

Formal Consultation to become a Multi-Academy Trust

Background

Seal Church of England Primary and Four Elms Primary School formed the Inspire Federation in July 2018 after working collaboratively for a year with Liz Mitchell as Executive Headteacher. In January 2022, the Executive Headteacher began working with Maypole Primary and the governing body of Maypole Primary soon began to see the value in collaborative working, culminating in September 2022 with Inspire Federation reforming to include Maypole Primary School.

The Inspire Federation vision is one of opportunity for all within an environment of inclusiveness, respect and compassion:

“Pupils, parents, staff and governors will be supported in developing and nurturing new skills that enable individuals to grow. Collaboration will empower us to offer the very best experiences that allow all those within it to thrive and fulfil aspirations. Through strong partnerships, we will embrace new ideas together, finding innovative ways to create an environment that endorses the very best learning so we all reach our full potential.”

The Inspire Federation, which very much operates in the same way as a Trust, remains relevant to any proposals set out in this consultation document.

Proposal

This consultation is regarding the proposal for the Inspire Federation to become the Inspire Academy Movement, its own multi-academy trust (MAT) by September 2023.

Seal, Four Elms, and Maypole Primaries would become part of this new MAT to allow them to continue working as they do currently under the federation arrangements. The three schools have worked together for a year, Seal and Four Elms for six years.

As a Trust, we would continue to value collaborative working to improve the quality of provision for our schools, enhance pupil progress and create a highly motivated workforce with a shared set of values.

The Inspire Academy Movement would recognise that all schools have their own distinctiveness and ethos, and these would be respected, cherished and nurtured.

The Trust will serve schools within North Kent, with a specific focus on Church Schools in the Sevenoaks and surrounding areas. Seal is currently federated with Four Elms which is also in the Sevenoaks district and Maypole which is in the Dartford district. Maypole is on the border of the Borough of Bexley, which we would also look to serve.

The Inspire Academy Movement will become a church majority MAT. This will enable the Trust to work closely with the Rochester Diocese and all other church schools in developing their Christian ethos. The Trust would not be exclusive to church schools, as it is important that non-faith schools develop this ethos, one based around a clear set of values that develop the children's character and prepare them for adult life.

Why and how have the Inspire Federation Governing Body arrived at this proposal?

The governing body of the Inspire Federation have long been able to see the value in schools supporting one another and sharing expertise and resources and feel that working alongside a greater number of schools would further strengthen the capacity for school improvement.

During discussions with the Diocese of Rochester, it became apparent that the options for church schools within or near the Sevenoaks area joining established multi-academy trusts were limited.

Following the publication of the [Education White Paper](#) in March 2022, the Schools Minister, in [February 2023](#) confirmed the government's desire remains for all schools to be in a strong multi-academy trust over time. Therefore, with the changing educational landscape, and the emphasis on school-to-school support, alongside the knowledge that many small church schools are vulnerable due to their size, the Governing Body felt it was the right time to explore the benefits of becoming a multi-academy trust to enable more flexibility and opportunity for both church and community schools to thrive within an organisation that has a proven track record of school improvement rather than join an existing MAT that may make changes to the way our schools work.

The current federation has a clear vision, direction, and proven track record for supporting other schools and raising standards. The Executive Headteacher has built good relationships with the Local Authority and the Diocese of Rochester who both support the conversion of the Inspire Federation to a MAT. The Diocese are working alongside the federation to ensure Inspire provide an option for church schools, both Voluntary Aided (VA) and Voluntary Controlled (VC) in the local area.

The governing body of Inspire Federation have completed due diligence and concluded that the success from collaborative working would lend itself to creating a new Trust rather than joining an existing MAT. The Executive Headteacher has built capacity within the federation to support other schools and have experienced leaders ready for the opportunity to grow within the organisation.

The Regional School's Commissioner and Advisory Board met to discuss Inspire's interest in creating their own MAT, and despite a reluctance from the Department for Education (DfE) for new MATs to be formed, they could see that Inspire were an exception and have granted permission for a new Inspire MAT to be formed if the governing body decide to do so.

