

Brize Norton Primary School

Conversion to Academy Status through Joining the Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust, ODST (A Multi-Academy Trust)

Increase of Pupil Admission Number to 17 children

Background

The academies programme is a central feature of government policy which states that every school should be given the opportunity to decide if it wants to continue with the Local Authority or to be an independent autonomous body.

Additionally, there are financial constraints and cuts faced by local government, and many services traditionally provided by the local authority are either reduced or have been completely phased out.

As a school we have to face these challenges head on and we have to consider whether to convert to an Academy.

What is an Academy?

An academy is a government funded school that is independent to the local authority. In terms of the day to day functioning, an academy school will not be noticeably different to a Local Authority maintained school.

Responsibility for funding the school, monitoring performance and any capital projects will fall to central government rather to local government.

Academy status gives schools additional responsibilities, and also greater freedoms.

If the decision is made to transfer to become an academy, the school and governing body will join an academy trust, which is a charitable company. The Governors have looked at several options and are considering joining ODST.

No one can make any money from the company. The company is limited by guarantee. It does not pay dividends and makes no profit. It is however a legal entity and will mean that the school is able to enter into contracts, employ staff and be recognised as a legal body.

Schools are supported in the trust to enable school staff to concentrate on continuing to deliver the highest standards of teaching and care to all pupils. This support is given through central services which are funded through a 5% top slice from the academies income. ODST academies will automatically be provided with a Service Level Agreement that includes support with the curriculum, school improvement, HR advice, finance software, training and advice, governance, premises and appeals.

Why are we considering joining ODST?

As governors we have been investigating the possibility of our school joining ODST as an Academy. Four of our local partnership schools have joined, and they are all full of praise for the support they are receiving as a school. The Local Authority has trimmed its services so much that school leaders

and governors are much more on their own than they used to be, and as a small school we would benefit from closer working with other similar schools in a supportive structure. These include Burford Primary School, which is also not a church school. **Joining ODST would not affect our status as a community school, and ODST would not expect us to become a church school.**

ODST Vision

At the heart of the ODST vision is the belief in educational excellence. The belief is that ODST is called to serve pupils, staff, parents and their local community, by providing academies with the highest levels of academic rigour and pastoral care. Academies are places where children and young people develop and thrive intellectually, socially, culturally and spiritually.

ODST academies teach a broad and balanced curriculum within national guidelines. Focusing on core skills, this is designed to ensure that all pupils reach their academic potential and seeks to enrich their experience along the way. Pupils are enabled to succeed in an atmosphere of high expectation, aspiring to educational excellence.

ODST is committed to sustaining high quality schools, and supporting schools in need of specific improvement. They set out to recruit and retain staff of the highest quality and to offer them the working conditions they need to give of their best as they serve the pupils in their care. They work in partnership with families so that students can be engaged and effective learners.

As a limited company operating within the family of the Diocese of Oxford, ODST are motivated by Christian values to serve local communities. But they do not impose those values. Admissions policies are open, and priority is normally given to children in the local area.

ODST welcome those of all faiths and none, and are proud of the ethnic diversity within their academies.

Why do we want to increase our Pupil Admission Number to 17?

Schools are finding that money is increasingly tight, due to government cuts and increases in employers' National Insurance and pension contributions. School funding is tied to the number of children in the school; simply, the more children, the more money. At Brize Norton School, we have an unusually high ratio of staff to pupils, both teachers and teaching assistants. We believe that this is the key to our success and we are keen to continue this despite the financial limitations. A small increase in our pupil numbers would bring in more money and allow us to continue with the small classes we have at the moment. There is a possibility that keeping the same numbers would mean reducing the number of classes to four, therefore increasing class sizes across the school. The governors have chosen 17 as the number because it is small enough to keep the ethos and feel of the school the same.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How many academies are in ODST?

The first academy joined ODST on 1 September 2012 which is John Henry Newman in Oxford and other schools have since joined, including Grove, The Hendreds, St Christopher's, Cowley, Wheatley Primary, Burchetts Green, St Luke's, Maidenhead, St Peter's (Old Windsor), St Christopher's, (Langford), The Blake, (Witney), Bampton Primary School, Burford Primary School,

and St Peter's, Alvescot. Several other schools have seriously expressed an interest in joining ODST and it is likely that further ones will in the coming months including St Mary's, (Witney).

