

Friday, 05 April 2019

CONSULTATION DOCUMENTATION April 2019

Dear Parents & Carers,

Members of the governing body met recently to explore the possibility of the school applying to the DFE for conversion to Academy status. After careful consideration the Governors of St Hilda's have resolved, unanimously, to seek Academy Status from 1st September 2019 subject to a consultation exercise and permission from the Diocese and Parochial Church Council.

St Hilda's is very much a part of the Trafford family of schools, and we will remain so after September 2019. We intend to continue to provide an excellent service to our local community. The school is responding to the changes in the national educational landscape. We are aiming to form a permanent professional partnership with SS Simon and Jude CE Multi Academy Trust (more commonly known as "Vantage"). SSSJ is a National Support School. We see great benefit in the work that they do because of this, in terms of attracting and retaining high quality staff and providing additional resources.

There can be no doubt that the school has met many challenges in the last 3 years and we have recently been judged in both Ofsted and SIAMS inspections as Good. The Government policy of academy convertors (utilising good and outstanding schools) and sponsored academies (for schools experiencing difficulties) means that we will be able to work within that new sector, as well as with our local partner schools in Trafford. We wish to do this in order to maintain the rapid progress at St Hilda's that benefits your children. We see significant educational gains for our school being achieved.

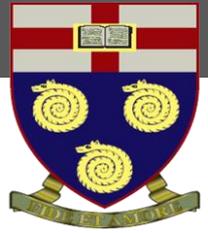
Whilst we will become independent of the Local Authority, as an academy, we will continue to make use of some of the high quality services they offer. The trust currently spends in the region of £100k annually, across the trust, purchasing services from and through local authorities.

If there are any concerns or questions that you would like to share with governors, please feel free to do so in person at "clinics" to be held on:

Tuesday, 30th April 2019 at 8-9am, 12-1pm, 3-4pm and 6-7pm

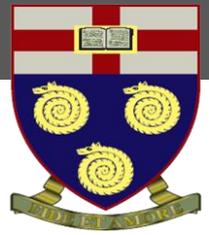
where governors, members from Vantage Trust and the head teacher will be available to talk to you individually. A formal meeting will take place on 10th May 2019 for governors to consider any feedback from interested parties. We are really keen to hear your views, and you are welcome to discuss these with governors. We hope the questions and answers below will explain more about what becoming an academy would mean for this school.

If you then wish for governors to consider your views, please submit them in writing to the Head teacher before **10th May 2019**.



We recognise though that the most important aspect to taking this decision is about looking to give our children the best opportunities and it is on that basis the Governors have resolved to move in this direction.

Below are some questions you may wish answered and I hope the answers provided are sufficient to help you decide that this is in the best interests of the school going forward.



FAQ

FAQ

1 What is an academy?

The Department for Education website defines academies as 'publicly funded independent schools that provide a first-class education.'

According to the government academies benefit from greater freedoms to innovate and raise standards. These include:

- freedom from local authority control
- the ability to set their own pay and conditions for staff
- freedoms around the delivery of the curriculum
- the ability to change the lengths of terms and school days.

2 Why convert?

Our school is striving to be the best that it can be. We wish to continue working for the maximum benefit for the children at St Hilda's with the additional support that academisation brings, as well as the CPD and career development opportunities. This is a pragmatic decision, not one that is ideological or political.

As a VA school we have been able to have more independence than some schools and have taken as much advantage of this as we could. New freedoms through becoming an academy will allow us to continue to develop a curriculum bespoke for our children as well as take advantage of deploying current centrally held funds directly for the benefit of our children

3 Is St Hilda's a failing school?

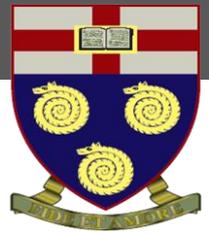
St Hilda's is very proud of its position in the local community and the way in which we see our pupils become more confident and independent learners. Ofsted rated the school as Good just a year ago, as did the recent Church School (SIAMS) inspection. However, we are striving to be an outstanding school and feel that partnering with a strong Trust will help us achieve this.

4 What are other schools in Trafford doing?

There are a number of examples within the LA of schools that have formed professional partnerships with larger groups to improve outcomes for pupils. Over 50% of pupils in the entire country are now in academies.

5 As an Academy, will staff still work with the Local Authority?

Academies are not maintained by the Local Authority. However, we want to continue to work with our local partners, including the Local Authority, as much as possible. We will continue to maintain a strong relationship with the community of local schools. All staff



would move to being employed by the Trustees (they are currently employed by the Governing Board).

The Local Authority will continue to provide services to primary schools such as SEN support, although academies have to pay for these services. However it is hard to predict how extensive these services will be as more schools become academies and the money which previously went to the Local Authority is given directly to the schools which have converted.

