



St John's
Church of England (VA)
Combined School

Inspire creativity and fulfil potential within a
Christian ethos

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· Headteacher: Mrs G J Grimsey
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· Chair of Governors: Mrs C Gulliver
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St John's C of E (VA) Combined School

Conversion to academy status through joining the Oxford Diocesan Bucks Schools Trust, ODBST (A Multi-Academy Trust)

Consultation Period: 21 June 2017 to 19 July 2017

Background

The academies programme commenced in 2002 and since 2010 it has been widely available for all schools. The purpose of the academies programme is to give every school the opportunity to decide if it wants to continue under the umbrella of the Local Authority or to become an independent state school.

Over recent years there have been on-going financial constraints and cuts faced by local government and many services traditionally provided by local authority have either been reduced or have been completely phased out.

As a school we have to consider whether to convert to an Academy and we are mindful of the Government's view that all schools should become academies over time. In considering the various possibilities open to our school the leadership and governors have kept the following matters at the forefront of their thinking:

1. What is in the best interests of the children in our school, both now and looking ahead to those who will attend in the years to come?
2. How can we best preserve the school's distinctive Christian ethos and continue to adhere to our vision statement?
3. Whether we will retain a significant role in running our school at a local level?

What is an Academy?

An academy is a government funded school that is independent to the Local Authority. Whilst academy status gives schools additional responsibilities and greater freedoms, in terms of the day to day functioning, an academy school will not be noticeably different for parents/the community compared to a Local Authority maintained school.

Responsibility for funding an academy school, monitoring performance and any capital projects will fall to central government rather to local government, although in reality this will be via an Academy Trust.

If the decision is made to transfer to become an academy, the school and governing body will join an Academy Trust, which is a charitable company.

No one can make any money from the company. The company is limited by guarantee. It does not pay dividends and makes no profit.

Schools have the option to convert as standalone academies, or to convert as part of a Multi Academy Trust (MAT); however, no school within the Oxford Diocese has converted as a standalone academy since April 2013 – all have

joined MATs. The governors and headteacher have looked in detail at the options available to the school and we have agreed that becoming an Academy, as part of ODBST, would seem to offer the best solution. Therefore, we are now exploring that in detail (including hearing your views) in order to establish whether or not this would be the best way to safeguard the distinctive education offered by the school.

What is the Oxford Diocesan Bucks Schools Trust?

ODBST is a Multi Academy Trust being established by the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education to enable schools across the Buckingham Episcopal Area (which covers Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes) to convert to academy status within the family of the Diocese. The MAT is open to church and non-church schools. The vision is to allow schools to develop and share best practice and work in support of one another whilst benefiting from central support services.

Although this is a new organisation, it is the sister of the established Diocese of Oxford MAT (Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust (ODST)), which currently serves 25 schools across Oxfordshire and Windsor and Maidenhead, but which intends to expand to around 30 schools by the end of the calendar year. The Oxford Diocesan Board of Education and ODST will both be supporting the establishment of ODBST, and our school would be one of the first to join.

Why do we wish to join ODBST?

The governors and headteacher believe that the best way to serve the future of this school is to join ODBST as an academy because we will be able to help the school to continue to improve; feedback on the support and services from schools already in ODST is very positive; it will provide a safe and secure home for our school in times of very considerable change in the education field; it enables the local governing body to continue to run the school locally (with accountabilities to ODBST) and it will preserve the Christian character of the school. We are also aware that there are other schools in the area that are exploring this possibility and we will therefore have not only the ongoing Diocesan support but that of ODBST and neighbouring schools.

Schools will be supported in the trust to enable school staff to concentrate on continuing to deliver the highest standards of teaching and care to all pupils. This support is given through central services which are funded through a top slice from the academies income. ODBST academies will automatically be provided with support regarding the curriculum, school improvement, HR advice, finance software, training and advice, governance, premises and admission appeals.

ODBST Vision

At the heart of the ODBST vision is the belief in educational excellence. The belief that ODBST is called to serve pupils, staff, parents and their local community by providing academies with the highest levels of academic rigour and pastoral care. Academies are places where children and young people develop and thrive intellectually, socially, culturally and spiritually.

ODBST academies teach a broad and balanced curriculum within national guidelines. Focusing on core skills, this is designed to ensure that all pupils reach their academic potential and seeks to enrich their experience along the way. Pupils are enabled to succeed in an atmosphere of high expectation, aspiring to educational excellence with a firm commitment to Christian values.

