

# Yenton Primary School

## Conversion to Academy Status Consultation Document

May 2018

This document is intended to set out all the information that staff, parents/carers and stakeholders need to know in order to be fully informed about the proposed change. Teachers, employees and parents and carers are invited to research these changes if they wish, and use this document as a guide.

We invite all stakeholders to make their feelings known to the school during the course of the consultation. Although the decision on whether to convert or not lies legally with the Governing Board alone, governors are keen to take into account as wide a set of views and opinions as possible.

### **Introduction**

Over the last few years, with the diminishing capacity of the Local Authority, it has become clear that academies are here to stay, and other schools in Birmingham have already converted, or are considering converting, from local authority maintained schools to independent academies. The number of local primary schools seeking to convert is continuing to gather pace. The governors of Yenton Primary School have been considering our position very carefully, and have concluded that it is important for us to engage in this change.

In common with many other local primary schools, we have been discussing the potential advantages and routes towards Academy status. We have registered an interest with the Department for Education (DfE), met with existing Academy Trusts, attended seminars, visited schools that have converted to Academy status, and sought information from numerous sources.

We now wish to consult formally on whether Yenton Primary School should convert to Academy status.

### **Consultation Process**

The consultation will be carried out with as many stakeholders, staff, parents and pupils as possible to provide the Governors with a clear picture of the school community's views about this potential change.

The final decision on whether or not to convert to Academy status lies entirely with the Governing Body once they have consulted with, and considered, the views of all the stakeholders mentioned above. Please note that the formal consultation process is now open and will be so until **12 noon on 20 June, 2018**. We encourage you to

present your support, views, questions and concerns. All submissions received by this date will be considered at a meeting of the Governing Board's 'Academy Consultation Working Group'.

Please submit your questions, comments, views;  
by email to the governing board at [consultation@yenton.bham.sch.uk](mailto:consultation@yenton.bham.sch.uk);  
via Survey Monkey at <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/RD55ZLS>  
or put a comment in the suggestion box in the Main Reception or send a letter marked "Academy Consultation" to the School office.

In order to inform you as fully as possible, an outline of what academies are is included below. We have also set out our thinking on why we believe that becoming an Academy is right for Yenton Primary School and its community, and we have tried to answer some of the questions we think you may have.

### **What is an Academy?**

Academies are schools that are funded directly by the Department for Education (DfE). They have greater freedoms and flexibilities because they are independent from their local authority (LA). **Schools that are performing well can apply to become academies.**

Many schools see that becoming an Academy carries positive benefits. Other schools convert in order to protect themselves from future jeopardy. Both views have validity:

#### **Positive Benefits**

- Freedom from LA control allows schools to make strategic decisions without unnecessary administrative burdens;
- Academies have some flexibility in delivering the curriculum, allowing teachers to take ownership of lessons and better maintain pupil interest;
- By receiving funding direct from the DfE, Academies can keep the share of funding previously taken by their LA for administration costs. This money can then be used to purchase goods and services from best value providers, rather than being tied in to the LA;
- A group of schools sharing central administration can make economies by sharing resources, meaning more money is left for spending on pupils;
- A group of schools working together with shared strategic objectives and values can provide mutual support and expertise (resolving many of the problems of scale suffered by small stand-alone schools).

## **Future Risks**

- Government policy has, for some time, supported the formation of Academies and this is unlikely to change. As more schools become Academies, there is a potential risk that the remaining schools might eventually be forced to convert. They may have little control over the process.
- Government funding for LAs is under constant pressure and over time there is an increasing risk that the resources and support available for schools will decline. Joining a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) now is potentially a form of insurance against a future decline in provision from the LA.

Each Academy usually takes the legal form of a charitable Academy Trust which holds the ownership of the school's site, and is the conduit for funding. The Trust does not 'own' the school and it cannot make a profit from the wider Academy. The freedoms, rights and responsibilities of the Trust are set out in a Funding Agreement between the Trust and the Secretary of State. Academy Trusts are 'exempt' charities and are not required to register with the Charity Commission.

### **Why should Yenton Primary School become an Academy?**

The governors believe that Yenton is a school with special qualities that can be protected and enhanced by academy conversion. The school has excellent leadership, and across the school it has teachers and support staff of the highest quality. The school is ambitious and has a clear vision for the future.

It is a good school which should serve and sit at the heart of its community, and which should provide an exceptional education and wide opportunities to children in our community, as well as contributing to education in a much broader context. Our aim is to provide a stimulating learning environment in which children are inspired and achieve the best possible outcomes.

### **Why should Yenton join a MAT as opposed to becoming an academy in its own right?**

We could not afford to run as a standalone academy and this model is not encouraged by the government. The main benefits to Yenton of academisation are founded in collaboration, mutual support and shared expertise and we cannot access these benefits as a standalone school.

