

Dear Parent,

As you will be aware, St Marks Elm Tree Voluntary Aided primary school is a successful, popular school and we have been over-subscribed for a number of years. We have a record of strong results and families tell us that our school is well led and managed. We are part of the High Force school based initial teacher training group and have trained a large number of prospective teachers and teaching assistants, several of whom now work at St Mark's Elm Tree primary school. Last year's results at all key stages showed an increase at all key stages and were part of a continuous upward trend. We believe we are in strong position to move forward and offer the education our community will value and want for their children to be successful and become good, caring citizens.

You may be aware of the recent announcements by the Government making it clear that it wants all schools to become academies, or have a plan in place to become an academy.

The preferred structure is a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) which is where a group of academies join together and form a single Trust company with a single board of directors who are responsible for the strategic running of the Trust and are accountable for the Trust. The Department for Education, Ofsted and the Regional Schools Commissioner are all supportive of MATs as are all three main political parties. An Academy receives its funding directly from the Government and does not have any money withheld by the Local Authority to fund its services.

In light of the current educational landscape and to ensure the children and community are able to access the benefits of becoming an academy the Board of Governors have voted to consult on changing from a Church of England (VA) Primary to a Church of England Multi-Academy Trust (MAT). It is initially envisaged that only our school will be within the MAT but this change in legal status will give us the capacity to potentially enter into partnerships with other schools by taking them within the MAT. This will give us the opportunity and potential to develop the quality of other schools as well as our own, and share resources and expertise, going forwards.

The directors of the Multi-Academy Trust will be company directors and charitable trustees of the academy company and will be accountable for our school and any other academies which may ultimately join the MAT in the future. They will also be accountable to the Members of the MAT. For more information on the role of Members and Directors in a MAT please see the Q & A document attached. To enable this change could mean a restructure of our current governors going forwards; for example some of our existing governors may be represented within the wider MAT structure as part of a working party linked to one particular school if we do start to work with other schools, rather than as company Directors/trustees on the MAT board.

We would not intend to change the day-to-day operation of the school as a result of converting to a MAT. The admissions process would stay the same. The current Head Teacher and staffing of the school will not change as a result of becoming a MAT.

We will be holding an 'Information and Discussion session' at St Marks Elm Tree Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School on 26th May 2016 at 5pm to

allow parents to ask questions about the proposal. The governors will review all the comments received during the consultation process. On July 11th 2016 the Board of Governors will meet to discuss the feedback received from this consultation. Any decision on whether or not to convert to Multi-Academy Trust status will be taken by the Board of Governors based on what is considered best for our school, our students, our staff and the wider community.

We want to assure all our parents, staff and students, that should we convert to a Multi-Academy Trust we would remain a fully inclusive school serving the needs of our community. The Multi- Academy Trust proposal is part of our strategy for change, building on our successes. We believe this move will help the school to continue to develop as a great school and ensure that we continue to serve our community. I have included some Q&A about converting to a multi-academy trust. I hope that these will answer the majority of your queries.

Please email any comments to school email address

stmarkselmtree.school@stockton.gov.uk

or you can write to us at the school by July 1st 2016 at 9am.

The Board of Governors are determined to preserve our heritage, and our Church of England status. They are equally determined that we will also strive for educational excellence based on the needs of our children in this community.

I would like to thank you in advance for making the time to engage with this important issue.

Yours sincerely,

Valerie Hall
Head Teacher

Don Allday
Chair of the Governing Body.

1. What is a multi-academy trust?

A multi-academy trust (MAT) is where a number of academies join together and form a single trust with a board of directors answerable to the Trust's Members

The Trust can agree that other schools can join. Members of the trust are responsible for monitoring the performance of the Trust and holding the Directors to account. Members will generally meet at least once a year to approve the auditors and the accounts and have responsibility for appointing all or the majority of the Trust's directors who determine the policies of the trust, monitor the effectiveness of each academy within the MAT, manage central services where appropriate and report to the Secretary of State. The directors work to ensure that each academy is performing to the best of its ability and it gets the support it requires. The MAT enters into a master funding agreement for the MAT and also a supplemental funding agreement with the Secretary of State in respect of each academy within the MAT, each school having its own budget stream and staffing structure. Each of the academies in the trust can have own local working party which has some authority delegated to it by the directors. However, if there is a school in the Trust that needs more support in some areas, then there would be greater oversight as laid down in a document called a "**scheme of delegation**".

