



## **DARELL PRIMARY AND NURSERY SCHOOL**

### **Q&A for Consultation on Academy Conversion**

#### **ACADEMY CONVERSION PROCESS**

##### **1. Why is the school considering converting to academy status?**

As part of its strategic role, the Governing Body has been exploring what conversion to academy status might mean for Darell. In addition to the fact that we believe the greater freedoms and flexibilities of becoming an academy will enable us to raise educational standards, there are other factors which have influenced our decision to apply for conversion.

At the moment, central services are provided by the Local Authority (LA) with school improvement and Special Educational Needs support being commissioned through Achieving for Children (AfC - a not-for-profit community interest company serving Richmond and Kingston boroughs). Resources have already been considerably reduced due to government spending reviews cutting budgets delegated to Local Authorities; and all schools are being urged to give serious consideration to pursuing conversion to academy status. The government's, and our conservative-controlled council's, policy is to encourage conversion and the Department for Education are currently providing funding to assist with the costs of doing so. The Governing Body therefore feels that we need to engage actively with this issue; if we wait and ignore the changes that are happening around us, we may restrict our choices and have a model of academy conversion imposed upon us.

Our primary focus has always been to provide the highest possible quality of education for all our children in an inclusive environment. We believe that becoming an academy will allow us even greater freedom and flexibility to work with the most effective partners to support our children and staff as we continue to grow and develop. Being an academy is not about changing everything but about asking, 'What can we do even better to get the best for our children?'

##### **2. What is the proposal?**

The Governing Body are proposing to join the Every Child, Every Day Academy Trust from September 2017. This is a local Trust consisting of two secondary schools, and has a proven track record of improving children's educational outcomes. Grey Court is an Outstanding school and Hollyfield received Good in its most recent inspection (improving from Requires Improvement since working with Grey Court).

The proposal is subject to consultation, due diligence and agreement from Darell, the Every Child, Every Day Academy Trust and the Secretary of State.

### 3. How did the Governing Body reach this conclusion?

As part of the ongoing process of school improvement, the Governing Body investigated the various alternative, more formal structures that might better support the school in achieving good outcomes for all children. In considering these alternatives, the Governing Body had the following objectives for any collaboration with other schools:

- Similar ethos and values to Darell and a commitment to maintaining these;
- Highly inclusive environment supporting education for all abilities;
- Local, and with the intention to remain small and local, to enable easy collaboration and practical support;
- Proven track record of improving school performance; and,
- Secular.

Governors attended numerous conferences, meetings and discussion groups to familiarise themselves with academies, the conversion process and alternatives, such as federations and informal collaborative arrangements (details of these meetings are provided in Appendix 1).

Review of the local school models showed that there were limited options that met all of our criteria. Many of the primary schools are faith or PFI (Private Finance Initiative) schools, which reduces our ability to join together in formal structures. Other schools have chosen to join large, national academy trusts.

The Governing Body believes that the Every Child Every Day Academy Trust meets all of our criteria and is therefore the best option for Darell Primary and Nursery School.

### 4. What alternative models were considered?

There are many models for school organisation. The main ones considered by the Governing Body were:

- Local Authority (LA): This is the current model when the school is an LA maintained school, receiving funding via the LA and support services from AfC (Achieving for Children).
- Federation/Umbrella Trust/Collaborative Partnership: These are voluntary arrangements between schools to encourage collaboration. They are not underpinned by a legal framework so they do not have the same level of accountability or commitment to each other.
- Single academy: The school's current performance and capacity suggests that this is not a sustainable way forward and also does not encourage wider collaboration;
- Multi-Academy trust: This is the preferred model in which the school joins with other schools under a single trust. The following Q&As provide more details of how this works in practice.

## **5. Is Darell the only primary school in Richmond considering converting to an academy?**

Over the last 12 months, many of the local primary schools have been considering the pros and cons of the academy structure. All of the local, non-faith secondary schools have already converted to academy status. Darell may be ahead of the other primaries because the Governing Body has decided to act more proactively to improve the educational standards in our school.

