



**The Trafalgar School**



**St Edmund's Girls' School**



**Wyvern College**

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December 2015

Dear Parents and Carers

### **The Magna Learning Partnership: Developing a Multi Academy Trust**

We are writing to communicate some information regarding an exciting development for Salisbury and the surrounding area which focuses initially on partnership working between three secondary schools: St Edmund's Girls' School, The Trafalgar School at Downton and Wyvern College.

During this year the Governing Bodies and Senior Leadership Teams of the three schools have been exploring options for the schools to form a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) with other schools in the local area. Our intention is to form a Trust which includes three 11-16 schools in the first instance, with the expectation that we will be joined by one or more other educational institution in the future. The Governors of all three schools have supported this resolution and the name for our proposed MAT is 'The Magna Learning Partnership'. As three schools working closely together, sharing our strengths and collaborating in student and staff learning and development, we believe that we will be in the very best place possible to deliver an exceptional standard of education for the young people of Salisbury and the surrounding area.

### **The process towards establishment of a Multi Academy Trust**

We are in the very early stage of the process. Our schools have formed a small steering group to consider and develop the proposals and to work with the Department for Education (DfE) and the Regional Schools Commissioner, and for the Church schools with the Diocese, in shaping the plans. This will take place over the next few weeks and once we have received the required approvals from the authorities to progress into the development process we will begin a period of formal consultation with our parents, carers and school communities. Your views will be welcomed and we envisage the timing of this will be in the spring term when we plan to host consultation events at each of the three schools.

Before then we wanted to take this opportunity to outline the initiative to you, share some early information and offer you the opportunity to ask any initial questions. To this end further information is attached in the form of some general Frequently Asked Questions. Information is also available on each of the schools' websites, and you are encouraged to send your questions, concerns and opinions to [info@magnalearningpartnership.org.uk](mailto:info@magnalearningpartnership.org.uk)

We will endeavour to respond to all queries directly and to keep you informed of progress. Please note that we may not be able to answer all questions straight away as some may require further planning or due diligence; we will therefore respond and publish your views and responses as appropriate as the plans develop on our websites. We will consider them before a final decision is made.

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## What are the potential benefits of a Multi Academy Trust?

- As a MAT we can set a strong, shared strategic vision across all the schools in the partnership.
- As the MAT is accountable for the outcomes for all pupils in the partnership it can be an excellent mechanism for ensuring that support and challenge is directed to where it is needed most.
- The MAT has flexibility about how much or how little power it delegates to individual schools. This enables tailoring to the individual circumstances of the partnership. In the case of our three schools, all of which are rated by Ofsted as good, we will adopt a model that provides a high level of individual school autonomy.
- The MAT is the employer of all the staff. This makes it easier to deploy staff flexibly, draw on a wider pool of opportunities for Continuing Professional Development, and develop a trust-wide approach to staff development and succession planning.
- The central funding agreement can make it easier to pool resources and achieve economies of scale in contracting. This will enable each school to maintain and improve students' wider experience and the quality of teaching and learning as educational budgets are reduced.

## Schools will not be changing their names or uniforms

Our schools value our individual, unique qualities as well as our shared vision and objectives. We have already agreed that school uniforms and names will not be changed. The one small exception to this is that the Church of England Schools will no longer have "VA" or "VC" in their title. (They will still retain all the characteristic of a VA or VC school, and will still be called "Church of England", but in legal terms VA and VC refers specifically to maintained schools).

## What happens next?

Our initial applications are being submitted to the Department for Education (DfE). We are continuing our due diligence work and will be responding to queries and information requests from the DfE.

We will write to you again once we have further information on the timings for entering the development phase and to inform you of the formal consultation plans.

Yours sincerely



**Stewart Roderick**  
Headteacher

**The Trafalgar  
School**



**Sarah Busby**  
Headteacher

**St Edmund's  
Girls'  
School**



**Paul German**  
Headteacher

**Wyvern  
College**



**Neil Owen**  
Chair

**Project Interim  
Steering Board**

**The Magna Learning  
Partnership**

# **The Magna Learning Partnership**

## **St Edmund's School, The Trafalgar School & Wyvern College Multi Academy Trust development**

### **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS December 2015**

This paper sets out a number of frequently asked questions about academy status and being part of a multi academy trust. This will be developed and added to as questions are raised more information is gathered during due diligence and our plans are further developed.

