



St Jude's Church of England Schools Federation

Excellence in education, kindness in the community, courage through faith.



Headteacher: Mrs Vicki Chiverton

Dear Parents and Carers,

Proposal for St Jude's Church of England Schools Federation to join Enlighten Learning Trust

The Governors and leadership team at St Jude's are very proud of both our schools, their role in the community, and the excellent care and education they provide. Every day our superb teams work to realise our schools' vision: *Excellence in education, kindness in the community, courage through faith.*

Governors have a fundamental duty to act in the best interests of the school and this includes considering how they can support it now, and in the long term, to ensure it continues to remain at the heart of its community.

After considerable research and discussion, the governors want to consult you on the proposal for schools in the federation to become academies and join a local multi academy trust called the Enlighten Learning Trust (ELT).

We want to hear the views of all parents, staff and stakeholders on this proposal and we are therefore running a consultation process to enable you to find out more about it and offer any comments or ask any questions you may have.

The consultation will run from Monday 24th June 2024 to Friday 26th July 2024.

The accompanying information sets out the background to the proposal, provides information on what it means to become an academy and answers a number of frequently asked questions.

As part of the consultation process we are holding a parents' consultation meeting on **18th July at the St Jude's Infant School at 6.30pm.**

Governors will be present, as will representatives of ELT, who we will be happy to answer any further questions you have.

If you are unable to attend the consultation meeting but wish to make your views known, you can email them to governors@stjudes.surrey.sch.uk or leave your views in an envelope marked for the attention of the Chair of Governors with the school office. Please note, you will not receive an individual response to these, but they will be shared with all governors at our next full governing body meeting following which the governors will publish a report on the consultation, setting out next steps.

Kind regards,

Juan Pemberton & Xavier Brice

Chairs of Governors

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Background to the Proposal

Why are we considering becoming an Academy?

As you may be aware, many schools across the country have already decided to become an academy and others will have at least considered the benefits of such a step.

We believe that becoming an academy within the Enlighten Learning Trust will be in the very best interest of our pupils and the staff that support them. This is an ongoing process and it is important to stress that no final decision has been made at this stage.

This document sets out the reasons why we believe this is the right way forward for our schools and, having read it, we would encourage you to respond and let us know your views.

From the outset, we recognised that this is a significant decision. Both the infant and junior schools are successful, happy schools in which children thrive and whose distinctive ethos are valued by parents and the wider community.

To help us continue to maintain this, we believe that becoming an academy must:

- Have tangible benefits for existing pupils, their families and staff;
- Not disadvantage the schools or those it serves now or in the years to come;
- Not dilute or ignore the current strengths of the schools;
- Not diminish the place of the schools in the local community;
- Further strengthen the schools' ability to make a positive contribution to the lives of children, their families and other local residents.

These principles have guided our discussions and underpin our proposal to join ELT.

What this means for St Jude's

Joining a Multi Academy Trust will help to provide an even more secure future for our schools, its pupils, staff and the St Jude's community. Working in formal partnership with other academies could offer a number of possibilities that would enhance and secure the capacity and long-term future of our schools.

As a governing body we have reflected on the range of partnerships and relationships we have with other schools and academies in the local area. On this basis, we came to the view in June 2023 that Enlighten Learning Trust (ELT) was a "good fit" as it is very much aligned to our aims and values.

ELT was founded in 2014 and is made up of Esher Church of England High School, St Andrew's Church of England Primary School in Cobham, St Martin's Church of England Infant and Junior Schools in Epsom and, as of 1 May this year, The Priory High School in Dorking.

ELT enjoys a strong relationship with the Diocese of Guildford with its Christian ethos guiding its mission and purpose. You can find out more about ELT here <https://www.enlightenlt.education/>.

How will becoming part of ELT benefit St Jude's and its pupils?

