



Thingwall Primary School

'Together Promoting Success'

Headteacher: Mrs D. L. Evans B.Ed (Hons) NPQH

Pensby Road
Thingwall
Wirral
CH61 7UG

Tel: 0151 648 4885

Fax: 0151 648 2507

www.thingwall.eschools.co.uk
schooloffice@thingwall.wirral.sch.uk

11th January 2023

Dear Parents and Carers,

CONSULTATION ON PROPOSED ACADEMY CONVERSION

Following many months of research, the Governors at Thingwall Primary School have taken a decision to consider applying for academy status and join Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust. We strongly believe this would benefit our pupils and staff enormously.

RATIONALE

The Government's vision, as laid out in the recently published School White Paper, is for all schools to have joined multi academy trusts by 2030. In anticipation of this, the Governors have decided to now look more closely into whether an academy model would be in the best interests of the children, teachers and staff at Thingwall Primary School. The Governors are keen that Thingwall Primary School has full control of when and how they go forward with academy status, without pressure from Government departments. As one of a number of schools currently considering academy status, our Governors consider that joining Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust now will be a positive step for the school.

THE PROPOSAL

The Governing Body at Thingwall Primary School believes that the best plan for the school is to become an academy and join Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust.

The Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust was established in June 2017, with four schools joining initially; Church Drive Primary School joined later in 2019; and Brackenwood Junior School joined in 2021. The most recent school to join the Trust is Greasby Junior, which converted on 1st January 2023, bringing the total number of schools to seven. The Trust was set up to enhance the good working relationships and practices built up over a number of years between the schools; all schools were judged to at least be 'good' by OFSTED.

Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust has received significant interest from other schools across the area who would like to join the Trust; demand has been particularly high from those schools that are judged to be 'good' or 'outstanding'. Strengthening our partnerships with these schools would have clear benefits for Thingwall Primary School and the additional support available through a Trust model would be one advantage of becoming an academy.

The proposal is that Thingwall Primary School converts to academy status and joins Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust on 1st September 2023.

Safeguarding Statement

Thingwall Primary School takes the safeguarding of its pupils very seriously. The Policy can be found on the School's VLE under policies.



QUESTIONS AND FEEDBACK

Governors are now entering the consultation phase. We know that the debate around academies has been predominant in recent times, and we would like to make sure that the entire school community has had an opportunity to ask questions about what academy status means for Thingwall Primary School. The consultation period will run from **11th January 2023 to 7th February 2023**.

We are therefore holding a meeting where we would welcome the opportunity to talk to you about what becoming an academy means for Thingwall. The meeting will be held at the school as follows:

On Monday 23rd January 2023

- Staff meeting 3.45pm - 4.45pm
- Parent/carer meeting 5.15pm - 6.15pm

We have included a feedback form (Appendix A) with this letter and we would be grateful if you could submit it to us by **7th February 2023** with any questions, comments, or concerns you may have. This can be done by email to: consultation@thingwall.wirral.sch.uk. You can also leave any paper feedback forms in the box at the school office and forms received will be kept completely anonymous.

We also enclose a copy of some FAQs, which you may find of interest. Information about the consultation and the feedback form can be found at: <https://www.thingwall.wirral.sch.uk/>. Any future information, feedback or responses can also be found on this website. The website will go live on 11th January 2023. We will be consulting on academy status with staff in school on 23rd January 2023.

In order for us to gather as broad and deep a range of opinions as possible, we strongly urge you to participate by attending the organised information session. If you are unable to attend this session, but would like further information or would like to respond to our consultation, you can contact school in the following ways:

- Telephone: 0151 648 4885
- Email: consultation@thingwall.wirral.sch.uk
- Suggestions box: leave paper feedback in the office at main entrance.

Finally, we would like to thank you for your continued support of Thingwall Primary School. We believe that we have a truly wonderful school here and we are committed to ensuring we provide the very best for our school family.

