

Royal County of Berkshire Schools Trust: Academy consultation

INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROPOSAL

What is an Academy?

Academies are state maintained schools free to all children. They have an agreement with the Government which provides funding directly to the Academy Trust. They have to follow the same rules as all other state-funded schools over admissions, pupils with Special Educational Needs and exclusions. They are still inspected by Ofsted.

Although academies do not have to follow the national curriculum this is unlikely to have any impact on the way that education is currently delivered in the school as a balanced curriculum which is judged against national standards, must be provided.

Not all academies are the same. Schools convert to academy status on what the DfE describes as an “as is” basis – so the existing character of each school is protected. The articles of association for the Royal County of Berkshire Schools Trust will enable it to be a MAT for schools of all types/ characters and the pre-conversion ethos/ character will be protected through aspects of the funding agreement with the Secretary of State.

Academies are companies limited by guarantee which means that they do not pay dividends and nobody makes a profit – so all the money is spent on the academy’s activities. But this structure means that the Academy is a legal entity which can enter into contracts and employ staff. Academies are also exempt charities and the directors of the company are referred to as Trustees.

What is the Royal County of Berkshire Schools Trust?

The Royal County of Berkshire Schools Trust (RCBST) is proposed to be established in partnership with the Diocese of Oxford as a company to be responsible for a number of academies. The Trustees of the company will have an agreement with the Secretary of State for Education to support and manage a number of individual academies.

Within RCBST, responsibility for leadership and management of each Academy will remain with its governing body and head teacher. RCBST will appoint a majority of the governing body and there will continue to be elected parent and staff governors.

What is a Multi Academy Trust?

A Multi Academy Trust is a company established to be responsible for a number of Academies. Each Academy remains a separate school, but the governors are responsible to a board of Trustees established for the Trust as a whole. This model is becoming more common, particularly as more primary schools seek academy status and the Government has encouraged primary schools to choose this route.

Royal County of Berkshire Schools Trust: Academy consultation

RCBST Vision

The Royal County of Schools Trust is committed to being “A valued community, respecting each other and working together to achieve Excellence in East Reading.” Different schools working together to inspire every child to be lifelong learners, to respect one another and achieve their full potential

The Trust will aim to ensure that our children develop aspirations for themselves and for our community, values that will enable them to be responsible and positive members and leaders of society and a deep rooted belief that they can excel in anything they choose to do. We believe strongly in the power of high expectations of children and of ourselves and in the importance of personal goals that are meaningful to each individual. We know that every child has their own potential and we are determined to help them fulfil it. We aim to enable all children to take part in exciting learning, inside and outside the classroom, so that they can make rapid and sustained progress.

Our goal is that the education a child receives at our schools sustains them as they move on to their next stage of learning and from there, enter the world of work or of further study. We are fully committed to helping our children be aspirational and optimistic so that they can make positive and responsible decisions that will lead them to become independent, confident, engaged members of society.

RCBST is an inclusive community and we are proud of the diversity and togetherness of our children. Building good relationships, based on trust and respect, among those who learn and work here is essential in achieving this. We aim to extend those positive relationships into the wider community, to engage with our families and to help them to support their children.

Our aspiration is to help create a Trust that upholds the desire to develop and nurture lifelong learners among our children and their families. We are confident that taking this step will help us in achieving that goal.

As a limited company operating within the family of the Diocese of Oxford, RCBST will be motivated by Christian values to serve local communities. But it will not impose those values. Admissions policies will remain unchanged, and priority is normally given to children in the local area. We welcome those of all faiths and none, and celebrate the ethnic diversity within our schools. Working with the diocese we will 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.

Royal County of Berkshire Schools Trust: Academy consultation

What impact will this have on St John's Church of England Primary School or on New Town Primary School?

Governors believe this will have a very positive impact and we are confident the relationship and benefits will develop over time. Membership of the RCBST will help to secure the future of each school.

We will not make any major changes. There will be no change to the uniform, the admissions arrangements or to the times of the school day or terms. All children and all members of staff will continue to be part of the school and staff terms and conditions are protected in law.

So why make the change?

Academy status gives us some additional flexibility in deciding how best to meet the needs of your children. The Government has made clear that they believe all schools should convert to Academy status and we want to manage how that happens for our schools. The Secretary of State has already indicated that she expects New Town Primary School to become a sponsored academy – and RCBST will act as the sponsor. Becoming part of the Trust will allow the partnership between St John's school and New Town school to continue to develop and flourish so that the good practice we develop benefits both schools.

When will these changes take place?

We want to know what parents and the local community think about this proposal. The next few months will be very busy as we continue to seek guidance and clarification, including meetings with the local authority, analysis and settlement of accounts and budgets, negotiation of key support services, financial preparation and asset registration and legal matters. The Diocese will support us in these processes and if all goes well we anticipate conversion at Easter.

How can I give my views?

If you have any questions or comments you would like to make about the proposal to establish the Royal County of Berkshire Schools Trust and for both St John's and New Town Primary Schools to convert to academy status within that Trust please send them using the form attached by Friday 12 February 2016 – either in hard copy to the school in an envelope marked 'Academy Conversion' or by email to clerk.gov@stjohns.reading.sch.uk
You can also complete the form on-line at <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/RCoBST>

Royal County of Berkshire Schools Trust: Academy consultation

Academies Key Facts

Legal Status

Academies are companies limited by guarantee and have exempt charitable status. These companies have members rather than shareholders who appoint Trustees to run the company on their behalf. The object of the company is the provision of education which is achieved by running academies. Members and Trustees are bound by the articles of the company to focus on delivering that object. Within multi academy trusts each school continues to have a local governing body on which parents and staff are represented and to which governance of the school is delegated.

