

REPORT ON THE CONSULTATION
ON THE PROPOSAL FOR THE ALDERTON INFANT SCHOOL TO CONVERT TO
ACADEMY STATUS
AND JOIN THE EPPING FOREST SCHOOLS PARTNERSHIP TRUST

1. Objectives

It is recognised by the Secretary of State and the DfE that the Governing Body and leadership team of a school are best placed to assess the benefits of academy status and to decide whether it is appropriate for their school. Therefore, the purpose of consultation is for the Governing Body to present the proposal to stakeholders, to gather feedback on the proposal and to understand the level of stakeholder interest, support and objection. The Governing Body can then determine whether there is any significant stakeholder objection to academy status that would cause them to reconsider.

The objective of consultation is for the Governing Body to meet its responsibilities under The Academies Act 2010 which sets out clearly the duty to consult with 'appropriate stakeholders'. Following this, the Governing Body can then decide whether to proceed with the proposal to convert to academy status and form the Epping Forest Schools Partnership Trust.

2. Consultation activity

Governors considered carefully consultation and activities were planned in accordance with the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Parents and staff received information on the proposal and were also invited to attend a consultation presentation. The consultation letters and information were published on the school website www.alderton-inf.essesx.sch.uk

Audience	Time & Date
Parents & Carers	Tuesday 7 November 2017 at 2.00pm
Staff	Tuesday 7 November 2017 at 3.30pm

3. Outcome

Approximately 30 parents / carers from both the Alderton Infant School and the Alderton Junior School attended the 2.00pm meeting. Approximately 50 staff from both the Infant School and the Junior School attended the 3.30pm meeting along with a representative from Unison. The presentation was delivered by Mrs Dalby at both sessions and questions taken. Miss Johnson (Deputy Headteacher of the Junior School), Rebecca Fricker (Chair of Governors at the Infants) and Melissa Klein (Chair of Governors of the Junior School) were present.

Parents and carers asked questions about the structure of the proposed MAT, teacher's pay and conditions, and the changes they would see in the school. Staff were very positive about it being a "local" MAT with existing heads and governing bodies in place. The TUPE process was explained and everyone was asked to ensure that their current contracts and length of service information was correct. A summary of the consultation process is attached.

4. Conclusion

The Governing Body has met its responsibilities under the Academies Act 2010 to consult with appropriate stakeholders. As a result of consultation, the Governing Body is satisfied that there is

no objection that would make it reconsider the proposal to convert to academy status and join the Epping Forest Schools Partnership Trust.

Summary of the Alderton Infant School consultation information provided to parents, carers and staff

As you may be aware from the media, the educational landscape has changed significantly in recent years. Probably the biggest change has been the diminishing role of the Local Authority, in our case Essex County Council, and the emphasis on schools supporting one another. However, as school budgets are set to reduce further, we now feel the time is right for our next step. We are therefore consulting on The Alderton Infant School becoming an Academy and forming a trust of Academies (MAT) along with 15 other local primary schools. The CEO designate is Mr Peter Tidmarsh.

What are Academies?

Academies are state-funded independent schools, receiving their funding directly from the government, rather than the Local Authority. They are overseen by individual, charitable bodies called academy trusts. Under the present government, the Academy programme has been expanded to embrace all schools, putting more flexibility and ownership in the hands of individual schools, giving greater freedom to innovate and tailor provision to local needs and priorities. Whilst government timescales and approaches have altered, the direction of travel remains the same and Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) have emerged as the preferred academy model. The proposed National Funding Formula for schools will have a significant impact on the Local Authority and, therefore, the support options available to schools. Schools need to ensure that they future proof themselves against the financial and structural changes ahead.

What are the implications?

The stories in the press about the increasing pressures on school budgets are real and finances are being squeezed. We anticipate that the support currently provided by Essex County Council will may lose a significant proportion of its funding, reducing the services currently available to schools, or increase the costs of buying them.

What is next for our school?

Doing nothing is no longer a sensible option. We have carried out a great deal of information gathering to determine the options available and the best pathway forward. Other schools within the Epping Forest Consortium have also been scanning the education horizons and have made the decision to convert from a single standalone Academy to become a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT), inviting other local schools to join them in forming a local learning partnership. A local MAT is set to maximise the opportunities for collaboration amongst local schools, which could benefit the local community and its young people. To explore this option more, the Governors have formally agreed to pursue the next steps to initiate conversion to Academy status.

