



# **Woods Foundation Church of England Voluntary Aided School**

## **Multi-academy Trust (MAT) Consultation**

### *Parent & Community Event Summary Information*

*This document summarises the information presented by members of the Woods Governing Body and executive leaders from Archway Learning Trust at the two parent and community events on Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> November. It has been prepared to support those who were unable to attend.*

#### **Governing Body Presentation Notes**

- The purpose of the parent and community event was to share the rationale for the Governing Body's proposal that Woods becomes an academy and the reasons for choosing the Archway Learning Trust as the preferred MAT. Further, the event aimed to gather the views of parents and members of the community as key stakeholders, answering any questions they may have.
- Following inspection earlier this year, Woods is now a 'good' school. Ofsted described Woods as a school "at the very heart of its community". The Governing Body is keen to ensure that this position is maintained and further strengthened. To do so, it is important that the school moves forward in partnership with other like-minded schools. The school previously got into difficulties because it stood still, became too inward-looking and did not remain responsive to the changing world of education. The Governing Body is looking to take this step to safeguard the future of the school.
- There are a number of elements that the Governing Body is keen to maintain, further improve and embed:
  - Our Christian ethos and values
  - High quality, stable leadership
  - Continuous improvement in provision for all children
  - A continued partnership with parents and the church
  - Continuous professional development opportunities for all staff
  - Continued high achievement for all children
- We seek to achieve those things in a climate where Woods has access to less local authority support. This is because the local authority does not have sufficient funding for the education improvement team to provide support to all maintained schools and must, therefore, prioritise support for schools that are less than good. Schools like Woods, that are judged to be good or better, can pay for additional support but, like many schools, Woods' budget position is very tight. The national direction of travel is for schools to work together in clusters, sharing effective practice and resources. By and large, this is happening through the work of multi-academy trusts.
- Woods could remain a stand-alone school, but the Governing Body does not believe that this would serve the children and families of Woodborough well. Woods is already part of a collaboration (with Holly Primary). In theory, this collaboration could be grown to include more schools. However, there are a reducing number of local authority maintained schools that would be eligible to join a collaboration. A number of these eligible schools are joining multi-academy trusts.
- However, the Governing Bodies at Woods and Holly Primary have both agreed to extend the collaboration agreement for a further three years or until one or more of the schools becomes an Academy. This will ensure that we retain stability in the leadership of the school and continue to benefit from the partnership between the schools, even if we take the decision to academise and join a MAT.
- As a Church of England school, should Woods choose to join a MAT, it would need to be a church MAT. This reflects a longstanding agreement between the Department for Education and The Church of England. There are five local church MATs:
  - Archway Learning Trust
  - Aspire Multi-Academy Trust

- o Diocese of Southwell and Nottingham Multi-Academy Trust
  - o Minster Trust for Education
  - o Transform Trust
- The Governing Body has spent approximately 18 months researching these options. We deliberately took our time for two reasons. Firstly, we wanted to be thorough to ensure that any decision was based on strong evidence. Secondly, we wanted to ensure that Woods staff and governors could focus primarily on bringing about the necessary improvements in the quality of provision for children at the school. In turn, this also ensures that we move forward with future plans from a position of strength and retain autonomy over the choice of MAT.
- The initial activities undertaken included:
  - o Conducting some background research, including attending a presentation from the Diocesan Director of Education, so that governors could understand the benefits of academisation, what we would want from a MAT and the characteristics of the school that we would not want to lose.
  - o Carrying out 'desktop' due diligence activities on each of the five MATs based on publicly available information (e.g. websites, performance tables and other Department for Education information, Ofsted reports, financial statements)
  - o Attending presentations from each of the five MATs and asking a range of questions afterwards
- We used the information gleaned to shortlist two MATs. Following this, we visited two schools from each of the shortlisted MATs to see the schools in action and to speak to headteachers, to other leaders, school staff, trust staff and governors. In each MAT, we visited a school that is well established within the MAT and one that was going through the onboarding process at the time of our visit.
- We then used all the information we had gathered to identify a preferred MAT. We were clear that we wanted a trust with a clear strategic direction (but not a trust that was simply 'collecting' schools), a trust that is grounded in a Christian vision and values and a trust that provided opportunities for development at all levels, such that we could continue to improve the provision for children.
- We believe that Archway Learning Trust is the best fit for Woods because we believe that they will provide:
  - o structured support that will add to and improve what Woods has already achieved – the MAT has built capacity in the central primary team ahead of need
  - o a diverse range of high achieving schools, enabling us to learn from a range of approaches and across phases (primary and secondary)
  - o a diverse range of school and community contexts, helping us to broaden the experiences and learning opportunities open to Woods children
  - o continuous professional development (CPD) for all staff no matter what their role or career stage
  - o the opportunity to contribute to the growing primary arm of the MAT, helping to shape the direction of travel
  - o the opportunity to contribute to the development of other MAT schools as a high achieving, outward facing school
  - o bespoke support at all levels (not a 'one size fits all' approach)
  - o capacity from the MAT central team in operational areas such as HR, Finance, premises, compliance and IT, freeing up school leaders to focus on the core business of education
  - o support and challenge for the local governing body (ALT call the local governing body an 'Academy Advisory Board')
- Woods would be the fourth primary school to join the Archway Learning Trust.