## **6. What is the status of the application?**

The Governing Body undertook a detailed analysis of the pros and cons of the different options available before voting unanimously to apply for conversion in June 2016.

A letter was sent to parents at the end of the summer term giving the reasons for the decision and detailing the next steps. The formal application for conversion was submitted to the Department for Education in September.

## **7. How does the consultation work?**

A school's governing body must consult formally about plans to convert to an academy with anyone who will have an interest in changing the status of the school. This will include staff members, parents, pupils and the wider local community. Consultation is the opportunity for the Governing Body to listen to your views and take them into account when making the final decision. The Governing Body have the responsibility to make the decision about conversion following completion of the consultation, due diligence and all Department for Education requirements.

As part of the conversion process, the Governing Body is consulting as widely as possible with all interested parties. For parents and the wider community, we will have a seven week period of consultation starting 21 November and finishing on 9 January, 2017. This will include sharing information via this Q&A document and open meetings with the school on 13 December at 7pm and 15th December at 9am to answer your questions. Supplementary questions may also be submitted via the school website or at the school front desk or directed to email address: [academyconsultation@darell.richmond.sch.uk](mailto:academyconsultation@darell.richmond.sch.uk). Responses to new questions will be published every week on the website during the term time and finalised at the end of the consultation period.

## **8. How will the Governing Body use the feedback?**

The Governing Body is responsible for setting the strategic direction for the school, ensuring robust accountability and maintaining financial viability and best value. It is committed to listening to all stakeholder views expressed in the consultation and to considering these views when taking the decision. A final report with all comments and questions will be provided at the end of the consultation period.

## **9. When would the conversion happen?**

An application has already been submitted with a proposed conversion date of September 2017. The main reason for submitting the application at an early stage is to release the £25,000 payable by the government to cover the legal and other costs associated with the next phase of the process, due diligence. It may be that the due diligence stage reveals a road block on either side that would make the proposal unviable. We can withdraw from

the conversion process at any time until the Secretary of State formally approves the application by signing the Funding Agreement, which is usually about eight weeks before conversion. If the school does not convert to an academy, then it will remain a Local Authority maintained school.

## **ACADEMY TRUST STRUCTURE**

### **10. What is an Academy?**

An academy is a state school, funded directly from central government rather than through the Local Authority (LA). A charitable company limited by guarantee (the academy trust) is responsible for the academy. A funding agreement is signed by the Secretary of State for Education.

Legislation requires that an academy has the following characteristics: that it offers a balanced and broadly based curriculum; that it provides education for students of different abilities; and that it provides education for students who are wholly or mainly drawn from the area in which the school is situated.

Becoming an academy means that we would have greater freedom to innovate and raise standards. We would also have much greater freedom around the delivery of the curriculum, using our budget to work with the best partners available. We would still be subject to Ofsted inspection and the children would still be prepared for SATs in the same way as they are now.

### **11. What is a Multi Academy Trust (MAT)?**

A MAT is a single charitable company that allows more than one academy to work together under an academy trust. The Department for Education agrees the model and funding during the initial set-up and this cannot be changed without further consultation and agreement.

The MAT consists of members and trustees. The members have ultimate control over the trust with the ability to appoint some trustees and the right to amend the trust's Articles of Association. The trustees are responsible for the governance of the trust in a similar way that governors are responsible for a school. The MAT is ultimately accountable for the performance of all the schools in the trust.

Joining a MAT would give us the chance to share knowledge and best practice between schools. It gives the schools within the trust the opportunity to make collective decisions about the purchase of services and other procurement, such as fuel, HR and office supplies, thereby achieving efficiencies and releasing more money for teaching and learning.

### **12. How is a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) different from a Local Authority (LA) Maintained school?**

- Admissions – the MAT is responsible for setting and consulting on its admissions policy. It must continue to operate within the requirements of the national School Admissions Code including full participation in the Pan London Admissions Scheme administered by Achieving for Children (AfC) which is reviewed annually.
- Land and Buildings – the land and buildings of the school are leased to the MAT by the LA (for a nominal rent) and the MAT would then take over responsibility for them.