Academy Trusts enter into a contract with the Secretary of State for Education (the funding agreement) in which the Trust commits to complying with law on admissions, provision for children with special educational needs and who are looked after, charging for school activity and offering a broad and balanced curriculum. In return for these commitments the Secretary of State agrees to fund academies. Each multi academy trust has a master funding agreement together with a supplemental agreement for each new academy as it joins.

Specific provisions within the funding agreement protect the ethos and character of schools so that they remain the same as they were before conversion. Local governing bodies of church academies continue to have foundation governors whose role is to secure the church distinctiveness of the school.

Curriculum

Academies are required to have a broad and balanced curriculum which promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils and prepares them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life. For pupils below Key Stage 1 (i.e. reception and nursery), academies are required to follow the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

The curriculum must include:

- English, maths and science;
- Religious Education; and
- sex and relationship education (SRE).

Academies are required to take part in the same pupil assessment arrangements and to report on the achievement and attainment of pupils in the same way as all other state-funded schools.

Inspection

Academies continue to be subject to Ofsted inspections.

Staffing

All staff employed by predecessor schools have the right to transfer to the academy on exactly the same terms and conditions as they have now.

The regulations that place requirements on maintained schools do not directly apply to academies. General employment law applies to academies in the same way as to other organisations. The Academy Trust has responsibility for setting pay and conditions. Teachers must be suitably qualified.

All teachers employed at an academy have access to the Teachers Pensions Scheme and all other employees at an academy have access to the Local Government Pension Scheme.

Royal County of Berkshire Schools Trust: Academy consultation Academies Key Facts

Funding

Each academy trust enters into a funding agreement with the Secretary of State which sets out the basis on which public funding will be made available (as described above). The academy trust will be funded by the Secretary of State as follows:

Recurrent expenditure

General Annual Grant (GAG) - the equivalent to that which would be received by a maintained school taking account of the number of pupils at the academy, plus an *Education Services Grant (ESG)* which for 2015/16 is £87 per pupil.

Academies also receive pupil premium funding and specific funding for any child with high level special educational needs in exactly the same way as they do now.

Capital expenditure

Academies can bid to the government for support with capital improvements and maintenance, particularly to address health and safety concerns.

Financial monitoring

The academy trust must abide by the requirements of and have regard to the guidance in the Academies Financial Handbook. As a charitable company limited by guarantee the Trust's accounts must be fully audited and published – including on each school's website.

SEN

Academies should be fully inclusive local schools and in common with all other schools have a clear legal duty to do their best to meet the needs of children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities.

Admissions

Academies are required to provide education for pupils wholly or mainly drawn from the area in which the academy is situated.

Academies must have admission arrangements that clearly set out how children will be admitted, including the criteria that will be applied if there are more applications than available places.

Academies are required to provide education for pupils of different abilities (i.e. they may not select pupils by ability – unless before conversion they did so.)

There are no plans to change the admissions arrangements for either St John's or New Town.

Insurance

The Government has introduced the Risk Protection Arrangement which is an alternative to insurance cover for all academies. It provides cover for buildings and facilities and for public, employer and governor liability.

Land and contracts

Arrangements are put in place to ensure that each academy can continue to occupy its site and buildings. Contracts transfer from the school to the academy, where it makes sense for them to do so.

Royal County of Berkshire Schools Trust: Academy consultation Academies Key Facts

The conversion process

Schools wishing to convert to academy status follow a process determined by the Academies Act 2010. Under that process, schools may apply for an Academy Order or are directed to pursue academy status. The DfE then decides whether the proposal put forward is an appropriate route for the schools concerned and, if it is content, issues an Academy Order. This indicates that the Secretary of State would allow the schools to convert and triggers the more detailed legal process that creates the structure in which the Academy can operate. It is not until that structure is in place and the terms of the Funding Agreement between the Secretary of State and the academy trust have been agreed that the school can convert. Governors make a final commitment to conversion when that agreement is signed.

As part of the process all schools consult stakeholders; staff are transferred from their current employer to the Academy Trust and their terms and conditions – including pensions - are protected in the process; arrangements are made for the Academy Trust to have the right to occupy the school site and buildings; and contracts are transferred from schools to the Academy Trust. A grant from the DfE supports the costs incurred – including for legal advisers and for the appointment of a consultant to manage and support the process so that school leaders are not distracted from their responsibilities in school.

**Royal County of Berkshire Schools Trust
Academy Consultation Response Form**

Thank you for your interest in the proposal to establish the Royal County of Berkshire Schools Trust and for St John's CE Primary School and New Town Primary School to convert to academy status within the Trust.

Please say which school you are associated with:

New Town Primary School

St John's CE Primary School

Having considered the information available please say whether you agree that the schools should move forward in this way, using the following scale

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>				

Please add any comments or questions here, including if there are elements of our current provision which you believe should be retained.

Please continue overleaf and add an extra sheet if necessary

Please provide your postcode and tick the box that best describes your connection to the school.

Postcode Name (optional)

Parent/carer	<input type="checkbox"/>	Staff member	<input type="checkbox"/>	
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Wider community	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	
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Please return this form by 12 February 2016 in hard copy to the school in an envelope marked 'Academy Conversion' or by email to clerk.gov@stjohns.reading.sch.uk
You can also complete the form on-line at <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/RCoBST>