

Rusthall St Paul's CE Primary School

INSPIRE BELIEVE ACHIEVE



Consultation Document

Formal Consultation to join the
Inspire Academy Movement





Formal Consultation to join the Inspire Academy Movement



Introduction

Rusthall St. Paul's Primary School is a small voluntary aided Church of England school in the Tunbridge Wells area.

Our strong belief that every child should be treated as an individual, together with our high expectations for learning and behaviour, ensure that every child achieves well whilst at Rusthall St Paul's.

We believe that high expectations for work and behaviour will support our children as they enter into today's life. We follow these three simple rules: respect everyone and everything, be fair and tolerant and treat others the way you would like to be treated. This means that, "pupils are kind to others and know that it is important to respect different viewpoints. They look out for each other and cooperate well together"¹. Our creative curriculum is designed to inspire and excite children as they undertake the journey of learning.

Background

In September 2022 the Local Authority, Kent County Council, having raised concerns regarding the Leadership and Management of the school, intervened and established an Interim Executive Board (IEB) in place of normal governance arrangements to ensure long-term sustainability. At the time the IEB were of the understanding the issues related to finance and premises. Over time, the IEB recognised school improvement also needed a high focus. It was the role of the IEB to consider all strategic options for the school and hold leaders to account for the swift improvement in the quality of education. In September 2023, the school entered into a collaboration agreement with The Inspire Federation, now Inspire Academy Movement, and following a period of rapid and significant improvement, the IEB transitioned back to a governing body and the Local Authority removed their notice of concern. With the current leadership in place, the school is now in a period of stability and growth evidenced by an increase to the Pupil Admissions Number (PAN) from 15 to 30. Whilst the tremendous work undertaken by the interim leadership prior to implementing the current arrangement is recognised, it is the view of the Governing Body that the success of the school, particularly in relation to school improvement, has been largely down to the support of Inspire Academy Movement.

Proposal

This consultation is regarding the proposal for Rusthall St Paul's to join the Inspire Academy Movement and become an academy within the Trust.

The Inspire Academy Movement became a church majority Multi Academy Trust (MAT) in September 2023, having successfully run as a federation for a number of years. The Inspire Academy Movement recognise that all schools have their own distinctiveness and ethos, and these are to be respected, cherished and nurtured.

Inspire Academy Movement serves schools within North and West Kent, with a specific focus on Church Schools in the Sevenoaks and surrounding areas. There are currently three schools within Inspire Academy Movement: Seal CE Primary School near Sevenoaks; Four Elms Primary School near Edenbridge, and Maypole Primary School in Dartford.

These schools have enjoyed the benefits of collaborative working since 2017. There have been several projects worked upon together that have raised standards across all schools. 'A Curriculum to Inspire'

¹ OFSTED inspection report April 2023

has been an on-going project since 2018. The curriculum is based around four core curriculum values which are interwoven. Teachers across the Trust work collaboratively on shared aims, guaranteeing consistency in approach. Our curriculum leads and senior leaders, who are experts in developing methods and practice of teaching and learning, work across all schools.

Within the Trust, a community farm has been created to offer farm education to all pupils. With growth in mind, additional farm education teachers have been employed to ensure this is provided for any school joining the Trust.

All schools within the Trust benefit from being Rights Respecting Schools. In July 2021, Seal and Four Elms worked collaboratively to achieve the Rights Respecting Gold award, with Maypole 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 the Trust grows. Should Rusthall St Paul's join the Trust, the school will work towards becoming a Rights Respecting school.

As part of the Trust, Rusthall St Paul's pupils will have the opportunity to enjoy collaborative residential trips in years 5 and 6 which enable them to make new friends and connections with those outside their own school before transitioning to secondary. They will also be part of the Trust-wide carol concert, and staff will enjoy the Trust-wide developmental days held regularly to support all staff.

The Trust is not exclusive to church schools, as it is important that non-faith schools develop an ethos based around a clear set of values that develop the children's character and prepare them for adult life. However, as a Church MAT, the Trust is keen to work closely with the Rochester Diocese to support church schools in developing their Christian ethos.

Why have the Rusthall St Paul's Governing Body arrived at this proposal?

The publication of the **Education White Paper** in March 2022 and the statement from 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. This is also the aim of the Rochester Diocesan Board of Education. 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 joining a multi-academy trust.

The Governing Body further recognised that over the past few years, with lower pupil numbers resulting in a reduction in the number of classes, the loss of a substantive Head teacher and being graded as Requires Improvement by Ofsted, the school had become vulnerable and was at risk of closure.

Collaboration with the Inspire Academy Movement has been very positive resulting in the school being on an upward trajectory. We have received positive feedback from the Local Authority on the changes made, and as a result, we are confident that when Ofsted return, we will once again be a 'Good' school.

With this in mind, the Governing Body considered the strategic options open to them and came to the conclusion that a continuation and deepening of the collaborative relationship with Inspire Academy Movement would be the most beneficial way forward for both staff and pupils at Rusthall St Paul's and in addition, the best way to safeguard the opportunity for local children to continue to be educated in their own community prior to moving to secondary education, benefitting the community as a whole.

