



Beaufort Primary School

Kirkland Avenue, Goldsworth Park,
Woking, Surrey. GU21 3RG
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Headteacher: Mrs Emily Ferris



Wednesday 22nd May 2019

Dear Parents or Guardians/Carers

As you know, we converted to an academy in February 2014 and became part of the SWAN Umbrella Trust. Becoming an academy and being part of the SWAN Umbrella Trust has been very successful for our school.

Since writing to you at the beginning of April 2018, following the successful application to the Regional School Commissioner (RSC), the five Governing Bodies of the five schools have met and **unanimously agreed the best way forward for the SWAN Trust would be to convert to a Multi-Academy Trust.** The SWAN Trust is made up of five schools; Barnsbury Primary School and Nursery, Beaufort Primary School, The Hermitage School, The Oaktree School and The Horsell Village School. As part of the SWAN Trust we have worked closely together, as equal partners who share a child-centred ethos and work effectively together to enhance the education of all the children in our care.

The leadership of the SWAN Trust is important to us and one of our key motivators was to ensure that we maintain the ethos of the SWAN Trust and let it flourish as we become a MAT. To that end, we are delighted to let you know that Mrs Elaine Cooper, current Headteacher at The Horsell Village School, has been successfully appointed as the CEO (Chief Executive Officer) of the SWAN Multi-Academy Trust from 1st September 2019. She has been part of the Trust since its formation and was appointed following a comprehensive recruitment process.

For those of you who have joined us since the academy process began, and to act as a reminder, as academies we have remained state schools but have had the freedom to determine our own policies on such things as how the curriculum is taught. Our funding comes directly from the Department for Education (DfE), giving us the autonomy to make our own decisions regarding spending. This means that we have been able to ensure that what we do spend is always for the benefit of the children at our schools. Each school has been able to do a better job of maintaining and updating the school buildings as well as developing the outside environment, bringing in specialist teachers and improving education resources.

The impact of the SWAN Trust has been significant for all five schools, reflecting the commitment and the support we feel as professionals when looking at the changing national agendas; we know we have made the right decision when it comes to partnership work and the challenge we provide to one another. We hold regular training sessions for staff and governors and an annual INSET day to move learning forward. At the beginning of each school year, we share our school data and develop a shared action plan which links to each of our School Development Plans. This action plan highlights the priorities for the Trust for the academic year and shows how we plan to use each school's strength to support one another. The children, across the SWAN Trust, have benefited in improved attainment across all schools and enjoyed joint sport and learning events.

So what will converting from an Umbrella Trust to Multi-Academy Trust mean for our schools?

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- The government is opening up more streams of funding for Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs), as an Umbrella Trust we will not be able to access or control that funding. Therefore, there will be more funding opportunities for our schools, staff and children.
- We have been very successful as individual academies accessing the Capital funding streams, all our Capital priorities have now been completed and as individual schools we will move further down the list. The time is right to be able access a Capital funding percentage and decide as a group how best to spend this and make improvements in the Trust; to do this we need to grow and be able to grow we need to be a MAT.
- If one of our schools is needing extra support or struggling, we will be able to more actively support that school.
- There will be more educational support for all of the schools. Our school believes that a MAT will support the raising of standards and success for the children in our care, as it has done already.
- We will be able to plan for the growth of each school and adopt effective ways to work together more closely.
- We can establish more partnerships and can grow the number of schools in the MAT so that we can take advantage of economies of scale.
- We will continue to have freedom over our curriculum, with the addition of shared resources, e.g. subject teachers such as music, languages and special educational needs.
- Very little change for our staff – staff will have the one employer, The SWAN Trust, they will have the same pay and conditions and contracts as before and still work for our school. However they will have the opportunity to develop their careers and experience without having to leave the Trust; we hope to be able to offer more opportunities to the staff.
- Improved mentoring, career progression and CPD opportunities to retain our talented teachers and staff.
- There will be no change for teacher pensions, and support staff pensions are still paid for by the Trust underwritten by the DfE with better overall terms.
- We want to celebrate our own individuality and each school will keep its own name, logo and uniform, these will NOT be changing. We will secure each school's own identity and its values.
- It will be a primary led MAT in which like-minded local schools can work together to support excellence.

What will the Governance look like?

- The MAT is run by the SWAN Trust which oversees a governing body. The Trust is a legal body which operates a charitable organisation and a company limited by guarantee. The Trust has a formal agreement with the Department for Education (DfE) to provide educational services to its pupils.
- The Trust's role will continue to make sure we have the proper resources and finance and will be responsible for the overall performance of the MAT.
- At the top of the 'tree', we have one group of Members*, who will form The SWAN Trust - each Member has the important strategic role to ensure the Trust is adhering to its articles. Currently, each school has its own members.
- A skilled Board of nine Trustees* will be appointed which will give us greater strength, understanding and ability to support one another by our schools working together. Currently, each school has its own Trustees.