### **Why is Yenton considering converting to an Academy and joining a MAT now when the government is no longer making it mandatory for schools to convert to Academies?**

The government is continuing to encourage schools to convert to academies. Although it is not mandatory for schools to convert there is a reduced level of LA statutory duties and corresponding funding resulting in reductions in the quality of services they provide. This, together with enhanced grant funding pots for academies, means that government is in effect continuing to support Academy/MAT conversions.

### **If we convert to an academy and join a MAT, why not link with local schools?**

The school has been supported by Robin Hood MAT for almost two years. The governors believe that continuing to work with Robin Hood MAT would greatly benefit our school, its children, staff and community.

In being part of a successful, like minded MAT, we can collaboratively develop policies and practices, draw upon expertise and experiences that we currently cannot access, provide support and career advancements for staff.

Part of the school's desire to convert to an academy is also because of our concern for the future. If Government policy continues to favour the formation of academies, the ultimate outcome is that those schools that do not make the change soon will perhaps be forced into changing in the future. Schools who are pressurised to become academies often have little choice about the group that they join. They may have to join a 'chain' of schools and lose their autonomy completely. We have the opportunity, now, to join a MAT who we have been working with since September 2016, that we share values and ideals with, and whom we trust. The governors believe that this is a good option to protect Yenton's future.

In addition, the governors believe that by joining a like-minded MAT, we will be able to gain a greater financial efficiency than at present, through the sharing of resources, increased economy of scale and the ability to negotiate central contracts beyond the scope of the Local Authority. These increased efficiencies can then be reinvested into the education of the children, further deepening their learning and future successes.

### **Who is Robin Hood MAT?**

The Robin Hood MAT was formed in 2016 and Robin Hood School (based in Hall Green, Birmingham) has been successfully operating as an academy since 2013. Cedars School, formerly Cottesbrooke Junior School, (based in Acocks Green) joined as a failing school in 2016 and the improvements in performance are already becoming evident. Results at Robin Hood are consistently good and those at Cedars are steadily improving.

Financially the MAT is in a good position; the leaders are experienced in bidding for funding and maximising income opportunities to plough back into the children's education. The trust is not backed or related to big business. Yenton's governing board can see no evidence of profiteering in the trust. We believe the values and ethos of the

trust together with careful cash management practices mean that this trust has a bright future.

### **The advantages to Yenton Primary School of forming joining a Multi Academy Trust**

The governing board believe the advantages to be:

- The MAT will allow the school to form strong bonds in the city and form an infrastructure that will allow it to continue to flourish in the future. Closer accountability ties and processes will further sharpen the school's thinking and focus as well as provide help and support for developing collaboratively the performance of key groups;
- The MAT will have schools which share the same values, objectives and ambitions. The Head Teachers have a strong relationship and a team approach. The school leaders believe that together they will be able to provide strong leadership for the long term;
- Although the school will continue to use the National Curriculum as a guiding document, the MAT would have the flexibility to improve and stabilise the curriculum to create interest and depth for our children. This flexibility will allow teachers to more fully explore their expertise and skills and allow children opportunities to be educated in a more dynamic and interesting way;
- Academies have control of all of their spending. We would be better able to ensure our focus and investment in the core business of the school - teaching and learning. We would also be better able to ensure best value in purchasing goods and services as part of a group;
- As part of a MAT the school could share skills and experiences with our partner schools. This creates the opportunity to create improvements in provision. Also to share the provision of specialist teaching in music, arts, drama, DSEN (Disabilities and Special Educational Needs), etc;
- Managing budgets becomes more transparent as the funding becomes aligned to an academic year rather than the financial year; currently as a LA school we have to run to their financial year (April to April) instead of to the academic year (Sept to Sept)
- By being proactive and joining this MAT, the risk of losing long term control over the future of the school can be managed. The other schools in the group are autonomous of Yenton, but we believe the MAT will complement our school and not be subject to competition. The school leaders believe that this connection will strengthen Yenton's ability to achieve its long term objectives;

- By taking over the responsibility for the site and development of the school and grounds, the school leaders and governors hope to be able to develop provision to better meet the needs of school users and the wider community.

### **In the practical sense what does this actually mean for education, facilities etc?**

With regards to education there would be no change that was not driven by the school. Joining a MAT would provide us with collaborative opportunities, enhanced teacher training and access to wider expertise which will provide us with opportunities to change and enhance our provision as we see fit. We will still work with the national curriculum but will have more flexibility with regards to curriculum delivery. We will continue to do the national assessment tests and we will continue to be monitored and graded by Ofsted as to the quality of the service that we provide.

With regards to the practical aspect of facilities there would be little change here too. The land and buildings are on public land held by the LA (Birmingham City Council), this would be leased to the academy trust on a 125-year lease. In terms of caretakers, day to day running and maintenance there would be no change on conversion to an academy. Schools that become academies will take responsibility for the buildings in which they are situated including for repairs and maintenance, and health and safety on the premises. As a maintained school, Yenton already have responsibility for repairs and maintenance and health and safety and therefore there is no real change.

