair of Governors

Consultation: Frequently asked questions



What is an Academy?

An academy is a state-funded school, which operates independently within the requirements of national codes of practice for state schools. However, unlike a state school it receives its funding directly from central government rather than through a local authority. The first Academies required a sponsoring organisation and had the sole objective of raising standards within the school. Under later legislation, schools that are either 'outstanding' or 'good' are able to convert to Academies. Academy schools have greater control of their own futures and are able to make use of some additional freedoms.

What is a Multi-Academy Trust?

Schools have a choice to become "standalone" academies or join other schools in a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT). Overtime however, it has been recognised that standalone academies are at risk of becoming isolated and are not able to benefit from the economies of scale associated with working with other partners. The Multi Academy Trust model involves a group of Academies forming a 'Multi Academy Trust' (MAT). The Multi-Academy Trust model enables schools in the Trust to share school improvement strategies, resources and services more effectively and to provide consistent and continuous support for all pupils in every school.

Why convert?

Schools have always operated within a changing educational landscape and the current situation means that for the schools to do nothing is not a viable option. It is the Government's intention that all schools in England "will over time" convert to Academy status and will cease to be maintained by their Local Authority. To date, the funding for maintained schools has been routed through Local Authorities who have 'top sliced' funding to construct and deliver a set of support services, such as legal advice, across all of their maintained schools. Local Authorities are adapting to this new climate by selling services in packages. As even remaining as we are, it is likely a community maintained school under the Local Authority would look different in the future than it does today.

Why is the Emmbrook School wanting to join The Circle Trust rather than other MATs?

A common feature of both our school and The Circle Trust is our desire to work with others having a similar outlook and perspective of the future for our children. Uniquely this MAT is an all through local Trust with a core purpose of improving educational outcomes for children and young people in Wokingham and the surrounding area.



What will change?

Day to day – very little!

There is no intention to change our school. A core value of The Circle Trust is that schools must retain their own unique identity and ethos. There will be therefore, no change to our school name, or a change in uniform or similar, as a result of academisation.

Therefore, whilst ostensibly there will be little change for students, parents and staff, behind the scenes there will be change (for the better!) The Trust offers a well-designed school improvement system and will facilitate functions such as H.R., finance and the management of the school premises. We believe becoming an academy will help us deliver these areas to the highest standards whilst prudently managing our money in current challenging financial times.

Conversion to academy status is a complex process. One of the fundamental changes for schools joining a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) is the change in Governance arrangements. As the community at large moves towards a system of Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) the importance of governance only continues to grow. A school-led MAT system should mean that whilst schools continue to be fully integrated with their local community they are crucially connected and learning from each other. This working together is about helping to improve the quality of teaching, enhancing the curriculum offer, providing greater opportunities for leadership and development of teachers and delivering greater efficiency and effectiveness in the use of financial and management resources.

The Circle Trust like all MATs is governed by the Board of Trustees; this Board is accountable for the operation and performance of the Trust as a whole and ultimately all schools in the Trust. Therefore, existing Governing Bodies of any school joining this MAT would cease and would reconstitute to become a Local Advisory Board (LAB). Current governors may continue to serve as either Trustees or Local Advisors. LABs will continue to have elected parental and staff representation.

What is the advantage of being part of the proposed Multi Academy Trust?

We now have the opportunity to work together in a supportive MAT, which builds on the collaborative structures already established. This will give extended opportunities to share good teaching and learning, join together to buy resources and develop a collaborative way of working for the benefit of all our children and families and create a pathway for the long-term sustainability of our schools.

We have a vision for education that goes beyond individual schools and is fundamentally rooted in the ambition of improving educational outcomes for all our children and young people.



A number of other elements will remain unchanged. An Academy would still be bound by the statutory codes for Special Educational Needs and we have no plans to substantively change the admissions criteria and catchment areas for the school. There are no changes to the pay and conditions of staff, to the start and finish times or length of the school day and no change to the school's policy on pupil discipline or the school uniform.

This school, as part of The Circle Trust, will continue to work closely in partnership with other local schools. That commitment to wider partnership working will remain and we will continue to work with our Local Authority in an atmosphere of mutual support.

Are there increased opportunities or demands for staff?

Certainly as an all-through Trust there are increased opportunities for a deeper professional understanding of a child's educational experience from 5 through to 18. As more schools join the Trust so there is increased opportunity to share CPD and other professional experience. There will be no expectation for teachers in one school to teach in another school in the Trust.

TUPE is "transfer of undertakings" and in essence is the process of protecting employees existing employment terms and conditions. In addition to the present consultation, there will be a separate and additional consultation for the TUPE process, which will involve staff representative and unions.

The Circle Trust strongly believes in maintaining terms and conditions of teachers and support staff. The Trust believes that staff are employed and wish to work in the school where they were engaged and as such does not practice the redeployment of staff to different schools.