

CONVERSION TO ACADEMY STATUS

CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

January 2016

Introduction

Over the last few years it has become clear that academies are here to stay and many other schools in Stoke on Trent have already converted from Local Authority maintained to independent academies. Nearly all secondary schools have already converted to academies as have some primary schools, and the number of local primary schools converting is gathering pace. The governors of Gladstone Primary have been considering our position very carefully and have concluded that it is important for us to engage in this change. In common with many other local primary schools we have been discussing the potential advantages and routes towards Academy status. We have registered an interest with the Department for Education (DfE), met with existing Academy Trusts, attended expert seminars, visited schools that have converted to Academy status, and sought information from numerous sources. Importantly we have been holding discussions with other primary schools about the possibility of joining together to form an Academy comprising a number of like-minded primary schools. It is our desire to join a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) with other schools who share our ethos and vision for the future. Following receiving confirmation from Nicky Morgan, secretary of state for education, that Gladstone Primary school has an Academy order that allows the school to convert to Academy status the governors have now decided that we should consult formally on whether Gladstone Primary School should proceed with an application to the DfE to convert to Academy status.

Consultation Process

The consultation will be carried out with as many stakeholders, staff, parents and pupils as possible to provide the Governors with a clear picture of the school community's views about this potential change.

The final decision on whether or not to convert to Academy status lies entirely with the Governing Body once they have consulted with and considered the views of all the stakeholders mentioned above. Please note that the formal consultation process is now open and will be so until 12pm 21/1/16 and we encourage you to present your support, views, questions and concerns. All submissions received by this date will be considered at a meeting of the full Governing Body. Please submit your views to Mrs Preston either by email to gladstoneprimary.org.uk or in writing to the school's address. Please mark letters and emails 'Academy Consultation' so that they can be quickly forwarded.

In order to inform you as fully as possible, an outline of what academies are is included below. We have also set out our thinking on why we believe that becoming an Academy is right for Gladstone Primary and we've tried to answer some of the questions we think you might have.

What is an Academy?

Academies are schools that are funded directly by the DfE. That means that they have greater freedoms and flexibilities as they are independent from their local authority (LA). Schools that are performing well can apply to become academies.

- Freedom from LA control
- Flexibility in delivering the curriculum

- Greater control of their budget as they are funded directly by the DfE. In particular academies are able to receive and spend money currently held back by the LA for management and services.

Each Academy or group of schools within a single Academy usually takes the legal form of a charitable Academy Trust which holds the ownership of the school's site, and is the conduit for funding. The Trust does not 'own' the school and it cannot make a profit from the wider Academy. The Academy Trust appoints the governing body of each school. Academy Trustees have a legal duty to act in the interests of the Academy. The freedoms, rights and responsibilities of the Trust are set out in a Funding Agreement between the Trust and the Secretary of State. Academy Trusts are 'exempt' charities and are not required to register with the Charity Commission.

Why should Wheelock Primary become an Academy?

As many other schools locally have become Academies so the LA's funding and resources to support those still LA maintained has reduced. Many of the support mechanisms we might benefit from have either been greatly reduced or simply no longer exist. This means that "do nothing" is not an option.

The governors share a vision for Gladstone Primary, and we believe converting to Academy status will provide the greatest chance of allowing us to continue with our current values and ethos. It can be hard to articulate our vision since it involves the "feel" of the school to a considerable degree. But broadly we think that Gladstone Primary is special, as are its staff, and that our ethos of being very inclusive and our location at the heart of this community contribute to what is unique about the school. Our aim is to provide a stimulating learning environment in which children are excited to learn and are given the confidence to achieve their potential. We try to foster strong links between home and school, actively encouraging parents to be closely involved in their child's education. There are a dwindling number of schools that have yet to convert to Academy status, and we judge that if we do not take action on this issue now we may well lose control over our future destiny as current government policy is that all schools will become academies. We have concluded that the best chance of preserving all that is special about us is to embrace the opportunity of converting to an Academy as part of a Multi Academy Trust, enabling us to form partnerships in the future with other like minded schools. Following receiving support from the Local Authority and reviewing several potential Multi Academy Trust possible partners the Governing Body have decided that should a decision to convert be made the trust that they would like to join would be The Societas Trust.