Becoming an academy does mean that the school will have the opportunity to apply for additional funds to enhance our building and facilities which are not available to maintained schools. Robin Hood MAT have successfully applied for funds in the past and the MAT would assist us in any applications. It also means that there may be some opportunity to pool resources with the other schools in the MAT giving the schools access to a wider range of equipment than they would have as standalone schools.

### **Potential risks to becoming an Academy**

- The governors are aware that many people see Academy conversion as something that is forced on failing schools and that Yenton Primary School might be seen in that light. Whilst in the past Multi Academy Trusts may have been seen as something that was forced on failing schools they are now seen as the vehicle for effective school to school collaboration. You are as likely to see a MAT with strong schools making positive change as you are to see a MAT with failing schools. The power of Multi Academy Trusts is that they allow like-minded schools with the same mind-set to drive change within education and affect positive change on the schooling system.

- Leadership and administration time will be needed during the application and conversion process and the school needs to keep a clear focus on its own progress and targets. After conversion there will be additional time and responsibilities placed on our financial and business management staff. We believe that they are

more than capable of managing the extra responsibilities and additional training will be provided as well as support from within the MAT.

- There will be costs involved in conversion, although these will be covered by the conversion grant available to all schools going through the process from DfE. The process should be cost neutral.
- In theory, the MAT leaders and trustees would be taking on very significant personal responsibilities that are currently shouldered by the Local Authority. The school will also take on financial responsibilities, such as for the cost of maintaining our buildings. We will still be able to draw upon Capital funding from the DfE towards the maintenance and repair of our buildings.
- The risk of the MAT failing as a group is a valid concern, given some recent press headlines, and the consequences, serious. School leaders across the group are skilled and ambitious and this risk will be very carefully managed by the trustees, the board and the school governors, in truth minimising that risk as much as possible through joint work and mutually beneficial support.

### **What change is likely?**

The day to day running of Yenton will carry on pretty much the same as it does now. If Yenton does convert to an Academy and joins Robin Hood MAT, Mr Paul Smith will continue as Headteacher and Mr Steve Taylor will continue as the Executive Headteacher. One of the reasons why we wish to convert is to preserve the current ethos and progress of the school. Neither children, parents nor staff should notice any differences.

Initially, there will be no immediate or significant changes in our curriculum delivery. We would expect any changes that come about to be gradual and evolutionary, driven by the teachers.

There are certainly no plans to alter the name Yenton for our school or change the uniform or anything else concerned with the day to day delivery of what we do here at Yenton.

It is highly unlikely that the governance of the school will change. All of the schools in the Robin Hood MAT are anxious to maintain their own control and management. The Governing Board at Yenton has played a significant part in the progress of the school in recent years. The Board of the MAT however, will have an over-arching responsibility to ensure that all of the schools in the group are well managed; this has implications that the school's governors are comfortable with.

It should also be noted that the employment rights of all current members of staff will be protected by TUPE, the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations. This means that these employment rights will transfer to

the Academy Trust under the same terms and conditions of employment. Pension rights and continuity of service record will be preserved.

All staff will receive full Trade Union representation and support during the consultation process and transfer process should a final decision be made to convert.

The school will still be subject to the exact same regime and cycle of Ofsted inspections.

The Local Authority will retain a monitoring role for all schools in their area including academies for such statutory duties as admissions, DSEN and attendance.

***What will happen if Yenton decides not to convert to an Academy?***

If the Governing Board decides not to convert to Academy status, the School will remain as a Maintained Local Authority school; it would end its working relationship with Robin Hood MAT and seek to appoint a new Headteacher. The Governing Board acknowledges that there are no benefits of a school remaining as a standalone school and it would seek to form a collaboration or federation with other schools.

**What will happen if Yenton converts to an Academy but decides not to join Robin Hood MAT?**

If Yenton does convert to Academy status but does not join Robin Hood MAT, it would end its working relationship with Robin Hood MAT and seek to appoint a new Headteacher. The Governing Board acknowledges that there are no benefits in a school becoming a single academy and it would be beneficial for Yenton to form or join a Multi - Academy Trust (MAT). In addition, the DfE are unlikely to approve a school converting to a standalone academy.

**We would like to hear your views, questions, concerns and support.**

The consultation process is open now.

**Please submit your views in the following ways:**

by email to the governing board at [consultation@yenton.bham.sch.uk](mailto:consultation@yenton.bham.sch.uk);

via Survey Monkey at <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/RD55ZLS>

or put a comment in the suggestion box in the Main Reception or send a letter marked "Academy Consultation" to the School office.

This is an exciting time for the school and we look forward to hearing your views.  
The consultation closes at **12 noon 20 June, 2018.**

Vicki Popplewell

Chair of Governors

Madeline Woodcock

Vice- Chair of Governors