

Potential Conversion To Academy Status With ODBST

Frequently Asked Questions

As we continue to discuss the potential conversion of the School to Academy Status and following feedback from stakeholders, this is a summary of the most frequently asked questions to date.

Please do continue to communicate your thoughts with the Headteacher and Governors.

1. What is a Multi Academy Trust (MAT)?

An Academy is a government funded school that is independent to the Local Authority. Whilst academy status gives schools additional responsibilities and greater freedoms, in terms of the day to day functioning an academy school will not be noticeably different for parents/the community compared to a Local Authority maintained school.

New Academies must join a MAT.

2. Why join Oxford Diocese (Bucks) School's Trust (ODBST) as opposed to any other MAT?

Over the last couple of years the Governors have researched the options available to the School. Initial discussions were held at one point with a secondary school which was seeking to set up a MAT with itself and feeder schools. The Local Authority however vetoed this plan.

The Governors and Head believe that the best way to serve the future of this school is to join ODBST as an academy because we will be able to help sustain the village school and to continue to improve; feedback on the support, training and services from schools already in ODBST is very positive; it will provide a safe and secure home for our relatively-small school in times of very considerable change in the education field; it enables the local governing body to continue to run the school locally (with accountabilities to ODBST) and it will preserve the Christian character of the school.

We are also aware that there are other schools in the area, both Church of England and Non-Church of England Schools, that are exploring this possibility and we will therefore have not only the ongoing Diocesan support but that of ODBST and neighbouring schools.

3. What is the timescale for the consultation for the school potentially joining the Oxford Diocese (Bucks) School's Trust (ODBST)?

The initial consultation period was from 24 June 2019 – 22 July 2019. There were presentations by David Cousins from ODBST on 15 July 2019 to parents and staff. Feedback was given by parents at the meeting and subsequently which Governors and the Head are considering carefully.

The Governors are now considering the information given by David Cousins, parent and staff comments during this ongoing Due Diligence process. Following the next Full Governing Board meeting of Governors on 7 November 2019, a further report will be made to parents.

4. What is ODBST and is it a profit –making company?

ODBST was established in 2017 to enable like-minded schools across the Buckingham Area (which covers Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes) to convert to academy status. The MAT is open to church and non-church schools. The vision is to allow schools to develop and share best practice and work in support of one another whilst benefiting from central support services.

ODBST academies teach a broad and balanced curriculum within national guidelines. Focusing on core skills, this is designed to ensure that all pupils reach their academic potential and seeks to enrich their experience along the way. Pupils are enabled to succeed in an atmosphere of high expectation, aspiring to educational excellence with a firm commitment to Christian values.

No one can make any money from the company. The company is limited by guarantee. It does not pay dividends and makes no profit.

5. As this is a Diocesan MAT, would there be any pressure on schools joining the MAT to eg: teach more RE?

As a limited company operating within the family of the Diocese of Oxford, ODBST are motivated by Christian values to serve local communities. But they do not impose those values. Admissions policies are open, and priority is normally given to children in the local area.

ODBST welcome those of all faiths and none and are proud of the ethnic diversity within their academies.

The Governors believe that joining ODBST will not change the School's character or vision in any way.

6. Who makes the decision to join ODBST?

Following full consultation with parents, staff and any other interested parties and after completing the due diligence process the Governing Body will take a vote on Academy Status.

Once an Academy Order is made by the Secretary of State it is irreversible. However there is provision for the Secretary of state to re-broker the school to another MAT should there be serious failure.

7. Would the governing body transfer across? Do the governing body get training and support from ODBST? Would the governing body be part of the MAT?

ODBST has a central board of Trustees, appointed by the members, which is responsible to the Secretary of State for overall standards for each school in ODBST and for maintaining a strategic oversight of the Trust.

A Local Governing Body will also be maintained/established which will be responsible for the day-to-day operational matters.

Being part of ODBST means that the board of directors will have the necessary range of skills required at a strategic level. The Local Governing Body does not take on the additional requirements under the Companies Act. Recruiting and retaining governors with key skills and experience remains a key task for all schools and ODBST are committed to supporting governors in their role.