ODBST is committed to sustaining high quality schools, and supporting schools in need of specific improvement. They set out to recruit and retain staff of the highest quality and to offer them the working conditions they need to give of their best as they serve the pupils in their care. They work in partnership with families so that students can be engaged and effective learners.

ODBST seek to embody the Christian experience of community, where gifts are shared without counting the cost, where the emphasis is on what can be contributed, rather than on what might be received, and where each is given according to need.

As a limited company operating within the family of the Diocese of Oxford, ODBST are motivated by Christian values to serve local communities. But they do not impose those values. Admissions policies are open, and priority is normally given to children in the local area.

ODBST welcome those of all faiths and none, and are proud of the ethnic diversity within their academies.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How many academies will be in ODBST?

There are four other schools that currently have an Academy Order to join ODBST. In total, there are 14 schools that have expressed a formal interest to join the MAT. It is envisaged that, eventually, ODBST may grow to as many as 30 schools, however, this will be determined by demand from schools with Bucks and with the permission of the Department for Education.

2. In light of the removal of 'enforced' academisation, is it still a requirement or expectation that schools will have to convert?

Although the government has decided to no longer impose a deadline for schools to become an academy, or to have the process in place to become an academy, by 2020, it is still advocating that all schools become an academy. In the most recent government paper, "Schools that work for everyone", the Department for Education states:

"It remains the Government's ambition that all schools ultimately benefit from the autonomy and freedom to innovate and to meet the needs of their community that academy status brings, and we will be supporting schools to make this transition." (Schools that Work for Everyone, Government Consultation Document, September 2016, p7)

3. How long does it take for a school to become an Academy?

It is expected that most schools can convert to academy status in around five months after achieving the initial DfE approval to proceed.

4. Do schools need to consult before converting?

Yes. All schools are required to carry out a consultation but it is up to each school to decide whom and how to consult. There is no legally specified length of time for the consultation and schools have flexibility in how it is conducted. We are currently consulting with parents, staff, local schools and the local community. We will also conduct information sessions for pupils.

5. How are we consulting with stakeholders?

An information evening is being held on 12 July 2017 to answer any questions. The governing body will then take a vote on Academy status at their following meeting and we will inform all stakeholders of the decision after then. After this point, we will continue to communicate and consult through a variety of methods to ensure that everyone is kept up-to-date and all views are considered.

If parents, staff and the community have additional questions to ask, they should email the school. These FAQs will be updated periodically on our website.

6. What does the conversion process involve?

After carrying out its own due diligence the key steps we must take are to:

- The Governing Body formally agrees to consult on becoming an academy and within which MAT
- Obtain the Secretary of State's initial consent by securing an "Academy Order";
- Carry out the necessary consultation and decide to proceed;
- Agree a supplementary funding agreement with the DfE and ODBST;
- Ensure that the school site is made available to the Academy Trust via leases and/or supplemental agreements;
- Ensure that financial systems are in place to manage funding;
- Transfer, renew or procure new contracts, service level agreements and licences and purchase insurance as appropriate;

- Transfer under TUPE all contract arrangements for staff. This is a formal legal consultation process which is separate from the consultation with all stakeholders. This would not start until after the vote by the Governing Body to apply for academy status.

7. Does the school have to change its name or uniform?

No. The name of the school does not have to change and the uniform requirements do not have to change either. There are no plans to change the school name or uniform requirements should we decide to convert to academy status.

TEACHING AND THE CURRICULUM

8. Will the school be able to set its own curriculum?

Academies can offer a more flexible curriculum but they are required to provide a 'balanced and broadly based curriculum'. The teaching of English, Maths and Science would, of course, remain central and as a church school RE would be important. The teachers and governors will work with ODBST to implement the curriculum to best meet the needs of its pupils using the freedoms available to it.

9. What would happen to SEN provision?

We would continue to provide the same support for pupils with a statement of special educational needs and indeed the funding for this element continues to be provided by the Local Authority. The Local Authority retains its responsibility for statutory duties, obligations and procedures remain in place when a school converts to academy status.

10. Will academies be free from Ofsted inspections?

No, academies remain fully under Ofsted's inspection arrangements.

PERSONNEL

11. What happens to all the staff?

All staff are entitled to transfer, under TUPE regulations, to the Academy with their same terms and conditions as at present.

12. Can academies alter the pay and conditions of employees?

When a school converts to a new academy, employees are entitled to transfer under the same employment terms and conditions. There is a legal process to go through, which is called TUPE, whereby staff maintain existing pay, conditions and length of service. Any alterations can only be made as they would have been by the Council (for example, changes to pay and annual leave negotiated with employee's representatives). This position will continue unless and until the contract of employment is varied with the agreement of the employee.