### **Archway Learning Trust (ALT) Presentation Notes**

Please note that you can read lots more about ALT on their website: [www.archwaytrust.co.uk](http://www.archwaytrust.co.uk)

- ALT's journey began in 1706 in the 'archway' of St Mary's church in the Lace Market, when the church chose to start providing free education to children. They did so to train them in the 'knowledge and ways of God' and lift them out of poverty. The MAT currently has over 9000 pupils and 1300 staff in its schools but their mission remains very clearly about working together to transform the lives of children.

- The MAT currently comprises two primary schools (with a third in the final stages of joining), eight secondary schools and a sixth form. The MAT has its own SCITT (teacher training provision).
- The schools are located across four local authorities: Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire. They serve a broad range of communities in terms of both diversity and deprivation.
- The MAT has three core values that underpin the way they operate: excellence, collaboration and inclusion. They are committed to being a fully inclusive family of learners providing nurture and an outstanding educational experience so that all children can grow and flourish. They want to make school an irresistible place to be.
- ALT understands that their staff are the most valuable asset they have and have extensive continuing professional learning (CPL) programmes for all staff, no matter what their role or stage of their career.
- The 'Archway Advantage' provides schools with extensive support, knowledge and capacity from the ALT central team in areas such as operations, finance, governance and HR. The MAT is financially stable and is well placed to support schools to run effectively so that school leaders can focus on delivering high quality education for children.
- The expected growth of the primary phase of the MAT has led ALT to proactively build capacity in its central education team with dedicated primary expertise. This ensures that there is sufficient support to develop schools as they join. ALT welcomes the positive contributions that Woods can make to the MAT and believes that this will further strengthen the collaboration between the MAT's primary schools.
- The joining process, as already noted by governors, is a lengthy one. It begins with an expression of interest to join the trust and approval by the Diocesan Board of Education. This part of the process has been completed for Woods. The next stage is where we are now – the consultation with stakeholders. Once this is complete, and if the Governing Body makes the decision to join ALT, an application will be made to the Department for Education's Regional Director and then a variety of legal processes will begin. This could take as long as 18 months based on recent experience, but ALT would begin working in partnership with the school immediately.

## Questions and answers

This section summarises the key themes covered during the 'question and answer' part of the sessions. It isn't a verbatim list of the questions that were asked to avoid repetition.

Will ALT expect the school to change name?
No. Some ALT schools have chosen to include the 'Bluecoat' name, but this is a school decision and not one mandated by the MAT. The Governing Body has no plans to change the name of the school in this way. The name of the school is, after all, grounded in its history.
What about the logo, uniform or school day?
These are also school decisions. The school recently adopted a new logo (when the vision and values of the school were reviewed in 2022). Changes were also made to simplify the uniform policy at that time. Mr White asked parents for some views on the timings of the school day earlier this year, but the feedback did not suggest any changes were required at that time. The Governing Body has no plans to make any further changes to these things.
Would Woods continue to have autonomy over the curriculum?
Yes. The school make decisions on the curriculum based on what is right for the children at that school. However, working in a MAT brings opportunities to collaborate on aspects of curriculum and to learn from best practice at other schools. Woods has already seen the benefit of this type of work through the collaboration with Holly Primary.
Will this change the arrangements for leadership of the school?
The Governing Body is, of course, keen to maintain the current leadership arrangements with Mr White as Executive Headteacher and Mr Mac as Deputy Headteacher (who both remain committed to the school). We have been clear on this desire with ALT. However, what happens over time will clearly depend on other factors, including decisions made at Holly Primary. The Governing Body recognises, however, that any member of staff could choose to move on from the school at any time and for a range of reasons. It is our view that joining ALT will provide us with better succession planning and capacity at all levels in the school should this be the case.