Any capital expenditure, such as for the upkeep of the building, is funded via an application to the Secretary of State;

- Curriculum – a MAT has to offer a broad and balanced curriculum including Maths, English, and Science, but it does not have to follow the National Curriculum;
- Employment – the MAT, rather than the LA, becomes the employer of school staff;
- Funding – the MAT receives its funding directly from the Secretary of State and it is distributed between the schools; and,
- Governance – the school would retain a headteacher and its own local governing body. The governors of the school would report to the trustees. The responsibilities of the school governing body are agreed in a 'Scheme of Delegation'. This document is agreed between the current governing body and the MAT before joining and is reviewed every year.

### **13. What is the Every Child, Every Day Academy Trust?**

The Every Child, Every Day Academy Trust is a new Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) that started in September 2016 and currently includes two local secondary schools: Grey Court (judged as Outstanding by Ofsted) and Hollyfield (judged as Good) but it is keen to also include local primary schools in order to provide education from 3-18 years of age. The intent is that there will be 7-10 schools in the Trust all based in the local area. A document outlining the philosophy of the Trust is included on our school website.

Following lengthy consideration and discussion with representatives of the Trust, the governing body believes that their vision, ethos and values are similar to and compatible with Darell's, with a strong emphasis on inclusivity and family.

The board of trustees are all local people with a diverse range of skills and experience. They include Maggie Bailey, headteacher of Grey Court and Hollyfield Schools and Jane Spencer, currently chair of governors at Darell. Jane was invited to join the Board of Trustees in the summer to represent primary schools' interests and governance and was appointed on 1 September 2016. To avoid any possible conflict of interest, Jane will not participate in any vote to decide whether Darell converts to an academy either as the chair of governors or as a trustee.

Maggie Bailey and other members of her leadership team and Trustees met with parents and staff on 14th/15th November to explain more about the Every Child, Every Day Academy Trust, their ethos and how we can benefit from working together. These Q&As reflect many of the issues that were discussed at these meetings but the Trust are willing to address any additional questions which are raised during consultation.

### **14. What are the benefits for Darell of joining the Every Child, Every Day Academy Trust?**

The Governing Body want to ensure high standards of achievement for all Darell pupils. With this in mind, we consider the key benefits of joining the Trust are to

Improve Teaching and Learning - The school can benefit from close collaboration with other schools using methods such as sharing best practice, informal and formal peer review and accessing shared specialist resources that could not be funded by an individual school. There is also opportunity to enhance the curriculum with subject specialist teaching support.

Better prepare children for secondary school - The transition between primary and secondary can be challenging for children and may result in a dip in academic progress in Years 7 and 8. A close collaboration with secondary schools can improve the transition for all students and provide greater continuity for the most vulnerable, including those with Special Educational Needs.

Wider opportunities for staff - Career development within a small school is limited. The Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) will offer staff the opportunity to develop leadership and other professional skills while remaining within the group of schools. In selecting a MAT consisting of only local schools, staff will be able to access these opportunities in a range of ways.

Resilience of leadership structure - In the past five years, Darell has experienced multiple leadership and organisational changes due to illness, staff turnover and maternity. Being part of a MAT allows more resilience of staffing, especially around middle leadership, than a stand-alone school can provide. It is easier to retain staff and develop their skills within a MAT that has a focus on staff development.

Achieve better value for money - The school could benefit from improved efficiency and effectiveness of systems and procedures. There are procurement economies from larger-scale purchasing, for example, sharing IT support and services.

**15. What are the risks associated with joining the Every Child, Every Day Academy Trust? What is the Governing Body doing to minimise those risks?**

In making any significant strategic change, there are a number of associated risks and challenges. The following have been considered and there are a number of actions that the Governing Body are taking to minimise the risk.

