

Colman Junior School
South Park Avenue
Norwich NR4 7AU



Colman Infant School
Colman Road
Norwich NR4 7AW

Mrs Catherine Wright
Interim Executive Headteacher

Colman Federation Governing Board Academy Status Consultation

Introduction

Over the past 18 months the Colman Federation has experienced some turmoil with changes of leadership and governance. We currently still have temporary leaders in post, a conscious decision after failing to secure a permanent Executive Headteacher in March 2023. Governors wanted a period of time with some stability for the federation. The changes experienced in the school are all focused on improving provision and educational experience for children, every good school strives for continued improvement. On our improvement journey, it has become apparent that working collaboratively with other schools can be hugely beneficial, not least with sharing expertise, skills and resources. This has led to the exploration of the school's future strategic direction.

So, the governors have been reviewing the short and long term strategy for the Colman Federation. To this end and in the light of recent government plans for the future of education (the Education White Paper published in March 2022) governors have taken the decision to actively consider academisation. Whilst governors go through a period of consultation they have taken the decision to advertise for a new substantive Executive Headteacher to start either April 1st 2024 or September 2024. The advertisement for this post goes live on January 5th 2024. To further support the leadership of the Federation throughout the spring term Mrs Binks Neate-Evans has been employed for three days a week. Mrs Binks Neate-Evans is a long standing and very experienced Headteacher in her own right. This post is being funded by the DfE.

The White Paper proposes that all schools in England will become academies within Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) by 2030. This means that all schools which have not yet converted to academy status will be required to join a trust or be assigned to a trust by the Regional Schools Commissioner or the Local Authority over the next few years. Multi-Academy Trusts receive funding directly from the Department for Education.

Over the last few years, the proportion of funding for schools which is allocated via the Local Authority has been reducing; for example almost all funding grants for school improvement are now allocated via MATs and the majority of funding allocated directly for premises building and repair is allocated via MATs.

The governors have concluded that it will be in the best interests of current and future pupils at the Federation to act now to choose a Multi-Academy Trust which shares the values, ethos and ambitions for children and which has the capacity to make the Colman Federation of schools great.

Governors have looked at a number of MATs and have decided that Unity Schools Partnership (<https://www.unitysp.co.uk>) offers the best combination of ethos, values, capacity, financial strength and leadership to take the Colman Federation forward and maintain the unique qualities that we value for our children and our staff.

This briefing is to give you information about the opportunity and to gather your views. A consultation period will run from Monday 8th January 2024 to Friday 1st March 2024 to share information and seek views from our community including parents and staff. The views of the Local Authority are also being sought.

When the consultation period is complete the governors will consider any responses and act in the best interests of the Federation when making decisions about the academy conversion application.

Governors welcome any comments or questions you may have which can be emailed to: chairofgovernors@colmanfederation.org.uk Alternatively written comments in an envelope marked "Academy Consultation" can be handed in at the Junior school office.

Governors have arranged a Parents' Meeting to answer questions about academy conversion on Thursday 11th January at 6.30pm in the Infant School Hall - all parents are invited. For anyone who cannot attend the meeting we will also be able to answer questions sent in response to the consultation via email (see email address above). Representatives from Unity Schools Partnership will attend the meeting to answer any questions about the trust or the conversion process.

Why are the governor's considering conversion to Academy status?

The organisation of schools in England will change rapidly in the next few years. The expectation of the government is that all schools will work together and support one another within academy trusts. The Department for Education expects academy trusts and Teaching School Hubs to be the providers of school improvement and development support. Local Authority support for schools is diminishing as the government moves funding for education away from local council control. This shift in funding patterns reduces the scope for non-academy schools to apply for additional funding and support to enhance the educational experience of the pupils. In future support for school improvement will come mainly from academy trusts.

There is a possibility, if we do nothing, that at some point the school may be in the position of having to join an academy trust which may not share our values. Therefore, governors believe that it is time to act to safeguard the ethos and strengths of our Federation, protect our pupils and staff from future isolation or loss of representation and to widen the support we can offer and receive from other schools.

What are the opportunities and benefits of academy conversion?

The emerging structure of education in England is built around a large number of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs). A MAT is a charitable company which must operate as not-for-profit organisation in the interests of the community it serves. The funding for education is allocated by the Department for Education (DfE) directly to the MATs and the MAT has control over the use of the funds.

The Colman Federation has much to gain from joining Unity Schools Partnership. We are planning to join a MAT which is in the process of growing and developing its provision in the primary school sector, where we will be able to share our knowledge and expertise as the trust expands.

We expect pupils to benefit from the Federation having access to a wider range of staff skills, resources and facilities. These are likely to enhance the curriculum that we offer, the range of activities for pupils, the process of transition between schools and increase the potential learning experiences through the school. Access to greater capital funding in a MAT will allow the school to improve buildings and facilities on the school site and reduce the risk of school disruption due to building or heating failures.

