



Edward Feild Primary School

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Dear Kidlington Community

Consultation on proposed academy conversion

The Governors of Edward Feild have been carefully considering the school's future plans and have asked me to consult with all relevant stakeholders on the prospect of Edward Feild Primary School becoming an academy as part of the River Learning Trust (RLT). In this letter we will outline what this means for the school and will provide some frequently asked questions which we hope will be helpful to you. We will also share details of the consultation where you, as the wider community can have your say.

If our school were to convert to an academy, we would no longer be tied to the Local Authority (Oxfordshire County Council) and we would join the RLT. This is a group of like-minded local schools committed to excellence in education. Whilst the trust shares key principles and schools work together to support and challenge each other, they respect each school's individual strengths and characteristics.

This means that our children will not notice any immediate difference, they will be in the same uniform, in the same classrooms with the same teaching staff. We would still have the same identity and ethos. In time the children will benefit from the extra freedom given to us as an academy and the additional autonomy over our spending as well as the impact of collaboration with other schools within the trust and the support provided by the central trust team.

Some schools have to become academies when they have been directed to by the government because of low standards whereas, for us, it is not compulsory as Edward Feild has only recently been judged as a "good" school by Ofsted. Governors have been considering this for some time and are confident that joining the trust would be a positive move for our school, being about partnership and enabling all schools in the trust to be the best they can be.

The board's decision to consult on joining the RLT specifically is the result of a robust review into the school's needs and requirements and matching these to the trust that best supports them. This has been an ongoing, multi-year process in which we have spoken to several different trusts and developed a real sense of where we fit as a school, and which will enable us to deliver on our vision and values.

Why should Edward Feild Primary School join the RLT?

Our school will be able to benefit from being in the trust in a number of ways:

- RLT have a strong school improvement team who are able to support our school to be the best it can be

- RLT have a dedicated SEND lead which would help us access multi agencies, help us unblock issues and delays
- RLT have a dedicated safeguarding lead who would support our Designated Safeguarding Lead and ensure we are giving our vulnerable pupils and families the best level of support in our power
- RLT are able to offer a high-quality professional development package to our teachers and support staff ensuring they deliver high quality lessons but also developing their leadership, communication and IT skills
- Our school will also be able to benefit from reduced costs by merging contracts, buying in bulk and sharing resources. RLT also provide a strong central services team which support HR, payroll and finance
- RLT are geographically close to our school, with the trust head office based at Gosford Hill School and other schools in the Trust located in and around Oxford, so we can easily meet and share best practice, and collaborate closely with our main secondary feeder school

You can find out more about the structure and ethos of River Learning Trust [here](#)

Consultation Process

We know you may have some questions to ask about the benefits of this collaboration and the process of joining the trust.

If you have any questions you can email me at governors@efs.oxon.sch.uk.

We have also prepared a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) document below to help answer some of questions we anticipate you may have as well as an online survey to gauge opinion.

The consultation will close on **Friday 1st December**. The Governors will meet after this date to consider how to proceed.

Yours faithfully,

Samuel Hubbard
Chair of Governors

Scott Lewis
Headteacher

Academisation Frequently Asked Questions

What is an Academy?

Academies are publicly funded state schools, independent of the local authority, held accountable through a legally binding funding agreement with the Department for Education (DfE). Staff are employed by the multi-academy trust. An academy is not a business, it is a charitable trust which cannot make profit.

Academies now account for approx. 50% primary schools and 98% of secondary schools in Oxfordshire. Nationally, just over 40% of primary schools and just over 80% of secondary schools in England are academies, and these numbers continue to grow.

Multi-academy trusts (MATs) are groups of schools that have come together to form a charitable company, with a single group of 'members' (who have an overview of the governance arrangements) and a single board of trustees.

As part of a MAT individual schools remain as separate entities, with separate names and DfE numbers. They receive separate Ofsted judgements and publish their own school performance tables.

What is the main motivation for converting to academy status and joining a trust?

The Local Authority (LA) capacity is disappearing. Pooling the resources of a number of schools means we can re-create some of the services once received from the LA.

We face ever increasing pressure on school budgets and challenges of rising costs. Joining a trust with centralised services such as HR, payroll and finance, and reducing costs by merging contracts, buying in bulk and sharing resources generate financial efficiencies to invest back into the classroom for the benefit of the children.

To shape the provision to meet the future needs of our children, families and communities based on a local and collaborative proposal of working together and building on existing good practice.

To develop the expertise of all staff to further improve effectiveness and outcomes for children.

We will remain in charge of our own destiny as the government continues to encourage all schools to become academies.

What are the disadvantages of conversion?

Greater freedoms do bring additional responsibilities including statutory duties as an academy trust company, but the School is confident it can manage these as we would be supported by the Central Team of RLT.

Will any changes to the School be made as a result of conversion?

Whilst many policies and practices will be aligned with those of the trust, our school will retain its identity and place within the local community. RLT uses an approach called 'aligned autonomy' where there is a high degree of delegated responsibility to the Local Governing Body and school leadership. There is no reason for there to be changes to the school's curriculum, to the policies

on teaching and learning or behaviour if the school joins the trust. The Headteacher and Governing Body will continue to run the school on a daily basis as they do now, and parents/carers will continue to be represented on the Governing Body.

The multi-academy trust arrangements will share some central services across the schools which will help them be more efficient and make sure that funding is focused on teaching, learning and support for children. The multi-academy trust will work very closely and co-operatively with local partners, including other schools, community groups and organisations, and the local authority.

Will we lose our teachers?

No, the current team will become employees of the trust, but their roles at the school will be unchanged with no changes to conditions of service under the TUPE provisions, which give protection surrounding terms and conditions

My child has special educational needs. What happens to their funding?

All funding will continue to be allocated in the same way as now and will be provided by the local authority – Oxfordshire County Council. Our responsibilities as an academy in relation to SEND would be just the same as they are now.

Will the academy follow the National Curriculum?

Yes, but it would have more freedom to try different things in the curriculum and make sure that what is taught is relevant to our pupils and their specific needs. It must be broad and balanced.

Will the school have a continued relationship with Oxfordshire County Council?

Yes, the school will continue to work with Oxfordshire County Council regarding SEND provision (as detailed above), safeguarding, admissions arrangements, educational psychology, home to school transport and provision of specialist facilities where a student is no longer registered at a school.

What about funding?

The Department for Education via the Education Funding Agency (EFA) meets the running costs for an academy. At the moment, the school receives its funding from central government via the Local Authority. A slice of the Education Services Grant is taken by the Local Authority to pay for a range of services, and schools opt to buy into other services either via the Local Authority or other providers. As an academy, the River Learning Trust would receive our funding and would operate in the same way as the Local Authority where a small percentage then funds the services provided by the Trust, rather than by the Local Authority, and the vast majority is passed to the school to decide how best to allocate it. Therefore the school as an academy will have a similar budget to that of its predecessor maintained school.

In the River Learning Trust schools are involved in setting the value of school income that is used to fund central Trust services at the most appropriate level, which is expected to benefit all schools' budgets and access to support over time. We would also be eligible for an annual capital grant, which may ensure more regular funding of capital projects.

How will the school be accountable financially?

An academy is governed by the rules and regulations for charitable trusts and company law, e.g. we will be required to produce and file accounts and trustees cannot be paid. There will be robust systems with an audit conducted by an external independent auditor.

When would Edward Feild become an academy?

It is hoped that the application would be processed and completed to enable the school to convert to an academy in April or September 2024.