2. Are other schools also creating MATs?

Across the country there are MATs with many academies joined together. This seems to be very much the way that education is going as academies work more closely together for the benefit of the students in a local area.

3. Why would a single school want to convert into a MAT and not a single academy?

There are four main reasons why a single school may want to convert into a MAT:

- a. When you are any type of Academy your funding comes straight from the Government and is not held back to pay for central back office structures in the Local Authority. An example is one Academy that has saved over £0.3m in just 3 years which it is now spending on resources and new classrooms for the pupils. We could potentially top up our budget by up to 10% and would receive a £25,000 grant when we turn into an academy.
- b. When you are an Academy you have greater freedoms around curriculum planning so you can tailor the curriculum to meet the needs and preferences of your children rather than be dictated to by central government. Children still need to pass the tests but we can do this more creatively.
- c. When you are the main school in a MAT you can support other schools in the locality who cannot, or do not wish to, convert to academy status independently or to support any new school in the area by bringing them into the MAT structure.
- d. When you are the main school (sponsor school) in the MAT you can become a formal sponsor of an underperforming school. However, this would only be undertaken where the other school(s) in the Trust had the capacity to provide this support and where the sponsored school had sufficient resources to pay for any such support.

The Trust would be aiming to develop any sponsored school's provision so that it became at least good, preferably outstanding. We would receive funding to help us do this and would not be using money intended for St Marks. In some circumstances good schools join with others for the benefit of all the students and the efficient running of the schools

It may be that schools we support are also CofE schools which will mean a shared vision and ethos already exists. However, we will also support other schools in the community. Community (non-CofE) schools would be able to retain their own individual character and ethos through protections in the legal documents. **[I don't know if you want to mention possibility of setting up a free school as an option here too?]**

4. What are the benefits of forming a MAT?

Schools in the Trust can benefit from being part of a larger organisation. Examples would include:

- Better purchasing power: having a larger organisation allows economies of scale for e.g. computers, paper and photocopying.
- Better sharing of resources such as employing specialists across schools to support students with particular needs;
- Sharing resources such as HR and Finance
- Opportunities for staff development or progression through working across schools to share best practice or support particular subject development

This could mean savings to the budget for schools in the Trust due to economies of scale which means more money for each school to spend on staffing, resources or other items.

5. What would a school becoming part of a Multi Academy Trust mean for our pupils and parents/carers?

Pupils and parents/carers will continue to be part of their school community with the same support structures that currently exist. In terms of the education and running of the school St Marks Elm Tree Church of England Voluntary aided primary school would change its name to St Mark's Elm Tree Church of England Academy which would be part of the St Mark's Multi-Academy Trust. Everything else from your child's point of view would stay the same but there would hopefully be some increased money available in the budget for teaching and other student support services.

6. Who runs the Multi Academy Trust?

The MAT has a very small group of Members (Church officials mainly) who are named for legal purposes but don't have a great deal to do with the daily running of the school. The MAT Directors Board has overall responsibility and accountability in law for the performance, site and overall running of the Trust and the school. A local working party/Academy council sits beneath this and supports the Principal (head teacher) and Senior Leadership Team to implement strategic decisions. Neither the Members, Directors nor working party are paid positions (except the CEO of the MAT who is usually the Principal of the main sponsor school and who receives a Head Teacher salary as usual). When there is more than one school in the trust, each school has its

own working party/academy council who support each school's Principal. Although the Directors are appointed by Members, in the case of st Marks Elm Tree Church of England Academy, they are most likely to initially include some of the current Governors and the current Head Teacher (as Chief Executive Officer).

7. Who decides if a school can join the Trust?

Decisions would be made by the Directors Board. A school cannot demand to be part of the Trust, nor can the Trust be forced to take any school by anyone else.

8. How does a school apply to join the trust?

Any school interested would talk to the Directors of the Trust about the practicalities of how this would work, and check that the school and the Trust hold common values in their approach to education. If there was interest in exploring this further, then the MAT would form a working group to work with representatives of the applying school for both parties to reassure each other of the financial, site and performance of both the applicant school and the existing Trust.

9. Do we need to get permission to convert to a MAT?

We will need to obtain the permission of the Secretary of State for Education, via Regional Schools Commissioner ('RSC'). As a Church of England (VA) Primary we also need the permission of the Diocese of Durham Board of Education.

10. If we proceed when will the change be made?

Subject to the outcome of the consultation and approval from the RSC we would hope to become a MAT as soon as approval is gained from the department for education.