6 Where else can we get resources from?

We have and are developing good links with other providers. We already make quality and value for money judgements as to whether the LA or other providers give us best value. Also the extensive services and expertise of the Trust will be at our disposal.

7 What are the financial advantages?

The government has made it clear that schools will neither be better or worse off when they convert to academy status. The government is required to match our current budget when conversion to academy status takes place. However, we will be able to direct the money that is currently spent on our behalf by the Local Authority to specifically what we need and want. In some cases, this will be to buy back services e.g Educational Welfare Officer or insurance. But we may not buy some of the services at all or look to better value providers. The trust has a common reserve pot and can generate savings through greater buying power that will benefit the school directly.

8 Will our admissions policy change?

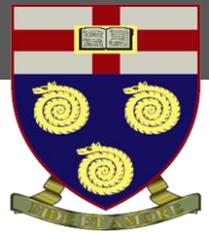
We do not intend to change our admissions policy. We will continue to take siblings and local children.

9 What will local families think about St Hilda's becoming an academy?

Although it is hard to predict what local families might think of the school becoming an academy, we do know that many local residents are very proud of and have great and increasing affection for the school.

10 Will becoming an academy have an effect on services provided for other Trafford schools?

The Local Authority is already drastically cutting services. It is very unlikely that the change in status of our single school will have much effect on the Local Authority. However, if a lot of schools convert, it could have the effect of diminishing the LAs capacity to provide all the services it currently does. One might however reflect that schools are unlikely not to buy a good value, efficient and responsive service.



11 Will becoming an academy affect how and what we teach?

There is no reason for St Hilda's to change its principles and methods of teaching and learning, although we will continue to draw on the latest educational research to improve our practice. The government has stated that academies will have more control over their curriculum. This means we will not be subject to the latest educational fashion from central government. We will of course have to teach the core subjects of literacy and numeracy according to government policy currently reflected in the national testing regime. Vantage schools use the International Primary Curriculum. Governors and school leadership are excited by the possibilities this offer and feel it has the potential to add a great deal to the education of our children.

12 Who will own the land and buildings?

The land and buildings would be transferred to the school, probably on a long-term lease. So far schools which have transferred have taken their land intact.

13 What will it mean for the school if it becomes incorporated as a company?

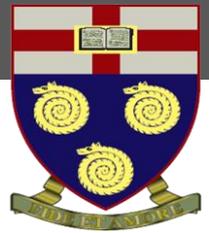
Essentially it will mean different accounting procedures for the school which will allow us more flexibility to form partnerships with other organisations. We will be able to make full use of our central staff and therefore probably reduce costs. We will also be able to form more meaningful partnerships with other schools beyond Trafford if we choose and if it is appropriate.

14 What is the role of the Academy Trust and who will be the members?

An Academy Trust is a charitable trust responsible for the running of the academy. It has a strategic role, planning for the long-term success of the charity i.e. the school, and is responsible for appointing governors. The trust has been appointed by the governing body and the Diocese of Manchester and will enter into a funding agreement with the Secretary of State. The Trust will then continue to ensure that the charity/school is performing in accordance with its charitable object. The Trust must have at least five members; one person appointed by the Secretary of State (if he chooses to appoint) and the chair of governors. But the local governing body will be responsible for the day to day running of the school.

15 What will be the charitable object?

To advance for the public benefit, education in England by establishing, maintaining, carrying on, managing and developing a school offering a broad and balanced curriculum.



16 What will be the responsibilities of the local governing body?

The local governing body will be responsible for the day to day running of the school on behalf of the Trust. The governing body will be responsible for:

- Ensuring the quality of the educational provision
- Challenging and monitoring the performance of the academy
- Looking at the pupil, parental and staff wellbeing
- Assisting in the appointment of staff

The governing body must include two parent governors and the head of school. No more than a third of the governing body can be staff. Apart from these rules, the Trust can choose who will be members of the governing body.

17 Will an outside organisation sponsor the school and will it have influence over what the school does? We would be free to work with any external organisation, and have carefully chosen Vantage Trust as a suitable partner. Any such agreement in the future would have to be agreed by the Trust and the governing body.

18 Will the role of the head teacher change?

As is currently the case, the head teacher/ head of school will be part of the governing body of the school. The head teacher will, however, continue to be subject to the authority of the governors and will act on their behalf. Of course the head teacher will advise the governors and will provide information to support their decisions.

19 What funding will be available to help schools become Academies?

The government is currently giving schools a £25,000 grant to cover the legal costs involved in conversion. This should be more than enough and the school will be able to keep any surplus from this grant.

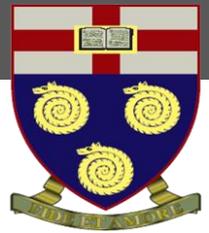
20 Will the name of the school change?

We do not intend to change the school name.

