**Dormansland Primary School**

‘Becoming an Academy’
A Question and Answer Information Sheet

**What is an Academy?**

An Academy is a state school that is run by an Academy Trust. The Academy Trust enters into an agreement with the Secretary of State for Education that sets out its responsibilities and accountabilities for the effective running of the Academy. The Academy is funded directly by the Government and not through the Local Authority. The Trust is given exempt charitable status, which means it must operate much like a charity.

**What is the difference between an Academy and a Multi-Academy Trust?**

A Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) is when two or more academies come together in partnership. Within a MAT all schools are governed by one academy trust. Each school retains its own governing body, which is represented on the multi-academy trust board. The schools’ governing bodies operate subject to the control of the trust which has ultimate responsibility for the running of the individual academies. The trust is accountable and responsible for the performance of each of the academies and may delegate its decision-making powers to the governing bodies of the individual academies. As the multi-academy trust is a single entity, schools can develop strong collaborative processes and drive school improvement initiatives across all of the schools.

**Is this the right time to consider converting to an Academy?**

Yes. Because we were rated by OFSTED as a ‘Good’ school at our last inspection we can choose whether or not to become an academy rather than have the decision made for us, including determining which MAT we might join. As Governors, we must consider the option to convert as part of our duty to improve the quality of education we can provide for our children.

As an academy, we would have greater control of our school budget and how we choose to spend this, and greater autonomy over our curriculum.

**What are the potential benefits of academy status?**

There are a number of considered advantages through a MAT structure including:

- Potential to broaden the curriculum that we can offer
- Sharing best practices – it is easier to share and implement best practice through member academies. For example, one academy may trial an innovative teaching approach and if successful, this can be effectively shared across the Multi-Academy Trust (MAT)
- The Trust can ‘grow its own’ leaders for long term succession planning and greater stability for each of its schools over time
- Central resource base – shared resource pools allow easier forward planning (such as planning for the changes to the assessment criteria) and unexpected short term demands (staff sickness and absence) can be met more easily
- Access to external sponsorship – this will provide financial support and also raise the profile of the MAT
- Enhanced procurement – with a higher number of academies procuring services or goods together this increases the purchasing power of the Trust
What are the risks of becoming an Academy?
The change to Academy status takes a school out of Local Authority control, but does not exclude the school from Local Authority support. For example, Academies can continue to receive finance, HR, behavioural support and other services from the Local Authority and, where these represent ‘best value’, the MAT would use these services. Where the MAT feels that others can provide better services or better value, the change to Academy increases the freedom to make these changes.

Will there be any changes to term dates and school holiday dates?
Academies, free schools and voluntary-aided schools are able to set their own term dates but are asked to set the same or similar dates in the interest of parents who may have children at different schools.

Would there be any changes to the admissions policy/criteria?
As part of converting, the school will become its own admissions authority. It will be required to adopt clear and fair admission arrangements within current admissions law and the School Admissions Code. The Local Authority will continue to have responsibility for making sure that there are sufficient places locally and will co-ordinate the admissions process for all schools. This means that parents will still only have to complete one application per child. Applications will still be made via the centrally co-ordinated process.

What about the staff?
At present, all staff are employed by the Local Authority. If the School does become an Academy, all staff will automatically transfer to the new Academy Trust, on their current pay and conditions, including pensions. All new staff would be employed under current national pay and conditions agreements. Their continuity of service is protected, and all staff will be consulted in accordance with the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations.

No members of staff would be ever required to move against their will and work in a different school in the Trust. However, should they wish to move across the Trust as part of their professional development at any stage, there would be far more flexibility within the MAT structure for this to happen.

Who will be responsible for running our school?
Mrs. Stokes, the current Head Teacher of Dormansland, would be responsible for running the school, and would retain the title ‘Head Teacher’. The school would also retain its own governing board. Head Teachers from all the schools will be accountable to the Trust Board.

Are the Every Child Trust Trustees paid?
No, all Trustees are unpaid in this capacity and serve as volunteers.

Would the Governors at Dormansland be paid from now on?
No, all governors are unpaid in this capacity and will continue to serve as volunteers.