The advantages to Gladstone Primary School joining the Learning for Life Partnership

In addition to preserving as much of our independence as possible, there are a number of practical advantages:

- The schools would continue to function with the same leadership structure as it does currently.
- The school will be joining a MAT with similar ethos and objectives.

- As an Academy we would be required to offer a broad and balanced curriculum, as we do now, including Maths, English and Science. We would not be required to adopt the National Curriculum. Although we are likely to continue to use the National Curriculum as our guiding document, there may be benefits in this flexibility that we would wish to explore in the future. These flexibilities may allow teachers to exercise more fully their professional judgment in the topics and context in which they teach their subjects and may allow children access to more personalised routes and opportunities.
- If we became an Academy we would receive a £25,000 grant from the DfE to support the conversion process and we judge this to be more than adequate to cover all that will be necessary.
- Academies have control of all of their spending. We would be better able to ensure our focus and investment in the core business of the school – teaching and learning. We would be better able to ensure better value for money both in the services that we choose to buy in to support ourselves and being able to negotiate services as part of a group.
- Managing budgets becomes more transparent as the funding becomes aligned to an academic year rather than the financial year.
- Importantly, as more and more local schools have become academies we have seen the support provided centrally by the LA dwindle and we believe that this trend will continue and accelerate. To be one of the very last schools depending on LA support, which by then may be minimal, would pose a real threat to our school. In contemplating the move to Academy status, our vision for Gladstone Primary School is to work in partnership with other like-minded primary schools. We feel that we will be able to use the strengths of each to maximise the opportunities available to provide the best education for all children educated within the partnership and to develop and maintain the highest standards of teaching. We will strive to retain our current ethos whilst recognising and respecting the individual qualities of each school in the partnership.

Potential risks to becoming an Academy

- There will be leadership, administration and support time needed during the application and conversion process. After conversion there will be additional time and responsibilities placed on our financial and business management staff.
- There will be costs involved in conversion, although these will be covered by the conversion grant available to all schools going through the process.
- There could, in theory, be potential additional financial liabilities. For example, we will become fully liable for the cost of maintaining our buildings; however, in practice we are already responsible for most of these costs now. Currently we 'bid' for money from the Local Authority to refurbish and repair our buildings. We would continue to bid for funding, however we would be bidding to the Education Funding Agency.

What would not change?

Very little if anything will change in the day to day running of Gladstone Primary School. Keeping all that is special about us is one of the drivers for conversion. Children and staff should not notice any differences.

We will be able to set our own admissions policy from 2016. We do not intend to alter radically the basis of selection admissions and intend to remain a welcoming and inclusive school.

Initially there will be no immediate or significant changes in our curriculum delivery. We would expect any changes that come about because of Academy freedoms to be gradual and evolutionary.

The governors are committed to retaining the existing 'Gladstone' name, but would change slightly to become Gladstone Primary Academy.

There will still be a Governing Body – with governors drawn, as now, from a range of backgrounds.

There will still be an opportunity for elected parents to join the governing body. Academies have a range of explicit freedoms not available to LA schools including setting the pay and conditions of staff and term dates of students. However, the governors of Gladstone Primary School are committed to adhering to national agreements on pay and conditions.

It should also be noted that the employment rights of all current members of staff will be protected by TUPE, the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations. This means that these employment rights will transfer to the Academy Trust under the same terms and conditions of employment. Pension rights and continuity of service record will be preserved.

The school will be subject to the exact same regime and cycle of Ofsted inspections.

The Local Authority retains a monitoring role for all maintained schools in their area including academies.

Please submit your views by noon on Thursday, 18th February

Email: gladstoneprimary.org.uk

Post: in writing to the Office addressed to Mrs Preston referenced Academy