What is a multi-academy trust?

A multi-academy trust (MAT) is a group of aligned educational academies that come together to form a trust. An academy is essentially an independent school which is funded by the state. It is independent of the local authority and receives its funding direct from central government. A charitable company limited by guarantee (the Academy Trust) is responsible for the individual academies within the trust, and the Academy Trust signs the Funding Agreement (the contract) with the Secretary of State as part of the establishment of the academy.

Legislation requires that each academy has the following characteristics:

- that it offers a balanced and broadly based curriculum;
- that it provides education for pupils of different abilities; and
- that it provides education for pupils who are wholly or mainly drawn from the area in which the school is situated

Why become a multi-academy trust (MAT)?

A significant benefit of becoming a MAT is the ability to collaborate and share expertise across the Trust in a more flexible way as it grows. Our children will continue to benefit from a wide range of specialist staff and expertise. An important factor is that that the Trust would have the freedom to choose how to spend the budget, with a focus on school improvement.

When the DfE asked school leaders within MATs why their governing boards had chosen to adopt a MAT structure, they said MATs:

- enabled governors and leaders to come together and take responsibility to provide better education in their community, rather than just in their individual schools, supported by a common ethos;

- facilitated the sharing of effective practice across a group of schools, so that when a particular approach has been shown to work, improving teaching and learning, it can be implemented across the MAT;
- extended the reach of great leaders and governors – at all levels – to support and develop teachers across a wider group of schools;
- produced a pipeline of future leaders, by enabling a greater array of middle leadership positions;
- facilitated the recruitment and retention of staff, by giving leaders the ability to point to realistic career development paths and opportunities to specialise within a MAT;
- made it easier for teachers to support each other across the group of schools by sharing, drawing on and learning from good practice; and
- generated economies of scale, enabling cost efficient commissioning and purchasing of goods and services, and/or facilitating the development of inhouse services for schools across the MAT.

Many of the above benefits are already realised from being a federation, however, the current legislation that governs the creation and expansion of federations is cumbersome and restrictive. The Inspire Federation already work in a similar model to a MAT and feel that the flexibility and governance structure of a multi-academy trust can provide for, and enable, the Trust to continue to support schools and grow in a more sustainable way.

Will we get more funding as an academy?

The Academy Trust will receive a General Annual Grant from the Secretary of State calculated as the equivalent to that which would be received by a maintained school taking account of the number of pupils at each academy. Capital funding is also available, channelled through the Trust. Every academy trust must abide by the requirements of their funding agreement and have regard to the guidance in the Academies Trust Handbook.

Academies receive the same amount of per-pupil funding as they would receive from the local authority as a maintained school.

Are there any consequences of becoming a multi-academy trust?

Academy Trusts are directly liable for matters such as insurance, employment liabilities, pensions, health and safety, and property maintenance. However, as mentioned above, trusts receive funding from central government to help them meet these additional costs.

Once an academy order has been issued and documents signed, the schools within the Trust cannot then revert back to be local authority maintained schools.

Will the admissions arrangements change?

As community and voluntary controlled schools, the local authority is the admissions authority and sets the current school admission arrangements; the local authority also decides which pupils should be offered places at the schools. As academies, the admissions authority would be the Trust. Just like the local authority, the Trust will still be bound by the School Admissions Code, and School Admissions Appeals Code.

Children allocated a place at the schools within the federation will not be affected for the September 2023 intake.

Are the schools still inspected by Ofsted?

Yes, academies are still subject to Ofsted inspections.

How will the schools within the Inspire Federation change?

You will not see any change in the day-to-day school lives of your children. The schools' uniforms and the school names will remain the same.

Inspire Federation consultation to become a multi-academy trust

Your children will continue to have opportunities to collaborate on exciting projects across the Trust, as they currently do with the federation.