2. Why is the number of Academies increasing?

Academies were initially opened in 2002 under the Labour Government. The Academies Act 2010 enabled all outstanding schools to apply to become an Academy. Since April 2011 the programme has been expanded so that all schools performing well could convert, together with those that needed to convert with an external sponsor or in partnership with another school/Trust.

3. How long does it take for a school to become an Academy?

It is expected that most schools are able to convert to academy status in around five months.

4. Do schools need to consult before converting?

Yes. All schools are required to carry out a consultation but it is up to each school to decide whom and how to consult. There is no legally specified length of time for the consultation and schools have flexibility in how it is conducted. We will also conduct information sessions for pupils.

6. Does the school have to change its name or uniform?

No. The name of the school does not have to change and the uniform requirements do not have to change either.

TEACHING AND THE CURRICULUM

7. Will the school be able to set its own curriculum?

Although academies do not have to follow the national curriculum this is unlikely to have any impact on the way that education is currently delivered in the school as a balanced curriculum which is judged against national standards must be provided.

8. What would happen to SEN provision?

We would continue to provide the same support for pupils with an Education and Health Care Plan and indeed the funding for this element continues to be provided by the Local Authority. The Local Authority retains its responsibility for statutory duties, obligations and procedures remain in place when a school converts to academy status.

PERSONNEL

9. What happens to all of the staff?

All staff are entitled to transfer, under TUPE regulations, to the Academy.

10. Can academies alter the pay and conditions of employees?

When a school converts to a new academy, employees are entitled to transfer under the same employment terms and conditions. There is a legal process to go through, which is called TUPE, whereby staff maintain existing pay, conditions and length of service. Any alterations can only be made as they would have been by the Council (for example, changes to pay and annual leave negotiated with employee's representatives). This position will continue unless and until the contract of employment is varied with the agreement of the employee.

It's important to note that there are no plans to alter the pay and conditions of staff. Of course, any changes made nationally would apply.

11. How will union membership (NUT, NASUWT, Unison, etc) work?

Union recognition would remain as it currently stands; all employees are entitled to be part of a union.

12. Will being an academy mean that we will recruit unqualified teachers so that the school can pay less? This could lead to a decline in the quality of teaching.

No. As an academy, we would be required to only employ qualified teachers.

13. Would we be able to buy services such as HR and payroll more cheaply if the school was not buying from the local authority?

ODST will procure some services on behalf of schools in ODST and will be able to negotiate better deals for a group of schools. The Governing Body will be able to procure services from a wider range of providers (and can continue to buy some services from the Local Authority).

ADMISSIONS

14. What are the admission requirements for schools converting to become academies?

No changes are proposed to the admissions criteria or catchment area. As an Academy it becomes the admission authority and this will include periodic consultation if any changes are proposed in the future to admission arrangements and regularly publishing the academy's admission arrangements.

The Local Authority retains responsibility for co-ordination of admission arrangements.

As at present, the Academy could not refuse places to anyone, if there was a vacancy in that particular year group.

FINANCE

15. How are academies funded?

Academies receive the same level of per-pupil funding as they would receive from the Local Authority as a maintained school.

16. Do we have to cover the full cost to convert to an academy?

No. The Department for Education currently pay a flat-rate grant of £25,000 and the conversion is not expected to impact on the Academy's revenue budget.

17. How will insurance be arranged for the school?

ODST will ensure that the necessary insurance is in place through the approved insurance framework.

18. Who would own the land and buildings?

The land and buildings remain in their current ownership but are made available to the Academy via a 125 year lease and a supplemental agreement.

19. Will we retain the existing financial systems?

The financial system will change to better reflect the requirements of an Academy company.

GOVERNANCE

20. What are the expected changes to the Governing Body?

ODST has a central board of directors which is responsible to the Secretary of State for overall standards for each school in ODST. A Local Governing Body will be responsible for the day-to-day operation; in practice, this is likely to remain the same as or similar to the current Governing Body.

21. Becoming an academy will require a strong and effective Governing Body. How will we find the governors with the necessary skills, experience and time?

Being part of ODST means that the board of directors will have the necessary range of skills required at an overarching level. The Local Governing Body as now will come from the local and wider community.

22. Will academies be free from Ofsted inspections?

Academies remain subject to the Government's inspection arrangements.

23. What will happen to local links and partnerships that we already have?

These will continue. By joining ODST it does not preclude us from being part of local partnerships which are for the benefit of the school.

There is more information about ODST on the ODST website, www.ODST.org.uk