It's important to note that there are no plans to alter the pay and conditions of staff. Of course, any changes made nationally would apply.

13. How would staff pensions be impacted by the school converting to an academy within ODBST?

Upon conversion all staff will remain members of their current pension scheme i.e. Teachers' Pension Scheme or Local Government Pension Scheme. These will also be open to new staff who join. The trust will be an "Admitted Body" and become a contributing employer into the central pension pots. Pension benefits of staff, employee contribution rates and continuity of service are unaffected.

14. How will union membership (NUT, NASUWT, Unison, etc) work?

Union recognition would remain as it currently stands; all employees are entitled to be part of a union.

15. Do we have enough support staff to cope with the change of status?

As we are proposing to join ODBST, many of the additional tasks associated with conversion and academy status are met by the Trust. It is not anticipated that further support staff would be required. However, the Governing Body would keep this under review.

16. Would we be able to buy services such as HR and payroll more cheaply if the school was not buying from the local authority?

ODBST will procure some services on behalf of schools in ODBST and will be able to negotiate better deals for a group of schools. The Governing Body will be able to procure services from a wider range of providers (and can continue to buy some services from the Local Authority – where they are still available).

17. How do the staff feel about conversion as part of ODBST?

Staff are being fully involved in the discussion regarding conversion. Meetings for staff with representatives from ODBST are being held to answer questions both about the process and being part of ODBST. The views of staff are held in the highest regard by the governors and school leaders. Ensuring that all viewpoints are listened to and all concerns addressed is a critical part of the conversion process.

ADMISSIONS

18. What are the admission requirements for schools converting to become academies?

No changes are proposed to the admissions criteria or catchment area. The governors will continue to be the admissions authority for the school. If any changes are proposed in the future to admission arrangements there would be a full consultation prior to any changes being made, in line with statutory requirements. We will continue to publish our admission arrangements on our website well in advance of each academic year.

The Local Authority retains responsibility for co-ordination of admission arrangements for entry into Year R and Year 3.

FINANCE

19. How are academies funded?

Academies receive the same level of per-pupil funding as they would receive via the Local Authority (LA) as a maintained school, but their funding is received via the Multi Academy Trust (MAT).

The school, as an academy, pays a top slice of this funding to the MAT for the services provided (e.g. School Improvement, HR, Finance, Legal Services etc). Previously they would have paid service charges to the local authority for these services. The overall net impact on the financial status of the school will depend upon the level of current service charges paid to the LA compared to the Top Slice that will be paid to the MAT.

20. Do we have to cover the full cost to convert to an academy?

No. The Department for Education currently pay a flat-rate grant of £25,000 and the conversion is not expected to impact on the Academy's revenue budget.

21. Will there be a capital fund or a specific grant for insurance to cover for emergencies in academies?

Academies are required to cover insurance at specified minimum levels of cover. ODBST will ensure that the necessary insurance is in place through the Government's approved insurance scheme (RPA).

22. Who would own the land and buildings?

The land and buildings remain in their current ownership but are made available to the Academy via a 125-year lease and/or a supplemental agreement.

23. Will we retain the existing financial systems?

The financial system will change to better reflect the requirements of an Academy Trust and meet the company accounts requirements.

24. How would we get a capital building project carried out?

ODBST is now part of a pooled capital funding scheme co-ordinated through the ODBE and is awarded an annual allocation from the Department for Education. This is allocated to schools based on our condition surveys. Our condition survey will be updated as part of the conversion process. We will continue to receive an annual DFC allocation for small capital projects as we do currently.

GOVERNANCE

25. What are the expected changes to the Governing Body?

ODBST has a central Board of Trustees, appointed by the Members who are appointed by the Diocese. The Trustees are responsible to the Secretary of State for overall standards for each school in ODBST and for maintaining a strategic oversight of the Trust. A Local Governing Body will be established as a committee of the Board of Trustees, which will be responsible for the day-to-day operational matters at our school.

26. Becoming an academy will require a strong and effective Governing Body. How will we find the governors with the necessary skills, experience and time?

Being part of ODBST means that the board of directors will have the necessary range of skills required at a strategic level. The Local Governing Body does not take on the additional requirements under the Companies Act and therefore, we feel it will not impact on our ability to recruit locally.

Recruiting and retaining governors with key skills and experience remains a key task for all schools and ODBST are committed to supporting governors in their role

27. What will happen to local links and partnerships that we already have?

These will continue. Joining ODBST does not preclude us from being part of local partnerships which are for the benefit of the school.

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