There will continue to be opportunities for staff to work together and share expertise across schools within the Trust, as well as opportunity for staff development and continuous learning.

Should the federation become a MAT, staff will go through a transfer of employment under TUPE Regulations. These regulations protect the terms and conditions of staff at the point of transfer. All employees would continue to work at their current schools with the same or similar responsibilities as now.

Academies have the power to vary their curriculums and vary the length of the school day, however, it is not intended to take any such steps at this stage and parents/carers, staff and pupils will be consulted if any such changes were to be considered in the future.

The schools within the federation have enjoyed the benefits of collaborative working since 2017. There have been several projects worked upon together that have raised standards across all three schools. 'A Curriculum to Inspire' has been an on-going project since 2018. The curriculum is based around four core curriculum values which are interwoven. Our teachers will continue to work collaboratively on shared aims, guaranteeing consistency in approach. Our curriculum leads and senior leaders who are experts in developing pedagogy and taxonomy approach to progression will continue across all schools

Year groups will continue to have the opportunities to share good practice and work together on planning, sharing ideas and resources to enhance learning.

Seal, having created a community farm on site, is able to offer farm education to all schools within the federation. With growth in mind, additional farm education teachers will be employed to ensure we are able to provide this for any school joining the Trust in the future.

Collaborative working to develop the role of lead practitioner in line with the development of the Curriculum to Inspire will continue, along with the creation of a 'How to Inspire' document of expectations for all aspects of teaching and learning.

The group of lead practitioners will be released to further research new and innovative methods of teaching which will enhance learning and further enable the four curriculum values to embed.

The schools within the federation are Rights Respecting Schools. In July 2021, Seal and Four Elms worked collaboratively to achieve the Rights Respecting Gold award. Since working with Maypole, they are now working towards their Silver Award. Rights Respecting has helped the pupils across the schools to work collaboratively towards supporting the rights of children across the world, campaigning and raising awareness of various issues, and this will continue as we grow as a trust.

While competing in local district competitions, the schools have developed their interhouse sports events including competitive football, netball, cricket, and rounders. There are trophies awarded to the winning school for each event. This exciting opportunity will be strengthened and grow within the freedoms of being a MAT.

The schools will continue to enjoy collaborative residential trips in years 5 and 6 which enable them to make new friends and connections with children outside their own school before transitioning to secondary.

How will the leadership and management of the schools be affected?

At present, the Inspire Federation has one single governing body over the federated schools, with committees at school level to support and challenge the Executive Headteacher and school leadership.

Liz Mitchell, the current Executive Headteacher will become the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the MAT, accountable to a Board of Trustees, who in church MATs are called Directors. Like the governing body of the Federation, the Board of Directors will be legally responsible for all the schools within the

Trust. Within the MAT, Local Governing Bodies (LGB) will provide local governance at school level, similar to the current committees within the federation. The LGB's will bring support and challenge to the Heads of School and leadership team of each academy which will include parents and staff representation. Many of the current governors within the federation will become either directors or local governing body members.

How can I find out more?

We will be holding a stakeholder consultation meeting for you to find out more and for you to ask any questions you may have on Thursday 4 May 2023 at 5pm.

The meeting will be held virtually via Zoom. Please register in advance for this meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZYvdu-uqTlpEt2jkIGDPVn5gn70bZm9HqGU>

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

You can submit questions on the form below or via email to clerk@inspirefederation.co.uk ahead of the meeting.

Staff consultation meetings will also take place and staff will be given details of these separately.

You can respond to this consultation proposal in the following ways:

- In writing via the school office to the Governing Body, please address your correspondence to "Multi-Academy Trust Consultation, Chair of Governors"
- By email to: clerk@inspirefederation.co.uk
- By scanning the QR code and completing the response survey



The closing date for representations to be made is Friday 26 May 2023

Your name:

Your question:

Please tick as appropriate:

- Parent/Carer
- Pupil
- Employee
- Member of the community
- Other