



Stratford-sub-Castle Church of England VC Primary School

Headteacher: Mrs Justine Watkins BEd (Hons)



Life in all its fullness

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Thursday 5th December 2024

Dear Parents and Carers,

I am writing to advise you that the Governing Body of Stratford-sub-Castle CE VC Primary School has decided to enter into discussions with Brunel Academies Trust (BAT) regarding potentially converting to an academy and joining BAT in the new year.

BAT is an established Multi Academy Trust (MAT) which operates Primary Mainstream Schools, including Church Schools, and Primary, Secondary and all through Special Schools located in Swindon and Wiltshire. BAT has a total of eight schools currently, including a cluster of schools located in Salisbury which includes; Wyndham Park Infant's School, St Mark's CofE Junior School and Exeter House Special School.

BAT's Strategic Growth Plan includes the development of a 'Primary Hub' of mainstream schools to support a truly inclusive community and to encourage cross phase collaboration. The vision and ethos of BAT is very closely aligned to Stratford School's vision and we are very excited about the prospect of becoming part of their inclusive educational family.

I would like to give you some background information about the process of converting to an academy and joining a MAT, and the reasons why the Governing Body believes that this is in the best interest of our school.

Over recent weeks, Stratford School governors and Senior Leaders, have been considering the benefits that would accrue to our current and succeeding generations of pupils being educated at Stratford School from several options open to us, and we have held exploratory discussions with the Department for Education (DfE), South West Region's Team and with other Multi Academy Trusts. These discussions have led us to conclude that the advantages to pupils attending Stratford School from being a member of a larger family of academies, enjoying shared practices and having a broader range of resources and experiences than it is possible for a school of our size is able to offer, would significantly benefit our pupils.

They have also led us to conclude that there would be significantly greater opportunities for pupils and employees to share, benefit from and build common practices based on the larger resources available to a grouping of schools, which includes other inclusive Primary Mainstream Schools, including Church Schools and Special schools.

The Governing Body of Stratford School, with the support of its Senior Leadership Team, is currently considering whether to join BAT and are seeking the views of parents and carers as part of our initial consultations with all stakeholders.

BAT's vision is to be a creative education community opening doors, opening minds and realising potential. BAT's Mission is to ensure that all children and young people are given every opportunity to be engaged, inspired and empowered to enable them to flourish and lead safe and successful lives.

Just as governors believe that there will be significant benefits to pupils and employees of Stratford School, so also do the leaders of BAT believe that inclusion of Stratford School in their family of schools will help them realise their vision of being a centre of excellence for exceptional education and inclusive provision. In particular, through our discussions, Stratford School governors and leaders have found that the ethos and values of BAT are shared by those at Stratford School.

Will Stratford School definitely become an academy?

Following consultation with stakeholders and completion of due diligence, the governing body will first need to confirm that they have resolved that the school should become an academy. For foundation, trust or voluntary schools, they will also need to have obtained the consent of the foundation, trust or diocese to the academy conversion, prior to submitting an application to convert to academy status. The school will then be issued with an academy order; however, the school is not obligated to become an academy until the contract between the governing body and the Department for Education (DfE), known as the Funding Agreement, is signed. The governing body has not begun to negotiate the Funding Agreement with the DfE yet.

<p>The governing body will not sign the Funding Agreement until parents and carers of pupils at and employees at the school have had the opportunity to comment on the proposals</p>

At this stage we welcome your feedback and questions regarding the proposals. **We will also be inviting all parents and carers to a meeting in the school hall on 21.01.25 at 6.00pm** where you will have the opportunity to learn more about the proposals to join BAT and put forward your comments on the proposals.

Employees have been made aware of the proposals and we will be holding a formal meeting where employees will be advised of the formal Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) process.

Any comments or representations which are made about the proposals will be considered by the governing body before a decision is taken to sign the Funding Agreement. Details of how to provide comments and representations are set out below. The governing body will not sign the Funding Agreement unless they are content that conversion would be in the best interests of the school taking account of all of the legal and practical ramifications.

What is a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT)?

A Multi-Academy Trust is a charitable company which is responsible for running two or more academies. The Academy Trust has a master funding agreement with the Department for Education but with separate funding agreements for each individual Academy based on the usual budget formula.

The MAT is also the single employer for employees in all its schools. The MAT may include primary, secondary (including Church Schools) and special schools. There are three levels of governance within a MAT: Members, Trustees and Governors. The MAT Board of Directors has ultimate responsibility for the performance of each academy and for setting the strategic direction of the MAT, and it typically then delegates the day-to-day running of each academy to a Local Governing Committee (LGC).

