

Headteacher: Mr Kevin Day BA(hons) NPQH

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

To support the consultation on Belmont Special School converting to academy status and joining SAND Multi Academy Trust.

The Governing Body of Belmont Special School is considering a proposal to convert to Academy status and join a Multi Academy Trust (MAT). The Governing Body's discussions on Academy status started some time ago and long before HM Government's recent statements on the possibility of converting all schools to Academy status. Over the recent years Belmont has explored a number of MAT options and our Governing Body believes that the SAND MAT best supports our ambitions to provide the highest possible standards of education and care for our children and young people.

The SAND MAT currently comprises of:

- **The Milestones School Gloucester** – an outstanding school for pupils with special needs aged 3 – 16
- **Paternoster School** – a special school for children aged 3 – 16 based in Cirencester.

At this time one further special school is also in consultation to join the SAND MAT in the near future.

Conversion is a relatively straightforward process, and the decision will be taken by the Governing Body based on what is considered best for our students, staff and the wider local community once all the necessary investigation and consideration has been completed. As part of this decision-making process, the Governing Body is committed to undertaking a full consultation with everyone connected with the school and will take into account their views before any final decision is made. Below are some Frequently Asked Questions which provide further details of the proposal.

Key Questions

Q 1: What is a Multi Academy Trust (MAT)?

A: A MAT is a mix of local academies, all with unique identities and features, working in a formal collaborative structure. MATs are governed by one Trust (Trustees and Members).

Q 2: What changes will I see?

A: There will be very little visible change as a direct result of forming the MAT. The Headteacher, staff, uniform, premises and curriculum will all continue to be very much Belmont School. Belmont would have a local advisory body rather than a governing board that will lead on many areas of school life, but the MAT board would have strategic lead. The changes that we expect you to see will be a general continued improvement in the performance and running of the school.

Q 3: Would Belmont Special School lose its identity if it becomes part of a MAT?

A: No, our own unique identity and ethos would remain. An obligation of the MAT would be to protect the unique identity and ethos of each of the schools within it. We would be Belmont Special School, part of the **Support Achieve Develop Nurture** MAT. The MAT will develop a logo and identity for the MAT and each school would use this in addition to any identification it already uses for itself.

Q 4: How would Belmont Special School's leadership change?

A: It is likely Belmont would keep its own current leadership team. The governance of Belmont Special School would change slightly, as outlined below. The MAT organisation would support the leadership of the school when needed and appoint future Heads of school. The current or future Head of school would appoint school staff to roles.

Q 5: What are the benefits of Joining a MAT?

There will be several benefits:

- Enhancing the work already happening at Belmont
- Raising standards through the development and promotion of outstanding teaching and learning;
- Sharing best practice between the, leadership, teaching and associate staff with other schools to the benefit of the children within each school;
- Efficiencies in administrative functions and joint procurement; this will help us in these more austere times to advantage the students;
- Improved and different ways of governance with a clear focus on strategic development, teaching and learning, and accountability;
- Improved leadership, management and governance that impacts directly upon the students;
- By joining with Milestone, Paternoster and others schools we can influence the growth of this MAT, ensuring that any schools we invite to join are not spread over too wide a geographical area and that the MAT does not expand without time to consolidate
- Recruitment, retention and growth of staff.

Q 6: How would becoming a MAT affect admissions?

A: Admissions to Belmont Special School would be unchanged for Gloucestershire Children. It's possible that the MAT would help Belmont develop Post 16 provision in the future as this is recorded on the current school development plan and has been requested by many parents and carers.

Q 7: How would becoming a MAT affect exclusions?

A: Academies are required by their Funding Agreement to follow the law and guidance on exclusions as if they were maintained schools.

Q 8: Will other schools join us?

A: We hope that others will do so, in the future, when we consider it to be the right time for us. These could be more special schools, secondary or primary schools. The essential factors are when the MAT is able to successfully expand and if future schools share and understand the values of any existing MAT.

Q 9: Are other schools also creating MATs?

A: Across the country there are MATs with many academies and schools joined together. This is very much the way that education is going as schools work more closely together for the benefit of the young people.

Q 10: How will forming the MAT improve standards for our children?

A: This will enable us to utilise the expertise of staff from schools in the MAT to accelerate progress for our children. We can develop a set of specialists who could operate over schools within the MAT, releasing staff to focus on developing wider opportunities and exciting experiences in a new and broad curriculum. This could be in middle and senior leadership, as well as with support staff. The talents of schools together become greater than the sum of their parts. Governors hope that this opportunity will also ensure that the specialist roles and skills remain. Milestone is a larger outstanding special school with teaching school status. This means at least two outstanding special schools are working together to maintain high standards and develop 'home grown' teachers and LSW's for the future.

Q 11: Will the governors' role change when we become a MAT?

A: If we convert to a MAT there will be tiers of governance rather than one, but the key responsibilities for the day to day running of the school will remain with a local governing group called a Local Advisory Board (LAB) who have knowledge of the school and community. There will also be a Strategic Board with Members and Trustees. This group will focus on the strategic direction. The CEO and head teachers account for the performance of the schools.