Do you have to do this? Could you continue as you are or wait longer?
As mentioned, the significantly reduced local authority support means that, to benefit from some of the collaborative working and help that we have had over the last two years and continue to move the school forward, we need to work in partnership with other like-minded schools. The scenario we've been working in does not exist for Woods any longer. As such, working in a broader partnership that the current collaboration agreement provides is crucial. As things stand, we have choice over the MAT that we join. As time moves on, that may well change as more and more schools join MATs and some MATs stop taking new schools. We also believe that joining ALT at this stage gives us the opportunity to help shape the direction of travel for the primary arm of the trust.
If the decision is made to academise and join ALT, how long with the process take?
The process can be a long one. It is taking around 18 months at the moment. This is because there are a number of legal processes involved, including land transfers. However, if the Governing Body makes the decision to join ALT, the school would begin to work in partnership with the MAT straight away. Some services may be arranged through service-level agreements, or other similar arrangements, to mitigate delays in the legal process.
What difference would we notice in the day-to-day running of the school after the school academises and joins ALT?
Initially, none. Transfer day marks a legal change in the status of the school but does not signal an immediate shift in the day-to-day operation of the school. Over time, however, the school community should begin to feel the benefits of joining the MAT.
Are school leaders in favour of this move?
Both Mr White and Mr Mac sit on the Governing Body. As such, they have been actively involved in all the background work, due diligence and decision making. Their voices have been very important. They believe that this is the right decision for the children, families and staff at Woods.
How does ALT interact with families?
Primarily, children and families should feel a sense of belonging to the school. The school should be at the heart of the community. Contact on a day-to-day basis remains with staff and leaders at the school. They are the people who know children and families well and are best placed to support them. ALT staff will support the school behind the scenes and are likely to attend a number of school events. ALT also sends out newsletters and other information to keep families abreast of wider developments. Further to this, Academy Advisory Boards or AABs (ALT's name for local governing bodies) act a bridge between the trust, its academies and the local community. AABs consist of key stakeholders who reflect the community's voice. They provide valuable advice to both the academy and the MAT, fostering a two-way dialogue. As a trusted link to the MAT's Board of Trustees, AABs play a critical role in monitoring performance and championing the wellbeing of staff and children. By offering both support and constructive challenge to the academy's senior leadership team, they ensure a strong focus on academic excellence and care. This collaborative approach strengthens engagement with families and the wider community, creating a meaningful partnership that supports the MAT's mission.
What opportunities are there for children to take part in events with children from other MAT schools?
As part of the collaboration with Holly Primary, children have been able to be involved with a range of joint activities. These opportunities grow as we work in partnership with more schools. Groups of children from ALT primaries, such as faith leaders, already come together through joint projects. The MAT currently run a sports day with all ALT schools involved but would be keen to introduce a primary focused event. They also run an annual event at The Albert Hall in Nottingham where all the school choirs perform together. ALT is keen to develop these opportunities further as the primary arm of the MAT grows.
Will academisation and joining ALT result in the school expanding?
No. Any plans to expand a school are based on need in the local area. The responsibility to ensure a sufficiency of school places remains with the local authority. Their place planning team looks at pupil number projections and makes decisions based on this. Where substantial new housing developments are built, it is usual for this to include provision for a new primary school close by. The latest data for this area does not suggest that any additional primary capacity would be required in Woodborough. The only area that the Governing Body would consider expansion is in nursery provision. The school already works in partnership with the village pre-school, and we are keen to take steps to ensure the security of this provision for the future.

How will we be kept up to date with the process?

The Governing Body will review the consultation responses in January before making a final decision. Once this decision is made, we will inform all the key stakeholders including parents and the local community. If the decision is made to proceed with academisation and joining ALT, we will try to ensure that there is regular communication to keep people appraised on progress. As noted above, the process can take some time and involves a lot of behind-the-scenes work. We hope that our approach to sharing the information in this document gives people an indication of our keenness to be open and transparent throughout.

### Next steps

Thank you to those parents and members of the community who came along to one of the consultation events. We hope that this document helps those who were not able to make it.

The consultation remains open until Friday 20<sup>th</sup> December. Consultation responses must be received by this date. You can share your views through the following:

- **Online Form:** <https://forms.office.com/r/R5KLy4LipZ>
- **Letters:** marked 'Private and Confidential – MAT Consultation' and handed (or posted) to: Wood's Foundation Church of England VA School, Lingwood Lane, Woodborough, NG14 6DX.

Once the consultation closes, the Governing Body will review all the responses submitted during the consultation period prior to making a final decision on the proposal that Woods Foundation Church of England Voluntary Aided School becomes an academy and joins the Archway Learning Trust.