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While St Jude's already benefits from the partnership with ELT, becoming an academy will deepen and enrich these benefits through, for example:

- Offering a core team of staff that can work in a supportive partnership to ensure resources are used most effectively. This provides protection for an individual school as it is part of a larger organisation and leads to the reduction in duplication – for instance around policy development and/or the introduction of new initiatives and responsibilities.
- Offering a wider range of leadership opportunities for middle and senior leaders, while also easing the overall leadership challenge through more supported and focused leadership roles. This is particularly important in small schools where individuals often hold a wide range of responsibilities.
- Enabling close partnership working with other schools to allow staff to deepen their knowledge of specific areas of work (for instance core subject leadership across two or more primary schools or SEND co-ordinators working within a supportive trust-based team).
- Opening up access to enhanced professional development and career progression opportunities for staff across the trust as part of a 'family' of schools. Equally, schools appointing staff from within the trust would reduce the challenge and risk associated with external recruitment.
- Improving efficiencies by procuring goods and services across the trust – this will apply to both back-office services (HR, Health and Safety etc) and IT and teaching resources.
- Running some of the operational and transactional functions at trust level, enabling the senior leadership team and its teaching staff to be freed up and to focus on the core work of teaching, learning and supporting all children to reach their full potential.

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Frequently Asked Questions

What changes would we see?

There would be very little that would change in the day to day running of the schools. The leadership team at St Jude's would continue to lead and drive forward the improvements at both schools.

During the discussions with ELT it has been clear that the values and vision we have for our school align very closely with those of the Trust, which has been another factor in the decision to propose joining ELT.

There would be no immediate or significant changes in our curriculum delivery. As you are aware, any changes we do make are driven in response to the needs of pupils. The act of becoming academies will not require us to make any changes.

There would still be governors overseeing the two schools. They would form the Local Governing Body (LGB) and all current governors would have the opportunity to transfer across to this committee without change if they choose to. There would also still be elected parent governors on the LGB. Our intention would be to ensure a high level of continuity in our governance during the conversion period.

Academies have a range of explicit freedoms not available to local authority schools, such as setting the pay and conditions of staff and setting their own term dates. However, the governors of the schools and ELT are committed to adhering to national agreements on pay and conditions and have no plans to alter term dates if the schools become academies.

The employment rights of all current members of staff would be protected by TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment) Regulations. This means that the staff would transfer to the ELT under the same terms and conditions of employment they enjoy now. Pension rights and continuity of service record would be preserved. Should this proposal go ahead, a separate process regarding TUPE will be undertaken with staff. ELT has adopted the same pay scales and terms and conditions as those negotiated nationally and locally for teacher and support staff.

No members of staff would lose their jobs as a result of the schools becoming academies.

The school would be subject to exactly the same Ofsted inspection framework as now.

What is the difference between a Church of England School and a Church of England Academy?

CofE schools are maintained by the Local Authority and relevant Diocese, whereas CofE academies are part of, and are operated by, a CofE Academy Trust. CofE Academy Trusts are charities that acknowledge the religious ethos of the schools they support and the ongoing partnership they have with the Diocese and wider family of church schools.

Academies have a certain number of freedoms and flexibilities in the way they operate that are not available to LA maintained schools. These relate in the main to staff terms and conditions, which can support and encourage recruitment and retention, and allow the curriculum to best reflect the learning needs of pupils.

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Academies, however, must continue to follow many of the same provisions and regulations as any other school to ensure they provide equality of access and an inclusive education (e.g. by following the national admissions processes and in making provision for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)).

Most schools, whether church schools or not, who have become academies have joined an academy trust consisting of 2 or more academies (a Multi-Academy Trust or MAT).

Importantly, by becoming a CofE academy, the school's religious designation does not alter and it remains part of the wider family of church schools, retaining a strong partnership with its Diocese.

Currently, there are 1,540 CofE academies and 280 CofE Multi Academy Trusts.

The vast majority of primary academies are in MATs for the very good reason that they provide a breadth of support, opportunities for staff development and access to back-office functions.