The advantage of having this extra tier of governance is that many of the statutory duties that a local board needs to undertake can be done centrally for all schools in the MAT by a highly professional and experienced group of governors. Economies of scale with the workload should result in stronger governance.

Q 12: Is a school able to leave the trust?

A: At the moment the Secretary of State is the only one with the power to cease a Trust relationship. However, it is clear that government intention is to enable appropriate movement of schools and we would support that flexibility.

Q 13: What is the structure of a MAT?

A: The Members are a small group of significant people responsible for the strategic oversight of the academy trust. They are the conscience of the Trust, ensuring that the objectives are upheld. They appoint the Trust's Trustees.

The Trustees, are a slightly larger group of people with a structured skill set, equivalent to an over-arching governing body. The Trustees, determine the policies of the Trust, monitor the effectiveness of individual academies, manage central services and report to the Secretary of State. They work to ensure that each academy is performing to the best of its ability and it gets the support it requires. They are advised by the Head Teacher Executive Board in the same way that the local advisory board members of each school are advised by the individual Heads of each school. Each school would also have a Local Advisory Board with responsibilities focused very much on the success of the individual school.

Q 14: What do you think the risks are and how do you propose to mitigate these?

There are a number of risks should we decide against this opportunity:

- Belmont might at a later stage be forced to join another MAT without the ability to choose. We believe by joining SAND MAT now we can continue to be a successful and sustainable school.
- If increasing numbers of schools become academies staff may be attracted to them rather than schools remaining under Local Authority control. We believe by joining SAND our staff will have opportunities for enhanced career progression and opportunities to develop expertise across a wider field of SEN to enable us to retain and attract the best staff
- We have also identified that doing nothing is a risk for us in the long term. The clear message from government and local authority is that formal partnering is a secure strategy.
- School finances continue to be strained making the ability to deliver the required quality of provision progressively more difficult over time. We believe by joining the SAND MAT that we will be able to reduce some costs over time and gain opportunities to generate more income and access additional funding opportunities

There are some risks should we decide join the SAND MAT:

- If we had schools within the MAT that were too spread out geographically it might make governance more difficult, which is why we are not considering this.
- Growing a MAT too quickly can mean that there is not enough time to consolidate before expanding further, which can put the improvement of academies already in the MAT at risk. Like any school or organisation poor leadership can lead to poor outcomes for the school
- Schools may wish to join who have not been judged by Ofsted as 'good or 'outstanding' (currently Paternoster School has been judged as 'inadequate' and is improving quickly).
- To mitigate against these the Trust must undertake due diligence reviews each time there is an application to join. This process would consider issues such as reputation, teaching and learning, financial, staffing, land and relationships and will be at the heart of the development of the Trust. Once a partner is approved, transition plans will include team building and communication at all levels as we believe a steady and solid foundation will serve all the schools who want to work together in a longer term relationship.
- Other school may not wish to join us. It is important for any MAT that it grows over time to enable the economies of scale that will allow all schools to become more financial secure. It is the aim of the MAT to demonstrate that by working together we will have enhanced teaching and learning opportunities, are more financially stable and sustainable and are providing greater opportunities for our staff.

Q 15: What inspection regimes and assessment data information do academies have to provide?

A: All academies are inspected by Ofsted using the same framework and timescales as for maintained schools. As a MAT, all schools will continue to be inspected as separate schools. Academies will still have to take part in national tests and in teacher assessments of students' performance as they apply to maintained schools.

Q 16: How will staff be affected?

A: Staff will be employed by the Multi Academy Trust and all of their current pay and conditions will be protected on transfer. Academies do have the freedom to vary terms and conditions from national ones. In the schools that have already converted to academy status (by their own decision) the staff have noticed very little change except some increased opportunities to do more collaborative work. Staff could potentially work at more than one academy within the Trust, should they be interested in doing so and if it provided better outcomes for children. New staff will be appointed to a specific school but the employer would be the whole academy trust.

Q 17: How is the school going to consult everyone?

A: The Department for Education (DfE) guidance on making significant changes requires the Multi Academy Trust to consult with key stakeholders, including the Local Authority, for a minimum period of 6 weeks, before submitting responses to the EFA. In line with good practice consultation meetings will also be held at the school, to canvas the views of stakeholders. Every query will receive a response, and all objections will be detailed in the business case to the EFA.

Q 17: How do I take part in the consultation?

The Governing Body is consulting with all its stakeholders and the wider local community. You are invited to submit your comments and views on the proposal via our Consultation Questionnaire (see link below). If you would like a paper copy of the questionnaire please contact the school office. You are also welcome to attend a consultation meeting. The meetings will be for parents and other stakeholders to raise any points they have not been able to express through other means.

The formal consultation process will begin on 7th June 2019 and close on 19th July 2019. The Governing Body will consider any issues which arise as a result of the consultation period to inform their decision on whether or not to proceed further with the conversion to MAT status at this time

We would be very grateful if you could kindly complete the very brief questionnaire with your views by 19th July 2019.

[Click here for Consultation Questionnaire](#)