This proposal has the support of the Local Authority and the Diocese of Rochester.

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 join a multi-academy trust (MAT)?

A significant benefit of joining a MAT is the ability to collaborate and share expertise across a family of schools that share the same ethos and values. Our children will continue to benefit from a wide range of specialist staff and expertise. An important factor is 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 join a MAT, 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 had been shown to work, improving teaching and learning, it could 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 in-house services for schools across the MAT.

Many of the above benefits are already realised from being supported by the Trust, however, the current legislation that governs maintained schools is cumbersome and restrictive. By joining the Inspire Academy Movement, the school will have the flexibility and governance structure to enable the Trust to continue to develop the school to grow in a more sustainable way.

Will we get more funding as an academy?

Inspire Academy Movement 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 joining a multi-academy trust?

Multi 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 school cannot then revert back to being a maintained school.

Will the admissions arrangements change?

As a Voluntary Aided school, the current admission arrangements are set by the governing body, which has a duty to comply with the School Admissions Code set by the Department for Education. Rusthall St Paul's Primary School engages with the Co-ordinated Admission Scheme, which is administered by Kent County Council for the September intake.

Should the school become an academy, none of the current admission arrangements will change. The Trust would become the admissions authority with responsibility for determining the admissions and oversubscription criteria, but the Local Authority would continue to co-ordinate the application process for admissions. The Trust would also be bound by the School Admissions Code, and Admissions Appeals Code statutory guidance.

Children allocated a place at the school will not be affected for the September 2024 intake.

Are the schools still inspected by Ofsted?

Yes, academies are still subject to Ofsted inspections, however on conversion Rusthall St Paul's will be deemed a "new school" and therefore be exempt from Inspection for approximately three years.

How will Rusthall St Paul's change?

You will not see any change in the day-to-day school lives of your children. The school uniform and name will remain the same. The support currently received from Inspire Academy Movement will remain and your children will continue to have opportunities to collaborate on exciting projects across the Trust.

Opportunities for staff to work together and share expertise across schools within the Trust will also continue, as well as additional opportunities for staff development and continuous learning.

Should the school join Inspire Academy Movement, 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 school 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.

We do however believe that you will see continued progress on the positive trajectory that Inspire Academy Movement has set in place this year.

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

The school already has a close working relationship with Inspire Academy Movement, and therefore the opportunities that are afforded to our children through this collaboration will be further strengthened and enriched. There will be opportunities for staff to work together and share expertise across schools within the Trust. We will continue to develop a strong curriculum and enhanced learning experience for all pupils. The Trust will give opportunity for staff development and continuous learning, which the

Rusthall St Paul's governing body and senior leaders feel would be highly motivating for the staff and help them meet their personal career ambitions.

At present, Rusthall St Paul's governing body has the legal responsibility to ensure to support and challenge of the Executive Headteacher and school leadership. On academisation, the legal responsibility for the school will transfer to the Trust Board of Directors who oversee all the schools within the Trust.

Within the MAT, Local Governing Bodies (LGB) provide local governance at school level, similar to the committees within a maintained school structure. The LGB's will bring support and challenge to the Heads of School and leadership team of each academy and include parents and staff representation. It is hoped that all of the current governors on the Rusthall St Paul's governing body will choose to become local governing body members.

How will the decision be made?

The governors of Rusthall St Paul's will make the final decision on whether to convert to an academy and join the Inspire Academy Movement, they are therefore keen to consult with all stakeholders, including staff, parents and carers, pupils, the local community and the local authority.

After the consultation period has ended, all responses to the proposal will be collated into a stakeholder engagement and summary report. The Governing Body will then consider this report and review responses before making a decision to become an academy within the Inspire Academy Movement or remain a standalone maintained primary school. The Governing Body's decision will be communicated to all stakeholders as soon as possible following the consultation.

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 16 May, 6.30pm - 7.30pm.

The meeting will be held virtually via Teams. Please contact the clerk at jjohnson@inspiream.org.uk to book your place and receive the meeting link.

You can submit questions ahead of the meeting on the form below, via the link [here](#) or by email to jjohnson@inspiream.org.uk.

There will be further opportunity to ask questions and discuss the proposal on Wednesday 5 June from 3pm – 3.30pm on the playground.

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, Co-Chairs of Governors"
- By email to: jjohnson@inspiream.org.uk
- By scanning the QR code and completing the response survey



The closing date for representations to be made is **Friday 7 June 2024**

Submit your questions

You can use this form to submit any questions prior to the stakeholder consultation meeting on Thursday 16 May.

Your name:
Your question:
Please tick as appropriate: <input type="checkbox"/> Parent/Carer <input type="checkbox"/> Pupil <input type="checkbox"/> Employee <input type="checkbox"/> Member of the community <input type="checkbox"/> Other, please specify _____

Alternatively, you can email your questions to the Clerk at: jjohnson@inspiream.org.uk

Or via the electronic form via this QR code:



Please note, this QR code is only to submit a question. To respond to the consultation, please use the QR code on the consultation document. Thank you.