While the idea of becoming an academy may seem a significant step, LA maintained schools have come to enjoy, over the last 10-15 years, a high degree of autonomy and delegated responsibilities. Whilst this has been a positive thing in broad terms, the result has been that local authority support has reduced considerably. Inevitably this means that primary schools, in particular, have come to rely on small teams of staff and governors to cover an ever-increasing range of responsibilities and duties.

Partly as a response to this, the Department for Education's presumption is that schools choosing to become an academy must join an existing academy trust or create a new 'multi-academy' trust with one or more other schools. In this way, academies are expected to work in formal partnership with one another in order to gain the benefits of sharing resources and creating efficiencies.

What happens to the Federation?

Operationally, there will be no change to the way the Federation is currently led and managed on a day-to-day basis. The change in legal status from being LA schools to being academies does mean that the schools will no longer be formally designated as being in a federation. However, academies have the freedom to operate in exactly the same way as federated schools. So, for instance, there will still be one governing body and one leadership team overseeing both schools.

Are you being forced to become academies?

No. Only schools that are failing are forced to become an academy. We are electing to become academies. This places us in a strong position of being able to choose if and when we convert to academies and which trust to join.

What will it cost the schools to convert?

Schools receive a grant to cover the costs of conversion and will mean that no funding for pupils would be diverted as part of this process.

Will class sizes go up as a result of becoming an Academy?

No.

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Will teaching and learning change?

No, not as a result of becoming academies.

Will we change the admissions policies of the schools?

No. If we convert to academies, the governors will cease to be the admissions authority and instead ELT would have this responsibility. However, we would still be required to follow the statutory Admissions Code and we have no plans to change our current arrangements.

Will pupils with special educational needs and disabilities still be welcomed and receive the same support as they do now?

Yes. The schools would continue to provide for the range of needs of all the pupils on roll and, where a student has an EHC Plan, they would continue to receive the support required by it.

Will the schools remain in Englefield Green?

Yes.

Will the age ranges remain the same?

Yes.

Will the schools need to change their names?

No. The schools would retain their names.

Who will I be able to complain to if I am unhappy with the school?

Currently, parents are encouraged to address any concerns or issues they have to the class teacher in the first instance followed by a senior leader. Beyond that parents can complain to the Headteacher and/or the Governors. If necessary, a complaint can go on to the local authority.

If the schools become academies the same process would apply, but instead of complaining to the local authority a parent would complain to the Trustees of the ELT.

Will staff stay the same?

Yes – all staff would transfer to ELT under the TUPE process previously outlined.

My child receives Free School Meals. Will they continue to do so when the schools become academies?

Yes.

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Will the uniform change when the schools become academies?

No.

Will the schools' budgets be affected as a result of coming out of the local authority?

Academies and maintained schools in the same local authority with a similar pupil intake receive broadly comparable funding. As academies, however, we would have more financial flexibility – particularly working within a Multi-Academy Trust.

Could there be cuts to academy funding in the future?

Any changes to funding will apply to academies and local authority schools equally.

The Trust and the LGB would remain responsible for setting a balanced budget each year. By being part of a MAT, however, the school might be able to make savings on some of the goods and services it buys to run the school.

What input do parents have as part of the consultation/decision making process?

This consultation forms part of the overall consultation process. Your views, alongside those of other stakeholders, will be considered by Governors as part of the decision-making process. The Governors will, however, make the final decision on whether to convert to an academy once they have considered the responses to the consultation.

How would academy conversion affect local schools?

If we become an academy, we would continue to work in partnership with all schools in the local area.

What about links with the local authority and Diocese?

The change of status would bring greater independence from the local authority and Diocese but we would continue to work in partnership with the local authority and might continue to buy services from them if they offer best value and quality.

What impact would a Labour Government or a change of Government have on the Academy programme?

There is no current known plan for any of the major parties to roll back the academy programme. Indeed, it would take a large financial commitment to develop a policy to move away from academisation. As ever, we continue to monitor any and all situations that could impact the school.

Further information

Further information about Academies can be obtained from the Department for Education website:

<https://www.gov.uk/types-of-school>

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If you have any further questions, please do ask a member of the leadership team or a governor and please do attend our consultation meetings.

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