Yours faithfully,



Mrs Danielle Evans
Headteacher



Mr Mike Collins
Chair of Governors

Appendix A: Thingwall Primary Feedback Form

Q1. Please confirm the status that best describes you: (Please select one)

- ☐ A member of school staff
- ☐ A pupil at the school
- ☐ A parent or carer of a pupil
- ☐ A member of the community
- ☐ A school governor
- ☐ Other (Please specify)

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Q2. Do you support the proposal for Thingwall Primary School to convert to academy status and join Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust? (Please select one)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

Q3. Any other comments or questions? (Please write in)

Thank you for your comments!

Please return this form to [the School Office \(Reception\)](#) or send by email to consultation@thingwall.wirral.sch.uk by **7th February 2023.**

Converting to an Academy - Frequently Asked Questions

WHY ARE WE LOOKING AT BECOMING AN ACADEMY?

1. **What is an academy?** Academy schools are state funded schools in England, which are directly funded by central government (specifically, the Department for Education) and independent of direct funding and control by the Local Authority.
2. **Are all academies the same?** No. There are many different types of academy. For example, some schools have become academies independently; others have joined together with other schools to form a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) whilst others have joined larger groups and organisations, often known as academy chains. Different academies have a variety of school improvement and governance arrangements.
3. **Why are we considering converting to an academy now?** The current educational climate is changing and many schools nationally are choosing to take advantage of academy status. Many schools wish to make the move now to determine their own destiny and to make the changes when it is right for their own school.

We have been in discussion with Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust about joining their Trust and Governors feel that now is the right time to take this forward.

4. **What is Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust?** The Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust was established in June 2017, with four schools joining initially; Church Drive Primary School joining later in 2019; and Brackenwood Junior School joining in 2021. The most recent school to join the Trust is Greasby Junior which converted on 1st January 2023, bringing the total number of schools to seven. The Trust was set up to enhance the good working relationships and practices built up over a number of years between the schools; all schools were judged at least to be 'good' in terms of OFSTED category. All schools who joined the Trust at the outset had equal rights, and a large amount of due diligence was carried out in order to ensure that this 'equal footing' was appropriate to the founding schools.

As a Trust, Oak Trees would welcome other schools joining the Trust, as long as the time is right and it was felt that it would be to the benefit of the Trust and the interested school. This would be after due diligence was carried out, considering a number of factors such as finance, performance, Governance and assets, including buildings.

Our Trust values are:



You can find out more about the Oak Trees MAT at www.oaktreesmat.co.uk.

5. **Are any other schools in our local area academies?** Yes, there are a number of academies in our region. However, all academies are different in the same way that every school is different.

Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust currently has seven-member schools:

Poulton Lancelyn Primary School (Bebington, Wirral); Church Drive Primary School (Bebington, Wirral); Egremont Primary School (Egremont, Wirral); Brackenwood Junior School

(Bebington, Wirral); Stanton Road Primary School (Bebington, Wirral); Great Meols Primary School (Meols, Wirral) and Greasby Junior School (Greasby, Wirral).

6. **What are the advantages of Academy Status?** In addition to the advantages mentioned above, as Governors and Headteacher of Thingwall Primary School, we believe that the opportunity to work with new partners and schools, working together to ensure standards across the Trust are consistently high, is an exciting new proposition. However, we will continue to actively work with all local schools and current partners, ensuring the best of both worlds. Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust has made it clear that academy status will not change the things that work so well for our school.
7. **What are the disadvantages of Academy Status?** As an academy, there are a number of additional responsibilities placed on the school in terms of financial management and reporting. It is expected that, on a day-to-day basis, the pupils and their parents and carers, teachers and staff will not notice the difference when we become an academy. There will however be additional workloads for members of staff in the school office. Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust recognise the additional pressures and will provide the school with a significant amount of support from specialists who will be able to pick up the majority of this additional work.

WHAT DAY-TO-DAY CHANGES WILL HAPPEN?