*These two layers will be the same two groups of people and oversee all 5 schools rather than having 5 different groups. For Members we will have a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 5, for Trustees we will have a minimum of 7 and a maximum of 9.

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- We have spoken to and visited a number of existing MATs of all sizes. We have liaised with the Regional Schools Commissioner's office, researched the recommendations on Boards and Trustees published by the National Governors Association and utilised the Academy Ambassador service (which is a DfE driven charity to help schools find the right people for their Trust) to seek additional skills and knowledge external to the existing skill-sets across the current Governing Bodies. Using this knowledge, job descriptions and a skills matrix was created to ensure balance. Prospective Trustees and Members came forward after the roles were advertised to the existing Governing Bodies of the five individual schools, and through Academy Ambassadors.
- A Shadow board of Trustees and Members has now been recruited and appointed, though they will not officially be appointed as Trustees and Members until the new organisation is formed. The Members and Trustees were approved by the RSC as part of the application process.
- Local Governing Bodies will still have an important function and have delegated powers to run their own schools and can focus on the best teaching standards, learning outcomes, value and impact.

Yours sincerely

Rupert Crossland
Chair of Governors

Emily Ferris
Headteacher

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Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Why are we looking to become an academy within a Multi-Academy Trust?

As you may be aware, it is Government policy to encourage and support all schools to organise themselves within groups. At the same time, Local Authorities are reducing the services that they have available to schools as their budgets are reduced. From April 2018 a number of key services such as school improvement will no longer be provided by Surrey County Council. The school's Governing Body has been carefully considering the future strategy for our school for some time and believes that academy status within a Multi Academy Trust is the best way to support the school in continuing to develop and improve, and that working together within the Trust will bring benefits to teaching and learning which will positively impact on children's achievement.

Q. What work has been carried out by Governors to explore all options?

Governors and the SWAN Directors have conducted a number of activities to ensure we reach the best decision for our school. These include:

- discussions with other local schools to understand their strategy and journey
- attendance at specific training and information sessions for Governors
- research on other MATs within Surrey
- research on academisation based on information from a variety of sources
- presentation and discussion covering the pros and cons of all the options available for the future of the school
- due diligence activities

Q. What funding impact will this have on my school?

The MAT will receive the funding based on the same national formula as before. This money will be allocated to each school based on the number of pupils and need.

Q. Do you still need parental contributions? And will these be retained by our own school?

Absolutely, as these funds are ring-fenced for your school and used only by your school. This includes any funds raised by the PTA.

Q. What difference/impact/effect will this have on MY child's learning? Will this affect my child's education?

Only for the positive! Teachers will have better access to the best class teachers across the Trust, setting higher expectations for all teachers and support staff. Once fully up and running, your child should have access to more opportunities in more specialist subjects e.g. PE, music, art.

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Q. Will parents notice any immediate changes?

Streamlining of systems will help make schools run smoother and more efficiently, our schools are already very good at doing this as individuals, however sharing joint systems parents may notice a change in. For example one Trust-wide communication system/solution across all the schools, i.e. a change to ParentMail or SCOPay emails.

Q. Does this affect parent applications to the school?

No, you would still apply to each individual school through Surrey County Council in the way you currently do, there will be an alignment of admissions policies, although they are currently all very similar, so there will be no significant changes.

Q. Will my child be forced to attend one of the other schools in the MAT?

No, your place is with the school of your choice, the schools will not be linked in this way.

Q. Is this just a political thing? What if we do nothing?

Then nothing will change, we will keep the status quo, budgets will continue to get tighter and we will no longer have the opportunities or choice we currently have, we are in the strong position of shaping the future for ourselves. Eventually the DfE may request the school joins a MAT and probably not of its choosing, but we shouldn't do it just because we are 'scared'. We want to become a MAT because we want to be in charge of our own destiny and be in the driving seat of change. It's exciting to be creating this Primary option in Woking which is aligned to our own values and ethos.

Q. How will becoming an academy affect term dates and the working day?

There are no plans to deviate from currently agreed term dates or the hours of the working day. Any changes to term dates or the working day would be subject to a separate consultation process.

Q. When is the transition to MAT likely to be completed?

Now that the individual Governing Bodies of the 5 schools in the SWAN Umbrella Trust have all voted in favour of forming The SWAN MAT, the next steps will be to appoint solicitors to begin the legal process. The preferred date to convert is the 1st September 2019, as this would tie in with the start of the academic and financial years, though this will be subject to the various legal steps being completed ahead of this date.