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

- Academies are classed as independent state-funded schools, which have the freedom to determine their own policies on such things as the curriculum, school hours, term dates and staff pay. They aim to provide a free, first-class education for pupils of all abilities through a fresh approach to school leadership, teaching and learning. They offer a full, broad and balanced curriculum. This is enabled by the Academies Act 2010. Primary, infant, junior and secondary schools are all able to apply to convert into an academy and are accountable to the Secretary of State rather than the Local Authority.
- Academies are managed by their own academy trust and are not the responsibility of the Local Authority. Academy trusts are given directly the money which would have been given to the Local Authority, so academies can choose how best to spend that money on the provision of education.
- St Edmund's is already an academy. Trafalgar School and Wyvern College will aim to convert to become academies.

#### **What is a Multi Academy Trust (MAT)?**

- A Multi Academy trust is a single Trust which runs more than one academy and is the statutory Governing Body of each of its academies. The Multi Academy Trust is a charitable company limited by guarantee, which means it may not make any profit, and because it is publically funded it is subject to judicial review and to the Freedom of Information Act like any other public body. The trust has a formal agreement, or contract, with the Department for Education (DfE) which sets out the parameters in which it must operate as well as being subject to charity law, public law (being publically funded) as well as general company law.
- By entering into a MAT the three schools will become part of one legal entity with, it is important to note, each school retaining an individual identity and a Local Governing Board. In practical terms there will be very little visible change in the way that the school operates. Each school's values and ethos will also be maintained and our goal will remain to provide the very best education possible for our students.

#### **Can Church of England and Community or Foundation schools be part of the same Multi Academy Trust?**

Yes. We understand that the legal constitutions for Multi Academy Trusts enable this mix but each group is subject to the prior agreement with the Church of England through the local Diocese. The MAT is committed, both in terms of its vision and legal obligations, to maintaining the individual ethos of each school, and the Articles of Association of the MAT will allow that the individual ethos of each type of school will be maintained. Each of our schools will convert (or in the case of St Edmund's transfer) and retain its distinctive ethos and status as either a faith or non-faith school. The structure of the Local Governing Board for each school in the MAT will be reflective of its current status as a Voluntary Aided, Voluntary Controlled or Community Foundation school.

## How will the Multi-Academy Trust be governed?

- The new MAT will have a group of Members and a Board of Trustees.
- The “Members” are like shareholders in a commercial company: they appoint the Trustees to run the MAT, and are the only people able to amend the Articles of Association of the Company (and for this they require consent from the Secretary of State and any religious Diocesan Authority). The “Trustees” are those people who actually run, determine policy, and make decisions for the MAT. They are the statutory Governing Body of each academy within the MAT.
- For the new MAT we will establish a Local Governing Board for each of the schools within the MAT, and we will discuss this with the Diocese to ensure the model is fit for all schools within the MAT.

## What are the main responsibilities of the MAT once the schools have converted and the trust opened?

Typical activities include:-

- setting the strategic direction for improvement of educational attainment;
- ensuring that the right infrastructure is in place to deliver the necessary changes to support the educational improvement (leadership & management);
- challenging progress in all areas of the academies’ operations whilst providing support and guidance aimed at promoting success;
- responsibility for the performance of the academies, including monitoring and where necessary establishing a plan of action to improve performance;
- setting up committees with a specific focus to monitor aspects of academy life;
- leading involvement with parents and the wider community, to promote the MAT and support community regeneration;
- ensuring value for money and good use of public funds, and leveraging in other finance and resources when needed;
- championing the MAT in the wider community in order to bring new resources to the schools and the trust, for example through holding events, arranging mentoring and building links with business

## What does the conversion process involve?

- The conversion process for schools to become academies has been made as simple as possible for all schools. The key steps the school must take are all explained in the Department for Education’s conversion guide at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/academy-conversion-process> and may differ according to the type of school and who owns the buildings and land.
- The areas of work are related to any legal transfers of land or assets, regularising any contracts and leases, financial review and budget setting, TUPE transfer (whereby all staff transfer with continuity of service, retaining as closely as possible their existing terms and conditions) and HR work.
- In addition, the transition of the governance structure from a Governing Body model to a multi-academy trust model.
- Most schools are able to convert in around four months. It can, however, take longer where there are further issues to resolve such as complications relating to land ownership. It may also take longer for schools converting and forming a new MAT where they need to develop the new governance arrangements and agree these with several parties.
- Where one or more of the schools forming the new MAT is already an Academy the academy must follow either the ‘Academies Significant Change’ process – <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/making-significant-changes-to-an-existing-academy> or apply to become a sponsor to develop the MAT: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/sponsor-an-academy>