



## DORRIDGE PRIMARY SCHOOL

### **Stakeholder Frequently Asked Questions about Academy Conversion**

The Governing Body are currently considering joining the Arden Multi Academy Trust (AMAT) on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023. The purpose of these FAQs is to provide information as part of our consultation and information sharing obligations on what the school may look like as part of this trust.

#### **What are the benefits of converting to an academy?**

The Department for Education (DFE) promotes MATs as evidence shows that good schools are the best organisations to maintain standards and help and support other schools. MATs formally bring together leadership, autonomy, funding and accountability across a group of schools in an enduring way. A group of schools who are committed to collaborative working would offer greater opportunities for all, developing and supporting improved outcomes and pupil experience.

The benefits for us include:

- Quality of Education- continued shared curriculum planning across the schools in AMAT rather than within the Local Authority, shared practice and challenge on standards in the school
- Governance- the Governors at Dorridge Primary School will stay in post but with a representative sitting on the board of trustees within the MAT.
- Office and site functions- the pooling of resources and sharing support services can bring economies of scale and potentially release funding for the classroom
- Developing expertise, planning and best practice to further improve teaching and learning
- Employing specialist teachers across the schools
- Sharing premises and resources
- Supporting succession planning and retention of staff

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

**Yes** - We believe that remaining as a local authority maintained school is not a long term sustainable option. The Department for Education (DFE) has written 'The White Paper', which is a document setting out the DFE's policy plans over a period of several years, stating that they expect all schools to be part of a MAT by 2030. We believe that converting to being an Academy, as part of a Multi Academy Trust now, would be a pro-active approach. Joining AMAT gives us the opportunity to be the lead school in a new primary branch. It also makes sense to consider joining an existing MAT with a proven track record and one that the vast majority of our children move to as part of their educational journey.

#### **Has the decision to convert to an Academy already been made?**

**No** - Until the consultation has been completed and everyone's views have been obtained a decision will not be made. The Governing Body has to weigh up the pros and cons of academisation and joining a Multi Academy Trust at this time. If, after consultation and due diligence is completed, Governors would prefer Dorridge to remain within the Local Authority, academisation exploration will cease until it becomes a more pressing requirement from the DfE

## **What is a Multi Academy Trust?**

Academies are local schools which are funded by public money directly from central government. The day to day running of the school stays with the Headteacher, but they are overseen by individual charitable bodies called academy trusts. A Multi Academy Trust (MAT) is a single central entity which oversees the strategic collaboration across a number of schools. The MAT will ensure that the schools are committed to working together to continue to improve and maintain high educational standards. The MAT is ultimately responsible for the performance of all schools, although each school will still maintain its unique identity and their own governing body known as a Local Governing Body. Dorridge Primary would form the basis of a new primary branch within AMAT with the possibility of other primary schools joining in the future.

## **Why can't Dorridge form its own Multi Academy Trust?**

Senior Management team have spent a long time exploring the different options available to school. Unfortunately, despite investigative conversations with the DfE, the White Paper is very clear in its desire to reduce the amount of singular Academies and small MATs. Any new MATs will need a minimum of 10 schools (or a combined total of 7500 pupils) that are interested in forming a MAT before the DfE will consider approving their change of status. Primary schools within our rural collaborative have already created or joined MATs and we feel that if we joined these alternative options, Dorridge would lose its autonomy. With Arden's invitation to join their MAT, the possibility of leading on the Primary branch offers us strong opportunities to combine the benefits of a MAT with continued autonomy and we believe those need to be explored further.

## **What will change if Dorridge Primary joins Arden Multi Academy Trust?**

In practical terms while the academy status will change some things behind the scenes, most pupils and parents will not notice any change. Joining a MAT gives the schools more freedom to make decisions about the best way to provide an outstanding education for the pupils. If any major changes are planned, there will be a consultation with those affected before making any final decision.

## **If the school does join a Multi Academy Trust will the school change their name?**

**No** -The name of the school will not change. The Trust is called the **Arden Multi Academy Trust (AMAT)**

## **Would funds raised at school social events be spread across the other schools?**

**No** - Any funds raised by PTA, fundraising or our Darby's provision would be wholly applied to our school budget and not put into the central funding system.

## **What input do the staff have in the decision and how it will change their way of working?**

Staff are part of the consultation process and their views will be taken into account but we do not anticipate that there will be any significant changes to their way of working. Staff will continue to benefit from opportunities to share best practice and from enhanced opportunities for professional development.

## **Will staff be moved between the schools?**

Staff are always encouraged to further their careers and all schools have a certain amount of natural movement. Should a member of staff wish to move to another school then this would be considered if there was an appropriate position. This flexibility may enable us to retain outstanding staff within the 'family' of schools.

## **Will there be a new uniform?**

**No** - Dorridge Primary will retain our individuality and the uniform won't be changed.

## **Will there be changes to the admissions arrangements?**

**No** - admission of pupils will not change.

## **Would the term and holiday dates change?**

**No** - We see no reason to change and would continue to use the term dates published for all Solihull Schools.

## **Will other schools be joining the MAT?**

**Yes** - we do envisage other schools joining the primary branch of the AMAT. However, schools will only be able to join following an in depth due diligence process to ensure their needs can be met without compromising curriculum delivery at the existing schools.

## **What are the other steps that need to be taken?**

- The process for conversion to MAT status is prescribed by the DfE and commences with an application to the Independent Head Teacher's Board (HTB). The role of the HTB is to provide advice, scrutiny and challenge to the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC), who acts on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education in assessing applications from local authority-maintained schools to convert to academy status. The school has already had approval from the DfE and they are eager for us to proceed.
- Approval will give our school access to the MAT conversion grant funding. The conversion grant funding is used to appoint an independent and appropriate legal team who will lead on the due diligence process, including a legally required review of the statutory consultation with parents/guardians and stakeholders. This consultation will be an essential element of fulfilling our statutory duties and the views and outcomes will be reported back to the Governing Board.
- The appointed legal team will ensure due diligence is being carried out effectively. This will provide essential MAT Risk Assessment information, including (but not limited to):
  - Finance appraisal
  - Premises and land appraisal
  - External stakeholder consultation
  - Educational standards appraisal
- This process will take place during Autumn Term 2022.

## **How will the final decision be taken?**

1. Upon completion of the due diligence, the independent legal team will present the findings, including the results of all formal consultations and a detailed report to the school Governing Body.
2. The Governors will then use this information to vote on whether to proceed with conversion or not. A majority decision is required. Governors have been considering conversion for some time and decided to share information with stakeholders. Governors will meet in February 2023 to review the outcomes of the due diligence. If we vote to proceed, then Dorridge Primary will join the Arden Multi Academy Trust on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023.