Loss of school identity and local decision-making - The relationship between a single school and a Multi-Academy Trust is agreed through a document known as the 'scheme of delegation'. This is agreed by both parties and covers all aspects of decision-making. The Governing Body will ensure that all operational decisions are retained by the headteacher, such as school hours, uniform, etc. This is in conformity with the overall objectives of the Trust for each school to retain its identity.

Process of conversion will be time consuming and distracting to Headteacher and other staff members. There are a number of schools (including those already in the Trust) who have recently converted so there is plenty of expertise available to support the school in the conversion. However, it is acknowledged that this will be an additional activity that the school will be undertaking this year.

Negative reactions from staff and parents - Consultation with stakeholders is an important part of the process. This document is a starting point for providing the wider community with essential information about the proposed change. Feedback and further questions will be requested during the consultation period. All feedback will be considered by the Governing Body in reaching its final decision.

Poor performance of MAT - The selection of the Every Child, Every Day Academy Trust has been made knowing that there is a long history of collaboration between the schools and the MAT leadership have a proven track record of school improvement. There is also extensive due diligence taking place and the Department for Education grant is provided to ensure that this is conducted thoroughly. Although Darell could be the first primary school to join the Trust, primary-secondary collaboration is not an unusual model for a MAT. Ofsted also monitors MAT performance so there would be regular independent assessment.

**16. Is it possible to leave a MAT?**

Yes, there are two ways to leave a MAT:

1. Voluntarily – this requires the consent of the current MAT's trustees, another trust (single or multi academy) that will take a school on (ie sign a Funding Agreement), and the Secretary of State (since they are the other signatory to the current and future Funding Agreement).
2. By Secretary of State requirement: There are situations where the Secretary of State is able to terminate the funding agreement of an academy, and could therefore enter into a funding agreement for the school with another trust. In this case, only the consent of Secretary of State and the new academy trust is required (since the current academy trust would not have any choice). The situations are generally related to school performance / Ofsted judgements.

**ACADEMY GOVERNANCE**

**17. If Darell joins the Every Child, Every Day Academy Trust, will it continue to have its own governing body and what range of governance functions will be delegated to it?**

Yes - the school would retain its own governing body and its headteacher who will be responsible for the running of the school.

The current Governing Body is made up of fourteen governors, which reflect the school community: two parent governors, the Headteacher plus one staff governor, one Local Authority governor and nine members co-opted for the skills and experiences they bring to the school. Further information about our Governing Body can be found on the school website (<http://www.darell.richmond.sch.uk/page/?title=Governing+Body&pid=17>)

**18. Will there still be elected governors?**

There will still be elected parent governors and staff governors.

**19. Does Ofsted still inspect academies?**

Yes - there will be no change to how Ofsted will inspect the school.

**20. How can parents hold the school/academy trust to account? How are governors accountable to parents?**

As is the case now, parents and carers will be able to put themselves forward to be elected as parent governors. They will still be able to contact their parent governors to ask questions. If parents and carers have specific concerns that they cannot resolve with the school, they can use the published complaints procedure. Parents can also contact Ofsted or the Department for Education.

## **21. What will be the role of the Local Authority (LA)?**

The LA will retain three important statutory roles. First, to ensure there are sufficient schools places to meet demand; second, to monitor the performance of all schools and academies and advise the Department for Education (DfE) of concerns; third, to ensure adequate provision for pupils with special or additional needs.

## **EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES**

### **22. How will conversion benefit the children on a day-to-day basis?**

If the school converts to academy status and joins the Every Child, Every Day Academy Trust, the children will still be taught in the same classrooms by the same teaching staff so they are unlikely to notice any immediate difference.

Grey Court is a teaching school and Darell's teaching staff would have direct access to high quality training opportunities which would help them to innovate and improve the children's education. Over time, the children may notice changes and improvements in the way that they learn. They will also benefit from the sharing of excellent practice in teaching and learning between the partner schools and they will have wider opportunities to learn new skills and experience new activities.