What is involved in becoming an Academy?
The school will meet with parents, pupils, staff and the wider community before the Governors reach their final decision. The Governing Board has voted for this proposal in principle and the Secretary of State for Education will decide whether or not to approve our application. Each school is given a £25,000 support grant to convert, with the vast majority used in the conversion process, including legal fees etc.

Would the school have to change its name, logo or uniform?
No, there will be no change to the name, logo or uniform of Dormansland School. Each school is committed to the retention of its individual identity.
How are the children affected?
The children will not notice any immediate difference; they will be in the same uniform, in the same classrooms with the same teaching staff. We will continue to strive for an outstanding education for all our children. However, in time, the children may notice changes and improvements in the way that they learn, which will result from greater training opportunities for staff and wider opportunities for children in such areas as Science, DT and Sport.

Are you expecting teachers to leave if this move goes ahead?
Staff have been consulted formally, just as we are seeking the views of parents in this process. They are being encouraged to speak to their unions and will have a series of meetings with their union representatives and senior school leaders as part of the conversion process, should the Governors decide to proceed. We encourage open and honest dialogue amongst our staff and this is no different for this process than for any other that directly affects our school.

Has the Department for Education or the Local Authority put pressure on our school to convert?
Absolutely not. This is an initiative taken by the Governing Body of our school, after careful consideration of both the school's needs and the wider educational landscape.

Will we get more money as an Academy?
Academies receive the same amount of per-pupil funding as they would receive from the Local Authority as a maintained school. All funding comes directly from Government to the Multi Academy Trust, which controls the overall budget. Each school does not necessarily have more money, but as a group the schools are better able to control their part of the budget and to seek economies of scale. However, as part of Every Child Trust, we will continue to benefit from additional enrichment funding.

Would our school’s budget be used to bail out a new MAT member school if it was in financial trouble?
No and no decision will ever be taken that might jeopardise that. All schools within a MAT have their own budget and financial control. If another school wanted to join the partnership, they would only be able to do so if their financial position was strong.

How will the money raised by the Parents/ fundraising be used?
Each school will continue to have its own independent mechanism for fundraising, although they will be free to collaborate if they wish. The money raised by each school's fundraising efforts will only be used for its own school and will continue to be independent of the school, raising money for agreed resources or projects that have been asked for by the school's leadership.

Can schools withdraw from the conversion process?
Schools are able to withdraw right up to the point when they sign the Funding Agreement. Once this is signed, there is a legally binding agreement between the Secretary of State and the Academy.

Has the decision to convert to an Academy already been made?
Until the views of our parents, staff, the local community and other stakeholders of our school have been obtained, a final decision will not be made. The Governing Body has to weigh up both the pros and cons of Academy conversion. They have voted unanimously for this proposal in principle, and have registered our interest in becoming an Academy with the DfE. The final decision to convert rests entirely with the Governing Body.

What is the timescale for conversion?
The entire process, from start to finish, generally takes three to five months, with all conversions becoming official on the first day of the month. This would be planned as a smooth transition, with no disruption to the day to day running of the school. If we convert, the date would be determined with the Department for Education and we would let you know when it is confirmed.
Does becoming an Academy change the relationship with other schools and with the local community?
No, we are committed to being at the heart of our community, a local school for local children. We will continue to collaborate and share expertise with other schools outside of the proposed MAT and the wider community.

Can an academy be closed?
Academies are still subject to OFSTED inspections. Any school that is not making satisfactory progress or does not meet expected standards is at risk of external intervention.

Will our responsibilities in relation to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and exclusions change?
No, responsibilities as an Academy in relation to SEND and exclusions will be just the same as they are now.

What is a Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC)?
The responsibilities of the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) include:

- monitoring the performance of Academies and intervening where underperformance is found;
- making strategic decisions on the creation of MATs and granting academy orders;
- working in close partnership with the LA to ensure that support meets school need;
- ensuring there are enough academy sponsors to meet local demand.

Why not wait and make a decision, to see if the goal posts are moved again?
It is the view of the governors that the process of academisation has gone too far to stop its move throughout England. At some stage in the future, any school might be directed to become part of a larger Academy chain. The Governors at Dormansland believe that this conversion now with a group of other local schools will enable us to build a shared set of values and ethos, offering the best opportunity to sustain and share the good work already achieved here.

How can I find out more?
The best source of information on academies is the Government’s own website: https://www.gov.uk/become-an-academy-information-for-schools