8. **Will a move to academy status mean a new name for the school?** No. The school will continue to be called Thingwall Primary School. Other schools that have chosen to become academies with Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust have also chosen to retain their existing names.
9. **Will a proposed new academy have a new uniform?** No. Parents will not need to buy a new uniform.
10. **Will a proposed new academy still be open to the community?** Yes. There will be no change to the current provision and use of the school by different groups to hold events.
11. **What will be the impact on our children with special needs?** There will be no change to the level of support provided. Thingwall Primary School will continue to recognise that every child is different and has the right to be included as a valued, respected and equal member of the school community.
12. **Will the school hours be any different as an academy?** Although it is highly unlikely that the school day will be changed, it is the decision of the Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust Board to decide this as they have the power to do so. This decision is usually delegated to the local Governing Body of an academy, so there is no real change from our authority in this regard. As is the case now, parents would be consulted prior to any change in school hours, although no change is envisaged.
13. **Will pupils' education be disrupted by a transition to academy status?** No. When an academy is approved to go ahead, it will do so with minimal disruption to the staff and students. Most of the changes will take place behind the scenes, with support from a dedicated team from the Trust who have gone through this process before with other schools.
14. **If we move to being an academy, will this change what is taught?** We would be expected to continue to offer the full range of National Curriculum subjects. OFSTED continue to inspect academies and their handbook for inspection is the same one as used in any other school. The academy would be expected to strive to be outstanding in the statutory OFSTED (section 5). In other words, there may be no change in what or how pupils are taught.

WHAT WILL THIS MEAN FOR OUR SCHOOL FINANCES?

15. **How is an academy funded?** In maintained schools, all revenue funding (building funding is slightly different) goes directly to the Local Authority. The Local Authority (LA) takes a proportion of the money from the school budget to provide essential services to the school and the rest is delegated under the Local Management of Schools. Schools can, and do, buy additional services from the LA and other providers. As a result, schools currently depend upon the Local Authority for many services such as school improvement, HR, finance, etc. This has led to a dual system where the LA has taken the lead on school effectiveness whilst the local Governing Body has focused on the distinctive and inclusive characteristics of the school.

Academies will receive the same level of per-pupil funding as maintained schools, plus funding to meet additional responsibilities that are no longer provided for them by the Local Authority (LA). With Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust, the money that would have been provided to the LA to run the school is provided directly to Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust. Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust does retain some of the budget in order to provide services to the academy. Local authorities fund their core services in a similar way.

16. **Does this improve on current funding arrangements?** Converting to an academy will not be to our detriment financially, although there may be the potential for some financial gain. However, any decision is not motivated by money. Funding is available to cover the costs of the conversion process itself, which is provided by central government once the decision to convert has been approved. We will also have opportunities to support other schools and to benefit financially from doing so. In addition, the MAT Board has access to capacity funding from the Department for Education as well as opportunities to bid for capital funding on an annual basis.

WHAT WILL THIS MEAN FOR TEACHERS AND STAFF?

17. **What are the Terms and Conditions for staff?** On conversion to academy status, teachers and staff employed by the Local Authority will transfer with the same terms and conditions, via a formal TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment) process. In addition, conversion will not affect any union memberships.
18. **Who will employ teachers and staff following conversion?** At present, Thingwall Primary School teachers and staff are employed by the Local Authority. Following conversion, teachers and staff will be employed directly by Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust.
19. **Will Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust employ Non-Qualified Teachers?** All class groups of pupils will be registered to a qualified teacher, as is the case in schools currently.

WHAT WILL THIS MEAN FOR STANDARDS?

20. **Does Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust have the capacity to support our educational standards?** Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust has established its own school improvement capacity for those schools choosing to become an academy which includes a School Improvement Lead and regular use of education consultants.

Collectively, the team is experienced and qualified to support and challenge schools in data analysis, teaching, behaviour, safeguarding, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, special educational needs and disabilities, and leadership and management. The school improvement package will include support and challenge for governance and the team are able to draw on further support from National Leaders in Governance as appropriate.

21. **How will an academy raise achievement?** The whole structure of Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust has been designed to challenge and support schools in equal measure. We would receive a number of days of school improvement support from the School Improvement Lead, irrespective of whether the school is outstanding or inadequate.

These visits are not inspections but an opportunity for senior leaders to benchmark their judgments through shared lesson observation, work scrutiny, analysis of data, supported self-evaluation and school improvement planning. Indeed, the outcome of these visits will confirm the development of the school.

Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust will intervene rapidly in schools that are underperforming or on a downward trajectory based on OFSTED criteria.