Darell's pupils should also benefit from the subject-specific knowledge which teachers at Grey Court and Hollyfield possess. Grey Court has already been generous with sharing its expertise. For instance, last year's year 6 at Darell were taught for one day a week over a period of time by a Maths teacher from Grey Court. This year, Grey Court is advising Darell on how to teach children in Key Stage 2 about restorative justice so they can use these skills in the playground to help them solve their own disputes.

At the moment this arrangement is informal. By joining this MAT sharing expertise will become a formal legal obligation to support schools within 'the family'. This will be a two-way process as Grey Court and Hollyfield are keen to learn from Darell's primary expertise so as to enhance their teaching experience. Key educational learning principles are set at primary school level. For example, primary schools teach pupils to read and are experts in teaching phonics. Some teenagers are still struggling with phonics at secondary school. This is just one of many areas in which Darell can offer Grey Court and Hollyfield advice and support.

### **23. How will the school curriculum change if academies don't have to follow the National Curriculum? Will the curriculum remain broad and balanced?**

The schools will still be judged on pupil outcomes and overall performance so, the curriculum will continue to be broad, balanced and appropriate to each school. It will continue to be closely aligned to the National Curriculum but not restrictively so.

### **24. What will happen to the Special Educational Needs (SEN) unit? Will there be any changes to the SEN provision?**

No change is envisaged as a consequence of the conversion. The SEN unit will continue to run as it does now, with the LA funding a set number of places. The governing body is committed to continuing the provision.

**25. Who is responsible for deciding if a student needs a Statement of Special Educational Needs or an Education, Health and Care Plan?**

There will be no change. The Local Authority will be responsible for these decisions.

**SCHOOL POLICIES**

**26. What changes will be made to school policy?**

Policies are reviewed and updated on a regular basis as part of general school improvement and to ensure we stay up-to-date with best practice and legislative requirements. As part of the Every Child, Every Day Academy Trust, the school would implement those of the Trust's policies which are applicable. For example, Safeguarding and Complaints policies and procedures might be the same for all schools. However, the Curriculum policy would be specific to the school and its pupils needs. All changes to school-specific policies would remain at the discretion of the headteacher and the governing body.

**27. Would there be changes to admissions numbers/policy?**

The school must continue to operate within the requirements of the national School Admissions Code including full participation in the Pan London Admissions Scheme administered by AfC which is reviewed annually. Any change in admissions policy would need to go through consultation with all interested parties, including neighbouring boroughs.

**28. Would there be prioritised admissions to Grey Court for Darell School pupils?**

Darell pupils do not currently have prioritised admissions to Grey Court. Any change in admissions policy would need to go to consultation with all interested parties, including neighbouring boroughs. There is no plan to change the current policy as part of the conversion.

**29. Would the school day/term dates change?**

There would be no requirement to change the school day or term dates as part of the conversion. All changes would remain at the discretion of the headteacher and the governing body.

**30. Would the school uniform change?**

There would be no requirement to change school uniform policy as part of the conversion. All changes would remain at the discretion of the headteacher and the Governing Body.

**31. Would the school name change?**

There would be no requirement to change the school name as part of the conversion. Changing the school name has been discussed by the Governing Body several times in the past few years in the context of improving our local reputation. Any decision to change the name would only be made in conjunction with parents, staff and the wider community.

## **WORKING FOR AN ACADEMY**

### **32. Will staff be consulted?**

The staff will be consulted about the academy conversion at the same time as the parent community. These Q&As will be shared with the staff and they will have the opportunity to submit their own questions.

### **33. Will staff terms & conditions change?**

When a school becomes an academy, staff are legally protected and transfer under the same employment terms and conditions. This arrangement is known as TUPE and is clearly regulated. The current employer, the Local Authority, will lead this consultation to ensure that staff are clear on the process and any implications. The Trust will continue to recognise and consult with trade unions on pay and conditions.

## **SCHOOL FINANCES**

### **34. What costs will the school face on transfer to academy status?**

There are a number of legal and due diligence requirements before a final decision can be made, for which the government provides a grant of £25,000 to support this preparation. If the decision to convert does not go ahead, then only the money that has not been spent will need to be repaid.

