



# **ACADEMY STATUS CONSULTATION DOCUMENT**

## **CONVERSION TO ACADEMY STATUS CONSULTATION DOCUMENT**

**March 2016**

This document is intended to set out all the information that parents 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, the board are anxious to take into account as wide a set of views and opinions as possible.



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## Introduction

Over the last few years it has become clear that academies are here to stay, and many other schools in Cheshire have already converted from local authority maintained to independent academies. The number of local primary schools seeking to convert is continuing to gather pace. The governors of Wimboldsley 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 expert seminars, visited schools that have converted to Academy status, and sought information from numerous sources. Importantly, we have been holding discussions with other like-minded primary schools about the possibility of joining together to form a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) with a similar ethos and vision for the future. The secretary of state for education has now issued the proposed MAT with an Academy Order which allows us to progress matters. We now wish to consult formally on whether Wimboldsley Primary School should proceed with an application to the DfE to 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 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016. 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 Body's 'Academy Consultation Working Group'. Please submit your views; by email to the governing body at [consultation@wimboldsley.cheshire.sch.uk](mailto:consultation@wimboldsley.cheshire.sch.uk); in writing to the school at the school address (FAO Academy Consultation); or, post a comment in the Comments Box at reception (FAO Academy Consultation).

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 Wimboldsley Primary School, and we've 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:



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## 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 LA is under constant pressure and over time there is an increasing risk that the resources and support available for schools will decline. Forming a MAT now is potentially a form of insurance against a future decline in provision from the LA.
- As LA spending is squeezed in the future, the risk will increase that small community schools will face closure, with funding being transferred to bigger more financially efficient schools. Forming a MAT can protect small local schools against this significant risk

Each Academy, or group of schools within a single 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 Wimboldsley Primary School become an Academy?**

The governors believe that Wimboldsley 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.



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It is a 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 that community. Our aim is to provide a stimulating learning environment in which children are excited to learn and are given the confidence to achieve their potential.

The school has been working closely with William Stockton, Comberbach Primary and Elton for some time. The Head Teachers have a close working relationship and similar values and ambitions. Together they have supported each other with the challenges of continual changes in primary education. Forming a MAT has become a natural step in progressing this very positive and supportive relationship.

Part of the schools 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 form a MAT with other schools that we have an existing relationship with, and who we trust. The governors believe that this is a good option to protect the schools future.

## **The advantages to Wimboldsley Primary School of forming a new Multi Academy Trust**

The governing board believe the advantages to be:

- Wimboldsley is a small school and is isolated from other local schools by the competition for pupil numbers. The MAT will allow the school to form strong bonds in the region and form an infrastructure that will allow it to continue to flourish in the future.
- The MAT will have schools which share similar 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 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 and drama;



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- Managing budgets becomes more transparent as the funding becomes aligned to an academic year rather than the financial year;
- By being proactive and forming 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 different from Wimboldsley, but we believe the MAT will complement our school rather than cause competition. The school leaders believe that this connection will strengthen Wimboldsley'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.

## Potential risks to becoming an Academy

- School is aware that many people see Academy conversion as something that is forced on failing schools and that Wimboldsley Primary School might be seen in that light. In truth however, it will soon be the case that most Primary schools in Cheshire will have converted and it is likely that this perception will fade quickly.
- 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.
- There will be costs involved in conversion, although these will be covered by the conversion grant available to all schools going through the process. 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. In practice we are already responsible for most of these costs now. Currently we 'bid' for money from the Local Authority to refurbish and repair our buildings. Recent bids have been unsuccessful. We would continue to bid for funding, however we would be bidding to the Education Funding Agency.
- The risk of the MAT failing as a group is sobering 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 schools governors.



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## What change is likely?

Very little, if anything, will change in the day to day running of Wimboldsley Primary School. One of the reasons why we wish to convert is to preserve the current ethos and progress of the school. Children and staff should not 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 no plans to alter the school name or uniform or anything else concerned with the day to day delivery of what we do here at Wimboldsley Primary School.

It is highly unlikely that the governance of the school will change. All of the schools in the group are anxious to maintain their own control and management, and the Governing board at Wimboldsey 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 schools 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.

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

The Local Authority also retains a monitoring role for all schools in their area including academies.

The consultation process is open now. Please submit your views in the following ways:

- Email the governing body at [consultation@wimboldsey.cheshire.sch.uk](mailto:consultation@wimboldsey.cheshire.sch.uk);
- Write to the school at the school address (FAO Academy Consultation);
- Post a comment in the Comments Box at reception (FAO Academy Consultation).

This is an exciting time for the school and we look forward to hearing your views.

The consultation closes at 12 noon 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016.