What are the advantages of joining a local MAT?

The Epping Forest Consortium already supports lots of informal collaboration amongst its member schools. A local partnership in the form of a Multi-Academy Trust would further enhance the potential for all sorts of cost savings, economies of scale and enhanced purchasing power. Educational and learning opportunities include: improved curriculum links between the schools; opportunities for staff to work across key stages (e.g. KS1 – KS2) to enhance expectations and understanding; as well as, staff development opportunities – all of which could help staff recruitment and retention, which is becoming a more significant issue due to the high cost of living locally.

What difference will it make?

We are hoping from the outside there will be very little obvious change. The uniform, the staff and the name of our school will all be exactly the same. Behind the scenes, things will work a little differently. The school will have a different bank account, we might purchase supplies and stock from different companies, but day-to-day you probably won't see any difference. The children might notice more opportunities to use facilities at other local schools, but most of the changes will happen behind the scenes to enhance provision and transition.

What happens next?

Following a 12-month period of due diligence, the Full Governing Body has voted to pursue the next steps to initiate conversion to Academy status, with a view to forming a MAT with up to fifteen other schools in the Epping Forest area. We will register this proposal with the DfE and Essex County Council for approval. Another important part of this phase is to launch a formal consultation with you, the parents, staff and other stakeholders. This is a crucial part of the process which takes place in tandem with a host of other tasks that will be completed over five weeks.

Suggested structure?

Four Members: Members are like shareholders in that they have the ultimate power. They meet once or twice a year and are unpaid volunteers.

Eight Trustees (including the CEO / Mr Tidmarsh): The day-to-day running of the MAT and real power lies with the Trustees/Directors (as the MAT is both a charity and a company). When an Academy joins a MAT, all decisions are made by the Trustees. They need a good skills base and experience and share the MAT's ethos. The Trustees are also unpaid volunteers. The Trustees do have liability, but they will be insured.

School improvement hubs (covering, for example, Teaching and Learning, Safeguarding, Assessment, SEND, as well as the SCITT, Teaching School): Rather than a school covering all aspects of school improvement on its own, it will collaborate with other local schools. This will abet financial savings by centralising some of the HR, admin and finance services and also allowing the Headteachers to concentrate on Teaching and Learning and standards.

Administration arm (HR/Finance)

What do you think?

We are keen to hear your views and your questions. To explain the process more fully and give you the opportunity to ask questions we have organised two meetings for the school community.

1. Parent and carers information meeting on Tuesday 7 November at 2.00pm
2. Staff information meeting on Tuesday 7 November at 3.30pm

We will talk to you more fully about the options we have been exploring, the choices made and why, and the timeline for the conversion process.

Frequently Asked Questions

Will this mean a new uniform?

No, the uniform will remain unchanged if we join a local MAT.

Will the school name have to change?

No, we will still be called The Alderton Infant School. The name of the MAT will be the Epping Forest Schools Partnership Trust. We will work in partnership with the other schools including the Junior School with whom we share a site and families.

Who will be running the school?

Our School will still have its own leadership team and its own Headteacher. The full governing board may reduce in size to form a local governing body. They will all be accountable to a board of MAT trustees who will oversee all the schools in the MAT.

When will The Alderton Infant School become an Academy?

If each stage is successful, we are likely to convert on 1st July 2018. Nothing is definite until the secretary of state for education and the school signs the agreement. The Junior School is likely to join as of 1 April 2018.

Is there a financial cost to the school?

We can apply for a £25,000 government grant to help with any costs linked to the conversion, such as legal fees. We don't anticipate any financial costs beyond that funded by the grant.

Will the school have more money if it becomes an Academy?

The school will still have its own budget allocation from the DfE, but instead of this coming via the Local Authority, it will come via the MAT. Currently the LA keeps a percentage of this allocation. As an academy, the vast proportion of the budget will be devolved to the school, but a small percentage goes to the Epping Forest Schools Partnership Trust. Specific figures will be available once we are able to get funding details from the DfE about budget shares