Stratford School are proposing to join BAT. This means that we will both contribute to and benefit from being a member of a much larger and better resourced grouping of schools, all 100% focussed on benefitting all children, including those with special educational needs and disabilities.

What are the benefits of being part of a Multi-Academy Trust?

In the school's opinion the benefits are numerous:

- being part of a MAT will give Stratford School access to additional resources and support
- Stratford School will have opportunities to work very closely with other schools in the MAT who have a shared ethos and values; including sharing expertise and good practice, coproduction and collaborative working

- Stratford School will benefit from increased capacity, which it may not otherwise have as a Local Authority Maintained School

What does being part of a MAT involve?

BAT will be directly liable for matters such as insurance, employment liabilities, pensions, human resources, finance and health and safety. These responsibilities will be overseen by the MAT Central Services Team, who support all of the schools and provisions within the MAT. Stratford School will pay a contribution towards the Central costs of the MAT, for the services provided.

Will the admissions arrangements change?

BAT can set its own admission arrangements however for children and young people who have an Education Health and Care Plan, the Local Authority decides which pupils should be offered places at the school. The current Stratford School admission arrangements will remain in place. If the MAT wanted to change its admission arrangements consultation would be required.

How will employees be affected?

If the school joins BAT, all employees currently employed by the school will automatically transfer to the MAT on their current pay and conditions, in accordance with the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 ('TUPE'). Although the MAT does have freedom to amend those pay and conditions in the future, any change to pay and conditions would need to be consulted upon with employee representatives.

Will Stratford School change?

We do not intend to change Stratford School except in ways which we think will improve the school even more. For the pupils, it is unlikely that they will see much, if any change in their day to day school lives. MAT's do have the power to vary their Academies' curriculums and vary the length of the school day, however, it is not intended to take any such steps at this stage and we would engage with parents/carers, employees and pupils if we did ever intend to make such changes in the future.

Do we need to consult on our proposals?

The Academies Act 2010 requires a school to consult 'such persons as they think appropriate' on whether the school should be converted into an academy. The statutory requirement does not prescribe who should be consulted or the length of the consultation required, so the general law on consultation applies.

Generally, it is recommended that consultations with all key stakeholders, including parents, employees, pupils, other schools, the local authority and the wider community, take place over a consultation period of about six weeks, before the funding agreement is signed.

Employees will be formally informed/consulted about the transfer of their employment under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 ('TUPE').

What is the process for joining an existing MAT?

Following the completion of consultation, acquiring the required consent from the Diocese and informing the South West Regions Team, the governing body will need to resolve to convert to an academy and the BAT Board of Trustees will need to formally agree to Stratford School joining BAT. The following steps will then take place:

- the school will complete an application to convert to an academy and join an existing MAT; namely BAT
- the employment of the employees of Stratford School will transfer to the MAT in accordance with the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 ('TUPE')
- the assets and contracts of will be transferred from the Local Authority to the MAT under a commercial transfer agreement
- the MAT will need to be given use of the academy school land and buildings, usually either by way of a 125-year lease with the local authority or the transfer of the freehold of the land, as applicable.

Will our Governors' roles change when we join a MAT?

If Stratford School joins BAT, there will be three tiers of governance rather than two. These three tiers will be:

- Members
- Board of Trustees (the Board)
- Local Governing Committees (LGCs) for each academy/school

The current Stratford School governors, will form the Local Governing Committee for the school.

What is a Local Governing Committee?

Within BAT, each academy/school has its own Local Governing Committee (LGC) which include elected staff governors and elected parent/carer governors. These have a similar status to committees of a maintained governing body and have powers delegated to them by the BAT Board which are outlined in a Scheme of Delegation. Whilst the LGCs have delegated authority for the strategic direction and day-to-day running of the academy/school, the BAT Board will be ultimately responsible for all of the academies it runs.

How can I find out more?

A meeting will be held in the school hall on 21.01.25 at 6.00pm. We would encourage you to attend if you have any questions, or simply want to learn more.

If you have any questions and are unable to attend the meeting please e-mail head@stratford-sub-castle.wilts.sch.uk and Mrs Watkins will be happy to assist you.

How can I make representations?

The closing date for representations to be made is 17.01.2025.

Representations can be made in writing to:

Mrs Justine Watkins

Stratford-sub-Castle CE VC Primary School

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SP1 3LL

Or by email to: head@stratford-sub-castle.wilts.sch.uk

Yours sincerely

A Mintram

Andrew Mintram

Chair of Governors

J Watkins

Justine Watkins

Headteacher