



## FAIRLANDS PRIMARY SCHOOL & NURSERY

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Pound Avenue  
Stevenage  
Hertfordshire  
SG1 3JA

27 June 2016

### Conversion to Academy Status – Consultation Document

The government recently announced that all schools will eventually need to convert to academy status. A high proportion of secondary schools and a growing number of primary schools are already academies and school leaders in the remaining maintained schools locally, regionally and nationally are currently assessing the options. Good schools are currently able to opt to become an academy of their own accord and have a number of options available to them:

- Set up a single academy trust by themselves
- Set up a multi-academy trust with one or more other schools
- Join an existing academy chain

The Governing Body have been exploring different structures for Fairlands for a number of months and have set up a working party to undertake research and assess the options available. They are particularly keen that Fairlands is able to keep its own identity and inclusive ethos.

The Governing Body are also keen for Fairlands to continue to be well-connected in the local community and to work with other local schools ensure that our children and staff have the best opportunities available to them.

Most importantly, the Governing Body wants to ensure that children and staff are protected from unwanted changes, including being forced to join an existing academy chain, which could change the way in which the school is run.

As a result of these discussions, the governors have decided that we should consult formally on whether Fairland Primary School should set up a multi-academy trust with another local primary school.

### Consultation Process

This consultation will be carried out by the Governing Body with as many members of the school community as possible, to provide the governors with a clear picture of the views of staff, students, parents and other stakeholders for this potential change.

The final decision about whether or not to convert to academy status lies with the Governing Body and will be made with the interest of the pupils and staff of Fairlands at heart. The formal consultation process will run until 8 August 2016 and the Governing Body encourage you to present your support, views, concerns and questions during this time. All submissions received by this date will be considered at a meeting of the full Governing Body before a final decision is made.

## **What is an academy?**

Academies are state funded independent schools, funded directly by the Department for Education. Academies have greater freedoms and flexibilities than local authority maintained schools. These include:

- Freedom from local authority control;
- Flexibility in delivering the curriculum;
- Greater control of the school budget.

Schools that are performing well can apply to become academies.

A school can convert to academy status by itself (as a single academy trust) or with one or more other schools (as a multi-academy trust). Alternatively, a school can opt to join an existing multi-academy trust, an academy chain.

Each academy or group of academies is managed by an Academy Trust, which is a charitable company set up for the purpose of running the school(s). The Academy Trust consists of a number of Directors and is overseen by Members, equivalent to the shareholders in a corporate company.

The Board of Directors can choose to delegate responsibility for running the schools down to Local Governing Bodies, or Academy Councils, which are similar to the current Governing Body and may consist of elected parents and staff and other local stakeholders.

The freedoms, rights and responsibilities of the Academy Trust are set out in a Funding Agreement between the Academy Trust and the Secretary of State. Academy Trusts are exempt charities and are not required to register with the Charities Commission.

## **The proposal for Fairlands**

The Governing Body are proposing that Fairlands Primary School sets up a multi-academy trust with Camps Hill Primary School in Stevenage. The two schools have worked together for a number of years and have a lot of similarities.

Each school will retain its own name, uniform and identity. The governors will ensure that Fairlands continues to be an inclusive school and do not plan to change the admissions policy. Responsibility for the day-to-day running of the school will continue to be delegated to a local level but being part of a multi-academy trust will add a number of advantages.

The existing Governing Body will be responsible for setting up the legal structure of the Academy Board and would appoint the Directors. The two schools will have equal representation on the Academy Board and will each have significant responsibilities delegated to an Academy Council, a local governing body. Each of the schools will retain its Headteacher and current staffing structure. The multi-academy trust will need a named Chief Executive Officer and the existing Headteachers would step up into this role on a rotation basis.

The multi-academy trust would still continue to be a shareholder for Herts for Learning, and would continue to be an active member of the Hertfordshire family of schools.

## **Advantages of setting up a multi-academy trust**

There are a number of advantages of converting to academy status. These include:

- **Retain independence**

Fairlands Primary School would like to maintain as much independence as possible to allow the school to continue to make the best decisions for the pupils. The governors believe that setting up a multi-academy trust will ensure this happens as they will make the decisions about how the Academy Trust is set up and managed. The alternative would be for the school to join an existing multi-academy trust where these decisions have already been made, which could result in less autonomy for Fairlands.

- **Better opportunities for children**

Working closely with another like-minded school will also allow Fairlands to provide better opportunities for our children. These might include shared learning experiences or school trips, as well as opportunities for joint sports days or Wow days.

- **Best use of budget**

Working with another school will enable economies of scale and it is envisaged that the schools can save money by working together. School budgets are increasingly being cut and this will free up more resource to ensure the children received the best possible education.

- **National curriculum**

Although there are no current plans to deviate away from the National Curriculum, academies do have more freedoms than maintained schools and can deliver a different curriculum if they wish. Converting to academy status will give Fairlands the flexibility to deliver the curriculum teachers believe will best suit the needs of our children in the future.

- **Staff development and opportunities**

Working with another school will provide a number of opportunities for staff development. The staff from both schools will also be able to work together to share knowledge and expertise. Training and development opportunities will also be shared across both schools. Whilst staff will never be forced to work in a different school, development opportunities might arise in a different school.

- **Recruitment and retention**

Being able to provide better staff development and opportunities will also support recruitment and retention, and will enable the governing body to attract and retain the best possible staff to work at Fairlands.

- **Developing links across the community**

The Governing Body are committed to develop links with the local community. Working with another local primary school will strengthen community links. Both schools are will also continue to work with other local schools and community stakeholders.

## **Potential risks of becoming an academy**

As well as advantages of converting to academy status, there are also a number of potential risks. These include:

- **Leadership and administration time**

There will be significant leadership and administration time required during the application and conversion process. Post conversion, there will be additional responsibilities for our finance and business management staff. The school currently has the resources to manage the conversion process and will ensure there is capacity in place to manage the Academy Trust.

- **Cost**

There are costs involved in converting to academy status. The school would receive a grant of £25,000 and the governing body believe that this should cover these costs, but unforeseen complications may lead to costs increasing.

There could be some potential financial liabilities for the academy trust post conversion, for example in maintaining the buildings. In practice the school already funds most of these costs and grants are available from the Education Funding Agency for any significant maintenance costs.

## **What would not change?**

Many things will remain the same at Fairlands. The current Headteacher will remain in post and will still be responsible for the day-to-day running of the school. The current staff will also continue to work at Fairlands. The ethos of the school, the uniform, the school day and the inclusive nature of the school would all remain. The school will have a local governing body, the Academy Council, who will continue to be responsible for managing the school. They will report to the Board of Directors rather than the Local Authority.

## **Further information**

The school will be running an informal question and answer session for parents at Parent Forum on Friday 15 July at 9.00am. Please submit any questions by email or to the Headteacher in advance on the meeting – [head@fairlands.herts.sch.uk](mailto:head@fairlands.herts.sch.uk).

Further information about academies can be obtained from the Department for Education website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/convert-to-an-academy-documents-for-schools>.

The Anti-Academies Alliance is an umbrella group opposed to academies: <http://antiacademies.org.uk/>.

## **Submit your views**

The governing body welcome your views on the proposal outlined above. The deadline for responses will be Wednesday, 7 September 2016 and they can be submitted as follows:

- Email: [head@fairlands.herts.sch.uk](mailto:head@fairlands.herts.sch.uk)
- In writing: Fairlands Primary School and Nursery, Pound Avenue, Stevenage, Herts. SG1 4TJ - please mark your letter 'Academy Consultation'.