### **35. How will the school be funded as an academy? Will the school retain its budget?**

Academies receive the same amount of per-pupil funding as they would receive from the Local Authority (LA) as a maintained school. They also receive additional funding in the form of the Education Services Grant to cover the additional responsibilities that the academy trust will take from the LA. However, this grant is under review as part of the Government's consultation on the National Funding Formula for schools.

Funding to the schools within a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) will be allocated on an individual academy basis. Funding is governed through a master funding agreement between the Secretary of State and the MAT and a supplemental agreement between the Secretary of State and each school within the MAT.

Some of each individual school's budget is combined and used to fund shared services. This helps the Trust to achieve economies of scale and can be particularly beneficial for primary schools as it means that they can access shared services such as: IT support, human resource management, Educational Welfare Officer services, speech and language provision, school improvement provision, contract negotiations etc.

The school will be making a contribution of 2-5% of our budget to the MAT for central costs. Currently, the LA retains approximately 8% to provide centralised services.

### **36. Will the school be better off financially?**

Darell will be responsible for managing its own budget and will need to justify expenditure to the board of trustees. We see this as a good thing as it provides additional accountability for what are public funds.

The benefits will be achieved through increased financial expertise, improved buying power and sharing resources. This benefit will not be fully realised immediately but through sharing good practice and collaborative working across the Trust. For example, Grey Court has employed a professional fundraiser who has identified opportunities and made bids for additional funding for both schools. As part of joining the Trust, we would be able to benefit from that resource and potentially grow our income; currently we do not have the resources to do this.

**37. Could the Trust draw on other schools' funds where other schools are in difficulty?**

No. Within a trust, each academy receives its budget on an individual basis. Academies, like all schools, are expected to maintain strict budgetary controls and are required by their funding agreement to balance their budgets. Academies operating in a deficit position will be subject to intervention action by the Education Funding Agency which would include the agreement of a recovery plan.

The memorandum and articles of association ensure that the risks of failure of one school does not affect the financial health of another school within the MAT. Funding arrangements and any income generated by a specific school will be ring-fenced to the benefit of that school but there could be wider risk-management and due diligence carried out. This will ensure the overall solvency of the MAT.

**38. How will school premises be managed?**

After converting to an academy, responsibility for all school assets and liabilities including the school buildings and grounds would transfer from the Local Authority to the Every Child, Every Day Academy Trust on a long term lease. This will not have any detrimental effect on our premises. They will continue to be used and valued by us.

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Meetings attended by governors while considering academy conversion**

#### **2013**

*May:* Models of school organization – understanding the different models held at Darell for all governors of Darell, Kew Riverside and Queens – Deryn Harvey

#### **2014**

*September:* Meeting with Nick Whitfield and Graham Willett at AfC, Kew Riverside and Darell governors attended

#### **2015**

*March:* “Governance in a turbulent era” conference

*April:* Governors met informally with Maggie Bailey and Ash Ali at Grey Court

*September:* FGB discussion and agreement to formulate a Pros and Cons document

*October:* MAT open forum at Grey Court School

*November:*

- MAT meeting at Grey Court School
- MAT conference of North East cluster of primary schools at Holy Trinity

#### **2016**

*January:* Governors complete SWOT analysis on joining MAT

*February:*

- FGB meeting to discuss academy conversion attended by Karen Bos, Charis Tenfold and Jo Brinkley - Chief Executive Officer of The Spring Partnership in Bromley
- Meeting of MAT working party to discuss 3 options: new primary and secondary MAT, a new primary only MAT, existing MAT.

*April:* Meeting with AfC about MATs. Also attended by The Vineyard Primary, The Russell Primary, Meadlands Primary, Fern Hill Primary and Alexandra Infants

*May:* Meeting with David Groves, consultant to discuss process of academy conversion and possible timetable

*November:* Attended meeting at Warren House with SLT and governors from Grey Court and Hollyfield to discuss vision and ethos of Trust