

## **North Cerney Church of England Primary School Conversion to Academy Status**

### **Context**

The Governors of North Cerney CofE Primary School have looked carefully at whether converting to Academy status would benefit the school.

Governors are now minded that it is the right time to reconsider academy status.

North Cerney CofE Primary School has the opportunity to join an academy trust already established by the Diocese for church and non-church schools. This means that the Trust would support the school in becoming an academy without the need for the school to establish a separate Charitable Trust and a Limited Liability company. The school would still have a governing body, but it would be accountable to the Diocese rather than the LA. The Diocesan MAT is a single legal entity, promoting strong collaboration among member schools and accountability to drive up standards and quality. The MAT is committed to better staff development and schools working together. It can negotiate contracts and services that achieve much better value for money than each school negotiating individually. Additionally, there has been an impressive success rate in MAT bids for capital funding. In April 2014, the Trust secured just short of £1m for improvements in its the first two schools and a similar figure was secured in April 2015 for work across three academies.

This document has been produced as a result of the preliminary consultation process and provides all stakeholders of the school with information about the implications of North Cerney CofE primary school becoming an academy. The information has been drawn from a number of sources and was accurate at the time of the consultation process.

### **Facts About Academies**

#### **What is an academy?**

An academy is an independent non-fee paying state school which is funded by and accountable to the government, rather than being under Local Education Authority (LEA) control.

All academies are charitable companies limited by guarantee, and so the governing board are Directors of the company. As such, the academies need to be compliant with company and charity law and meet the requirements of Companies' House. The Trust sign a Funding Agreement in order to receive government funding; this is a contractual agreement between the academy Trust and the Secretary of State for Education. This document sets out the basis on which the Academy will be funded.

When a school converts to an academy, the Trust becomes responsible for the employment of staff, the standards and achievement of pupils in the academy, all buildings, land and assets that transfer to the Trust (under a license or otherwise) and all academy finance.

Like all schools, academies are required to offer a broad and balanced curriculum, provide an education for pupils of all abilities and educate pupils who are drawn from a local area.

#### **How are academies funded?**

In LA controlled schools, the Local Authority provides the school's budget and will retain a proportion of the school's budget to fund some central functions. Maintained schools also purchase some services from the Local Authority such as payroll services, financial management systems and buildings maintenance. Schools then choose how to spend the rest of their budget. The vast majority of a school's budget is usually spent on staffing and

essential services, such as utilities.

In contrast, academies receive their entire budget directly from central government from the Education Funding Agency (EFA) without any 'top slice' being taken by a Local Authority. An academy is then free to choose independently how to purchase services. Academies can still opt to buy some services from the Local Authority if they choose to. Academies are therefore responsible for securing best-value in the procurement of a wide-range of supplies and services.

### **What financial 'buffer' would exist if the Local Authority is no longer supporting the school?**

Academies are not allowed to run a deficit budget without having in place a remedial action plan which will eliminate the deficit. In the same way that schools which find themselves in financial difficulty have to agree a recovery plan with their Local Authority, academies that develop a deficit after opening will have to agree a recovery plan with the EFA.

### **A Multi Academy Trust**

A governing body may choose to join a multi-academy trust. A multi-academy trust (MAT) is usually established as the umbrella body which is ultimately accountable to the Secretary of State for Education for a number of schools. In this structure, it is usual for the Academy Trust Directors to appoint a local governing body to each academy within the Trust. The local governing body is responsible to the Directors. There is a scheme of delegation for the day to day operation of each school within the Trust. The Academy Trust, however, remains ultimately accountable to the Secretary of State for Education for the quality of provision within each school. In terms of funding, there is a supplementary Funding Agreement, which is signed for each of the schools which join the multi-academy trust.

### **The Diocese of Gloucester Multi-Academies Trust (DGAT)**

The Diocese has established a multi-academy trust in order to support Church of England and community primary schools within the Diocese. The aim of the Trust is to provide children of all faiths and none with excellent educational provision within a distinctively caring and supportive Christian ethos. Whilst initially established to sponsor Church of England Primary schools, the vision of the Trustees is to be able to offer 'a home' to a family of schools who want to benefit from academy status but value the added benefits of being part of a larger 'family'. There are currently five schools which have joined the trust, they are: Dursley, Hardwicke, Primrose Hill, Minchinhampton and Winchcombe Abbey Primary Schools. Three further schools are currently consulting their communities about joining the Trust, these are Longney, Whiteshill and Fieldcourt.

### **Advantages of joining the Diocese of Gloucester multi-academy trust**

For Church of England primary schools, joining the Diocesan Academy Trust further strengthens an already established relationship with the Diocese. For community schools, this provides a new opportunity to work closely with a wider network of schools.

The Trust's primary aim is to secure educational excellence in its schools. The Diocese recognise that this will be achieved in a variety of ways in a variety of contexts. The Trust recognizes the autonomy of individual schools and seeks to work in partnership with Local Governing Bodies and Head teachers to secure excellence. Whilst reserving the right to direct a school or intervene should the need arise, the Trust seeks to support local decision-making; the Trust is not a remote organisation which will impose a 'one size fits all' model.

The Trust has established a policy which enables a number of Chairs of Local Governing

Bodies to sit as Directors on the Trust, thus ensuring effective communication and accountability between local boards and Academy Directors. The Diocese has established an Academy Development Body, with a team of consultants with proven track-records in school improvement able to work alongside schools within the Trust. The Academy Development Body has established all the necessary systems and quality assurance mechanisms to ensure high quality school improvement is delivered in schools as and when required. The Principals from each of the five academies also come together termly to share best practice across the academies and, working with the Principals, the Trust provide additional professional Development opportunities for staff.

In order to ensure that Local Governing Bodies and Headteachers are not distracted from the business of educating children, the Trust will support its academies with many of the business functions associated with running a Trust. For example, the Trust will undertake all annual returns to the Education Funding Agency (EFA), VAT returns, auditing of accounts, responsible officer role, company secretary responsibilities and procurement of group services.

It is incumbent on all Academy Trusts to secure value for money. Schools that convert to academy status will need to tender and procure a number of services which have been traditionally purchased through the Local Authority. As a member of the Diocese family of academies, the Diocese will undertake some central tendering and procurement. The Diocese can manage all associated contracts for its academies in order to use collective bargaining power to achieve economies of scale, ensuring best value.

Key to the success of any academy is effective leadership and governance. The Trust will work with all those in positions of leadership to ensure best practice. For example, all academies are provided with a school development partner (selected with input from the school), to undertake specific and tailored work with the Headteacher and governors, as well as work with our Diocesan legal advisors to ensure that Local Governing Bodies receive regular updates.

### **What services does the Diocese provide for all Church of England Schools?**

The Diocesan Education Team currently provide expertise in governance, admissions, building projects, models of leadership, school remodelling (amalgamations and federations) Section 48 inspections, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, Religious Education and values education. The Diocese support governing bodies with Head teacher appointments and offers a mentoring scheme to newly appointed Head teachers. Each year the Diocese offers central training opportunities for staff and network meetings to support teachers. In order to extend the services the Diocese can provide, the Board of Education is currently working with a group of local Head teachers and consultants who all have a proven track record in school improvement.