On the day of conversion to Academy Status, our Governing body would cease to operate and a 'new' Local Governing Body will be established in their place, and they will act just as the current Governors act.

8. From a Wingrave School perspective what are the benefits of joining ODBST?

ODBST academies will automatically be provided with support regarding the curriculum, school improvement, HR advice, finance software, training and advice, governance, premises and admission appeals. ODBST's overall resources and expertise are rooted in the vast Oxford Diocese provision.

Schools are already relying and supporting each other heavily due to financial difficulties and lack of provision at the Local Authority. Joining the ODBST would not only provide an additional 'safety net' for the future but enfold the school into a caring network of schools with common interests, greater opportunities and passionate expertise.

9. Will we retain the existing financial systems? Does PTFA funding still go to the school?

Academies receive the same level of per-pupil funding as they would receive from the Local

Authority as a maintained school, plus additions to cover the services that are no longer provided for them by the local authority. Financially it will make very little difference to the school budget however we believe we will get more for our money as regards support and training.

Academies are required to cover insurance at specified minimum levels of cover. ODBST will ensure that the necessary insurance is in place through the Government's approved insurance scheme (RPA).

The financial system will change to better reflect the requirements of an Academy trust and meet the company accounts requirements. The management of the budget would move from an annual to monthly model to better monitor spending – this is in response to a dramatic number of schools operating a deficit budget across the County.

Any monies currently held by the school or raised by the PTFA would be retained and controlled by the school.

10. How would we get a capital building project carried out?

ODBST is now part of a pooled capital funding scheme coordinated through the ODBE and is awarded an annual allocation from the Department for Education. This is allocated to schools on the basis of our condition surveys. Our condition survey will be updated as part of the conversion process.

We will continue to receive an annual DFC allocation for small capital projects as we do currently.

11. Will there be issues over moving teachers to go and teach in other schools in the MAT?

All staff are entitled to transfer, under TUPE regulations, to the Academy with their same terms and conditions as at present.

When a school converts to a new academy, employees are entitled to transfer under the same employment terms and conditions. There is a legal process to go through, which is called TUPE, whereby staff maintain existing pay, conditions and length of service.

It is important to note that there are no plans to alter the pay and conditions of staff. Of course, any changes made nationally would apply.

Staff are being fully involved in the discussion regarding conversion. Meetings for staff with representatives from ODBST are being held in order to answer questions both about the process and being part of ODBST. The views of staff are held in the highest regard by the governors and school leaders. Ensuring that all viewpoints are listened to and all concerns addressed is a critical part of the conversion process.

As now, from time to time, the School responds to requests from other schools for

assistance with staff support. This may involve loaning a member of staff to another school for short periods of time. Governors and the Head review these requests on a case by case basis and only respond to requests where our own children would not be prejudiced in any way. This would remain the case if we joined ODBST.

As a relatively-small school, the opportunities offered to us by being part of a larger network of schools could be attractive to staff who otherwise are limited to our current staffing structure. With staff recruitment in Buckinghamshire being an ongoing issue, being part of a MAT also gives us more opportunities to source staff and share expertise.

12. Is there a conflict of interest with Maureen Lomas in the decision making process?

Maureen Lomas as well as being the School's Chair of Governors is also a member of the Oxford Diocese Bucks School Trust, appointed by the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education. In her role as a Member of the Bucks School Trust she is charged with overseeing the ODBST Board of Trustees.

The Governing body of the School has always been aware of the relationship between Mrs Lomas and ODBST, and this relationship is noted in the Minutes of every Governor meeting that Mrs Lomas attends. The relationship was also highlighted at the beginning of both the meetings that took place during the consultation period.

As the Chair of Governors, Mrs Lomas has always sought to consider the best interests of the School and the community it serves. The Governing body has considered all the options available to the School. As a Voluntary Controlled Church of England School, the School is also obliged to seek approval from the Oxford Diocese for any plans the school makes to join any MAT.

Any decision regarding conversion would be the decision of the whole Governing Body.