Staff at the Colman Federation will benefit from wider access to professional development with a larger group of colleagues. The Federation will have greater access to subject specific expertise and relevant training. As part of a larger group of schools our staff should have access to a wider range of specialist expertise including SEND and intervention leadership. Many MATs also see improved recruitment and retention of staff due to the wider variety of jobs and career opportunities available with the trust.

As part of a group of schools in a MAT there are financial opportunities including improved contracts for services (maintenance, catering, supplies etc). These economies of scale also extend to the provision of back-office systems and services such as accounting and management information. In general, a larger group of schools will be more resilient than a single school and better able to manage the sort of risks and uncertainties we have seen in the last few years.

Which MAT will we apply to join?

Clearly whilst we go through a period of consultation Governors have asked the DfE to consider governor's request to join Unity Schools Partnership. The DfE have sanctioned our request and an Academy Request is in place.

Unity Schools Partnership recognises the individuality of each community and supports a high degree of delegation to academies. The academies are led by Headteachers with clear accountabilities reporting to the Chief Executive of the Trust. There is a local governing board for each academy which oversees teaching, learning, behaviour and the school budget.

How long will it take?

January 8th to March 1st: consultation period.

March 4th: views from the consultation will be considered by Governors and the decision whether to proceed or not will be made.

April 1st 2024: Expected conversion date - if the decision is made to proceed.

Pupils' education will not be affected during this period of change. The Federation will continue to operate as normal.

What is an Academy?

An academy is a school which receives funding directly from the Department for Education rather than via the Local Authority (Norfolk County Council). School funding is allocated via a national funding formula for all schools which is intended to ensure that all schools and academies will receive an equivalent amount of money based mainly on the number of pupils. Schools which are not academies currently receive slightly less direct funding than an academy trust because some of their funds are "de-delegated" back to the Local Authority to provide some shared services.

Local Authorities have to compete directly with academy trusts and teaching school hubs for school improvement funding and capital funding for building improvements. Academies will be able to submit bids for additional funding through their MAT.

Academy trusts have:

- complete control of and responsibility for their own finances,
- the responsibility to manage all the external services the schools require,
- the choice to work with external providers of the trust's choosing to secure best value,
- automatic access to capital funding in the form of the School Condition Allocation (for MATs with more than 5 schools and 3,000 pupils).

How is an academy governed?

The MAT board sets out the strategic vision for the trust and oversees the governance structures within which the schools work.

Each school is seen as central to its own community and on its own journey of improvement which will be supported by the MAT, with the skills of each school being used in a supportive way for all the others. Unity Schools partnership is clear that the individual ethos, character and good practices of each school are retained and that all the schools operate as equals supporting each other.

How will staff contract terms and conditions be affected?

The Academy Trust employs staff directly rather than the Local Authority which means that staff terms and conditions of service can be set by the MAT. If the school converts to become an academy all staff will transfer to be employed by the MAT on their existing terms and conditions (under TUPE regulations). The MAT is subject to the same requirements as an LA-maintained school for consultation on staff terms and conditions.

Will there be changes to the Admissions Policy?

Academies are responsible for setting their own admissions policy but must comply with the Government's Schools' Admissions Code.

Will the school's responsibilities in relation to Special Educational Needs change?

No, responsibilities as an Academy in relation to Special Educational Needs will be just the same as they are now in a maintained school. The Local Authority will continue to be the Admissions Authority for the MAT as it retains responsibility for Special Education Needs.

Can a child with an Education Health and Care Plan nominate an academy as their school of choice?

Yes, these arrangements and related processes must at all times comply with the School Admissions Code. The responsibilities of an Academy in relation to Special Educational Needs will be just the same as they are now as a maintained school.

Does becoming an Academy change the way in which exclusions are dealt with?

Academies are required by their Funding Agreement to follow the law and guidance on exclusions as if they were maintained schools. This includes reporting exclusions to the Local authority. However, Academies do not have to consult the Local Authority before deciding to exclude a pupil and they can arrange their own independent appeals panel.

Will the school change its name and uniform as some Academies have done?

No, there is no plan for the Federation to change its name or uniform when it becomes an academy.

Are Academies subject to the same Ofsted inspection regime?

Yes, schools converting to become academies will continue to be inspected in the normal way.

Conclusion

The governors of the Colman Federation welcome all views from staff, parents, pupils and stakeholders in our community. We look forward to receiving your comments which will help us decide on the future status of the school.

Any comments or questions can be emailed to: chairofgovernorscolmanfederation.org.uk Alternatively written comments in an envelope marked "Academy Consultation" can be handed in at the school office.

Karen Gardner
Chair of Governors
5th January 2024