21 Will staff pay and conditions be affected?

The Academy would adopt the National Teachers Pay and Conditions and mirror the current arrangements for non-teaching staff, therefore staff pay, pensions and conditions will not be negatively affected.

It would be foolish to try and recruit staff on lesser pay and conditions. There are a lot of good schools in the local area. If our pay and conditions were less favourable than other schools, we would no longer be able to recruit the best and would possibly lose the excellent staff we currently have. In fact it may allow us to offer higher rates of pay to retain and incentivise staff than would previously been allowed



We would have more freedom as an Academy pay honoraria (one-off payments) for specific projects or temporary roles.

22 What would happen if the company went bankrupt?

Like existing governing bodies, the governors of the Academy would not be able to set a deficit budget and would be subject to the same financial monitoring as at present. Therefore, this should never happen. In fact, one of the main reasons for seeking conversion is to ensure the financial security of the school. However, if there were serious financial problems in the future, the Academy would need to seek support from the DFE while a recovery plan was put in place.

23 Will the academy change its hours?

As we would be using the national pay and conditions framework we would not be in a position to increase the school hours. If we were to make any changes to the pattern of the day, we would have to consult parents and staff as is currently the case. We would continue to offer our extended schools provision – the breakfast club and after school clubs. With increased financial freedom we may have the opportunity to make even more of this provision.

24 What further consultation will take place?

Consultations will be ongoing throughout the process.

25 Where can I find out more about this?

You might find it useful to use the link to current documents about academies on the DFE website:

<https://www.gov.uk/search?q=academies>

26 How will it affect the staff?

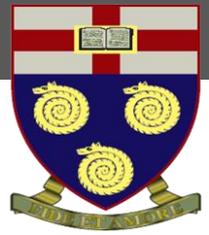
We don't anticipate there will be any impact on the staff. All governors are in agreement that staff salary, pensions and employment rights should be protected so that there is no change. (See the answer to question 21.)

27 Will the school get extra funding as an Academy?

St Hilda's will not get any extra funding if it becomes an Academy. As indicated in the answer to question 7, the government has stated it will match our existing funding which we take to mean it will neither give us more or less than we currently receive. However, we would be given the money which currently goes to the Local Authority on our behalf to fund the support services we use, and can apply for specific grants available only to academies.

28 Why convert to an Academy now?

If the governors feel that after consultation that academy status is the right move for the school.



29 What services are we losing from the local authority by turning into an Academy?

As an Academy, St Hilda's could still make use of the services provided by the Local Authority. The school would have direct control over the money which currently goes to the Local Authority from central government to pay for our use of their support services. The school already buys some services from other providers where we feel this is more efficient and effective.

More schools are converting to Academy status and there have been Local Authority cuts so these services are currently declining (see the answer to question 10).

30 How much extra work would be created for staff if we convert to an Academy?

During the conversion process there would certainly be extra work for the head teacher and for the governors as checks are carried out and the relevant paperwork is completed.

Once the conversion is completed, the school would, as now, have to manage its own affairs. The two major areas of work for a school are ensuring the curriculum and teaching meet the needs of the pupils and ensuring the support services needed to keep the school functioning such as purchasing resources and looking after the building operate well. The Head teacher will continue to be as involved in the curriculum and teaching and learning in the school.

31 How will the actual financing model change?

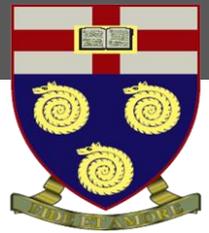
All money would come to the school from central government. No finance would be provided by the Local Authority (except Special Educational Needs/Statemented/Early Years. As indicated in the answer to question 27, this will include the money previously given to the Local Authority by central government to pay for the support services provided to the school by the Local Authority. The school would then be entirely responsible for managing its own budget (which will not be able to run at a deficit). The school would have to provide accounts to the government in the form of a Whole of Government Accounts return (the reporting format for this is currently being simplified) and accounts which satisfy the company law and the charities commission.

32 As an Academy, would we consider asking parents to make a financial contribution to the school?

The governors do not intend to ask parents for any more money than they currently give through voluntary financial contributions for trips, for example.

33 What would the constitution look like?

This is answered in response to questions 13 to 16. In simple terms the governing body would be answerable to the trust which would manage the charity and limited company.



34 Would being an Academy make any difference to the relationship we have with Secondary Schools?

There is no plan for this relationship to change. The local schools will continue to receive pupils from us regardless of whether our school is an Academy or not. We would also continue to maintain the excellent links we have built with the secondary schools nearby and work together on the children's transition between the schools.

35 As an Academy would the school still be inspected by Ofsted?

The performance of all schools will continue to be monitored and if there are signs of deterioration or other factors are a cause for concern, these could trigger an inspection.

Other than outstanding schools which convert to academies, schools continue to be inspected in the normal way.