

**St Jude's Conversion to Academy Status and Joining Enlighten Learning Trust  
Parents' Consultation Meeting – Q&A session**

**Q. The Government has been pushing academies to merge and form large Trusts. Is this what will happen to ELT? Does ELT's Strategic Plan include plans to merge with other trusts?**

The DfE's preference has been for small Trusts to merge with other Trusts in order to realise the benefits of working together and generating economies of scale. However, ELT is already of a size where our academies collaborate in ways that provide effective support to each other across a range of areas such as English, mathematics, Early Years, SEN etc. Our central team, albeit small, also provides effective back-office services to support the academies in the Trust with things like finance, payroll, IT, etc.

ELT is not therefore at risk of coming under pressure to merge with other Trusts.

ELT's Strategic Plan does not include any plans to merge with another large trust such as Harris, Oasis or similar.

It is the case, however, that national policy and local contexts change, and if the opportunity arises for us to collaborate with another trust we would rightly evaluate its merits for our pupils and schools. Schools and trusts must respond to such changes to ensure they remain able to serve their community to the best of their ability. For instance, we know that the new Government will continue to allow schools to become academies. It may also continue to encourage or even place pressure on small Trusts (one or two schools) to merge and form larger Trusts so they can fully realise the benefits of collaboration and the economies of scale.

As outlined above, ELT is already in a position where its schools are working together, sharing good practice and benefiting from its central service support. It is therefore in a strong position to determine its own future. Already, we ensure there is a "good fit" between us and a school that wants to join. For instance, St Jude's and ELT share many of the same values and a strong working relationship has already developed between our respective leadership and governance groups. This would be the same with any potential and future merger - maintaining our vision and ethos and developing strong and productive relationships will be paramount in any discussions and decisions regarding such plans.

Also, any changes of this nature would be fully consulted on with all stakeholders, including existing schools in the Trust.

**Q. Some academies complain that the Trust they are in force them to follow certain processes or curricula which do not always reflect what the school believes is best for its pupils and community. Will this be the case if the schools join ELT?**

Where academies are successful, ELT does not impose ways of doing things – it also wants the academies in the Trust to reflect what they believe to be the values and ways of doing things that best reflect the community and context they are operating in.

However, collaboration is fundamental to the way ELT supports academies in the Trust. By working together, academies may decide to change or adapt some of their approaches to make the best use of the collaborative opportunities available in the Trust and if they feel such a change would be of benefit to their pupils. ELT would not impose changes where academies are successful and performing well.

Where academies are facing challenges and/or their performance is not where it should be, the Trust has a duty and responsibility to make improvements. This may result in the Trust intervening more to drive improvement.

Equally, the Trust is held to account in relation to its financial processes and systems. This does mean there has to be some common operating process to ensure compliance – mainly in relation to financial matters. These issues will be discussed in detail as part of the process of the schools joining the Trust.

#### **Q. Can an academy leave the Trust once it has joined?**

It is very unusual for an academy to leave a Trust once it has joined. This may happen where a trust is unable to bring about the improvement needed in an individual academy and/or the Trust itself is subject to an improvement notice from its regulator (the Education and Skills Funding Agency).

In such instances an academy would transfer to another trust – it is not possible for an academy to return to LA control.

In very rare cases where there is a significant breakdown in relationships between the trust and the academy an academy has been “re-brokered” to another trust.

It is important, therefore, that schools and any prospective trust they are planning to join develop strong relationships and understandings of each other’s approach, values and ways of doing things.

#### **Q Your website makes your Christian ethos very clear. Do you teach the National Curriculum, in particular evolution? What is your position on creationism?**

Academies in the Trust follow the National Curriculum and teach evolution.

Our Christian ethos means we believe God is behind our creation and the Gospel values are important in the day-to-day life of each of the academies in the Trust.

Children are encouraged to think deeply about all issues relating to their lives including those of faith. We would not seek to close down enquiry and as educators it is our role to facilitate and encourage curiosity and discussion about a wide range of important issues.

*Governor contribution:* the Governing Body asked these questions when we originally met with ELT and were reassured that their values and ethos are very much aligned to ours.

**Q. Are academies inspected by Ofsted?**

Yes, academies are inspected in exactly the same way as LA schools.

All academies in the Trust are either Good or Outstanding. While a positive Ofsted inspection judgement is important, it is not the only defining feature of a school or an academy or the only focus of how the Trust works with its academies. Ensuring all academies in the Trust are safe, have good solid teaching, good leaders and pupil behaviour and attitudes are in line with our values and expectations is important regardless of whether Ofsted is due next week or not for another 5 years.

**Q. How are teachers in the Trust supported?**

Collaboration and partnership are central to the Trust's approach. We support networks across academies in the trust that mean staff can share practice, learn from one another and in many cases lighten some of their individual burden by developing and exchanging resources, policies and ways of doing things with each other. This is particularly valuable for staff in small schools where individual staff members may have a wide range of responsibilities.

Each academy's improvement plan reflects their priorities and strengths and weaknesses. The Trust's school improvement leads and Chief Executive Officer work closely with the head teachers of each academy to ensure the plan being delivered and is having a positive impact.

**Q. Do pay and conditions for staff change if the schools became academies?**

ELT's Charter enshrines a commitment to ensure pay and conditions for both teaching staff and support staff remain at least as good as the LA offer. Staff retain their pension entitlements and HR policies broadly mirror (and never undermine) current LA policies.

**Q. Are academies funded in a different way to LA schools?**

No. Schools and academies are funded in the same way according (in the main) to the number of pupils on roll and their characteristics (additional needs, levels of deprivation etc).

Each academy in the Trust contributes to a range of shared services provided by the Trust (school support and improvement, finance, HR, compliance etc). These replace some of the services the schools currently buy from the LA and/or external providers. By doing so the

Trust can generate savings through economies of scale and alleviate a number of administrative and operational burdens from individual academies.

*Governor contribution:* Our schools carry high levels of responsibility for their operation and these are delivered by small staff teams. The support provided by the Trust for back-office functions will be very valuable.

**Q. How does the Trust ensure they support LGBTQ+ children, staff and foster a supportive and safe environment?**

The Trust and its academies welcome all children, young people and adults who learn and work in them.

The board of trustees at ELT is wholly focussed on ensuring that every day the experience of the pupils in our schools is as rich and engaging as possible. We take inclusion seriously and are constantly improving the breadth of our schools and ensuring that every one of them can have a life changing education in our care.

We value every child equally, and recognise that they have one, unique opportunity to learn, develop and mature in our care.