Q. What is the planned senior executive structure? Will current headteachers report to the Trustees; or will a new layer of Executive Management be put in?

We will formally appoint Mrs Elaine Cooper as Chief Executive Officer and will appoint a Chief Financial Officer. They will report to the Board of Trustees. The current Headteachers will report to their Local Governing Bodies and the CEO. The Scheme of Delegation will share where the accountability and responsibility lies.

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Q. If so, where will the budget for this extra headcount come from?

The budget will come from the savings we can make as five schools working together as one entity, for example only one set of accounts will need to be filed.

Q. How this will benefit my child and their learning exactly? Is the intention to share teacher resources across subjects? How will you ensure continuity of learning between teachers – will this not add to the administrative burden already placed on staff?

As a MAT, we will be one employer across the 5 schools. Your child will continue to enjoy the curriculum and ethos of your chosen school, they will benefit from:

- the teachers having more access to quality training
- further opportunity to share best practice and 'magpie' ideas
- continuing to attract and retain the very highest quality staff by being able to give them opportunities across our schools, if they want opportunities in other schools
- your child won't experience more teachers, they will still work with the teachers in their school. However some of our schools already have specialist teachers and find it hard to recruit when they need only one/two days a week, it could be an opportunity to recruit one person for a couple of schools. This is aimed more at the schools who already have specialist teachers.

Whilst it reads that these are opportunities that the staff will benefit from, we believe that it is the children who will be the ultimate gainers.

In terms of continuity of Learning, we have always carried out joint moderation across the 5 schools since the formation of the SWAN Umbrella, so all the Heads are aware of the various strengths and areas to develop within each school. We do not believe that the conversion to a MAT will add to the staff's administration.

We expect there to be savings made as one organisation, allowing the schools to band together to purchase supplies and services, and access greater discounts for purchasing in larger quantities. Each school, however, will continue to have its own budget for purchasing resources and curriculum consumables; this will not change.

Q. Strategic Development Plans/Ethos: How are these managed in a MAT? For example, I know that both Oaktree and Hermitage have their own SDP and ethos and my concern/query is how these are managed in a MAT where the Trustees/Executive Head are responsible for the overall governance/strategy of the MAT. Does this mean that these individual, school specific SDP's and ethos are changed to one umbrella plan? How do we maintain the sense of 'belonging' for pupils in the individual schools.

There has always been a SWAN vision and development plan. The existing SWAN Directors, who are made up of the Headteachers and Governors from each school, have all been working on strengthening and developing the various MAT documents including the Strategic Plan and ethos over the last year or so, and all schools have had an input in their creation and development.

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The MAT will have a Strategic Development Plan, and each individual school will have their own School Development Plan which will cascade from the MAT's but will be individual to the needs and context of the school. The MAT's ethos will be shared across all the schools in the MAT. The individual schools within the MAT will look and feel the same as they did before conversion, so we do not envisage any change to the sense of 'belonging' for pupils in the individual schools.

Q. Ofsted: I am aware that Ofsted will still inspect individual academies within the MAT – but, will also evaluate the MAT as a whole to assess the educational effectiveness of the MAT. My concern is that this will place additional administrative burden on all schools in the MAT and in particular the 'head' office of the MAT (whichever school that may be). Also, what is the impact if the individual schools are assessed as 'good' but the MAT itself is determined as failing?

During an inspection of an individual school, the inspectors consider the impact of the Trust and put a sentence in each report about the impact of the Trust on that school, as it did in the Hermitage's latest report. The expectations on schools do not change whether they are a maintained school or an academy, a Single Academy Trust or a MAT. Leadership and management is part of the overall judgement for each school. We do not believe there will be additional administrative burden on all schools in the MAT and in particular the 'head' office of the MAT in terms of Ofsted.

The CEO and the Trustees of the MAT are accountable to the Members, and regular reporting will be taking place between the schools and the Trust Board and between the Trustees and the Members, so we would not expect a situation like you describe to occur.

Q. Will there be a risk of a takeover by another Trust? Or will schools within the Swan MAT that are underperforming be moved to alternative Trusts?

We do not envisage a takeover by another Trust in the current political climate. The message that we have from the Regional Schools Commissioner is that they have agreed to the creation of the SWAN MAT with 5 schools in it, as a new legal entity in its own right. Part of the SWAN's ethos is that we would like to grow as a local MAT for Primary schools in the area. As long as the SWAN MAT continues as it currently operates, there would not be a take-over by another Trust. If schools within the SWAN MAT were to underperform, then this would be a conversation and decision, ultimately, for the Regional Schools Commissioner, and the SWAN MAT to make.

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