



# Dartington C of E Primary & Nursery School

## Academy Conversion Consultation

### Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)



The information in this fact sheet is intended to help answer some of the questions which may arise when considering conversion to academy status. This information cannot in any way replace the informal conversations and formal consultation that takes place during the conversion process.

#### THE LEARNING ACADEMY PARTNERSHIP (MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST)

##### How would becoming an academy and joining the Trust benefit Dartington C of E Primary & Nursery School?

Since July 2019 Dartington and the Learning Academy Partnership have worked together in Management Partnership. This is a time limited arrangement that has included the deployment of a Headteacher and Executive Headteacher, teaching, family support IT and admin staff as well as governance support, safeguarding, school improvement delivery, financial support, HR and the continuing professional development of staff. Formalising this partnership by converting to academy status as part of the Learning Academy Partnership will mean that Dartington will continue to benefit from being a partner and be supported by the Trust.

There will be numerous benefits that will ensure the sustained success of the school:

- **Stronger Leadership:** School leaders can combine their knowledge and planning abilities to work on challenges and solutions together.
- **Focus on what really matters:** Without the distraction of having to manage business services including: finances, buildings, resourcing, IT services, legals, payroll, HR, staff professional development, and other associated services and challenges, Heads and school leaders can focus all their time on: the children, teaching and learning, parental and community partnerships.
- **Strategic Management:** Governors and trustees can draw on each other's experience to formulate strategic approaches.
- **Shared Staffing, talent and expertise :** Staff within a Trust can work across multiple sites. This can solve the recruitment crisis of finding high quality staff as well as support staff retention by offering more varied opportunities to staff. 98% of Trust staff said that they are proud to work within the Trust. This results in the retention of high quality ambitious staff.
- **Financial Security:** The Trust benefits from significant additional revenue through our work as a: Teaching School; National English Hub and National Support School. This is reinvested across all our schools for the benefit of all children.
- **Specialist Resources:** With combined funding, specialist knowledge can be bought in many different areas, spanning academic, extra-curricular and operational functions.
- **Curriculum enrichment** through partnership working and shared resources provide richer educational experiences and wider opportunities for the pupils

- **Professional Development:** continued opportunities to share best practice and professional development programmes, otherwise inaccessible, adding real value to the education of all pupils
- **Economies of Scale: A Trust is able to purchase as a whole, thereby achieving economies of scale not achievable by schools as individuals. With ever tightening budgets, this can help schools maintain and build upon the resources and standards they aspire to.**

### What is the Learning Academy Partnership (South West)?

The Learning Academy Partnership (South West) is a charitable Trust consisting of a family of local aspirational schools; a Teaching School Alliance and a National English Hub. The Learning Academy Partnership was established in the Summer of 2012 from its origins at Ilsham C of E Academy working as a National Support School.

There are currently eight schools working in partnership within the Trust, and a Nursery/Childcare Centre. These include:

- Ilsham C of E Academy, Torquay
- Ellacombe C of E Academy, Torquay
- Little Stars Nursery and Childcare Centre, Torquay
- All Saints Marsh C of E Academy, Newton Abbot
- Warberry C of E Academy, Torquay
- All Saints' Thurlestone C of E Academy, South Hams
- West Alvington C of E Academy, South Hams
- Charleton C of E Academy, South Hams
- Dunsford Community Academy, Teign Valley
- St Michaels C of E Academy, Paignton, which opens in September 2021

The Vision and Core purpose of the Trust schools is to **Transform Children's Lives** by working together as a values led family of exceptional schools, delivering an entitlement to a world class education across all local communities and where every child flourishes. The Trust believes that every young person, regardless of their background or context, can achieve and exceed the highest of expectations. The Trust, without exception, delivers that promise. The Trust's approach is to 'do what it takes' to remove all barriers to learning, so that together we really do **Transform Children's Lives**.

The inclusive ethos of the Trust aligns with the inclusive ethos of Dartington.

### How can we be assured that the Trust has ethical and sound financial approaches and procedures?

The financial position of the Trust is scrutinised monthly by the Trust Finance Manager, Trust Executive Team, Finance and Audit Committee and the Board. All spending decisions are made with children at the forefront of everything we do. The Trust is very proud of our high standards of financial management and control as assessed by both internal and external annual audits. This has been consistent since 2012 when the Trust was established.

The most recent financial and systems governance was recognised as a **'high standard'** by our internal audit (Devon Audit Partnership) in June 2020. The November 2020 audit carried out by Griffin Accountants reported the following:

*"From our testing of the systems and controls around the response to recruitment & selection, financial budgeting & monitoring, internal control framework, anti-fraud framework and governance and regularity we have not identified any recommendations."*

This maintains the Trust's year-on-year audit outcomes and in line with external audits since 2012-2016 (Francis Clarke LLP) and annually 2017-2020(Thompson Jenner LLP).

## TEACHING & THE CURRICULUM

### What will be the benefits to my child's education? Aren't things fine as they are?

Information was shared with parents throughout the past four terms, things had not been great at the school and the Trust has enabled the improvements for the children. Parents have already told the school about the improvements which they can see e.g teaching a wider curriculum and not just focusing on Maths and English; increased opportunities with Forest School; improving how children are learning to read so that they can unlock learning; our improved Early Years provision, introducing family support service for families and much more.

However the Trust needs to ensure that these changes not only keep happening but are sustained into the future so that Dartington never fails its children again. Working as a partnership of schools means the school will always have the expertise, support and resources that it needs.

### Will the school be able to set its own Curriculum?

Academies can offer a more flexible curriculum, but they are required to provide a 'balanced and broadly-based offer' in line with the National Curriculum. The teaching of Maths, English and scientific skills would, of course, remain central to the core offer as well as a wider range of curriculum subjects such as Art, Music, PE, Relationships and Health Education, Geography, History, Design and Technology, languages and Information Technology. Forest School would be an offer above and beyond the curriculum expectations distinct for Dartington.

Being a church school, RE would remain a key subject and would feed through daily Acts of Worship, the values and Christian vision of the school. The teachers and governors will work with the Trust to implement the curriculum to best meet the needs of its pupils using the freedoms available to it.

### Will our responsibilities in relation to SEND and exclusions change?

No. Responsibilities as an academy in relation to SEND and exclusions will be just the same as they are now. The Trust would continue to provide the same support for pupils with a statement of special educational needs and indeed the funding for this element continues to be provided by

the Local Authority. The Local Authority retains its responsibility for statutory duties, obligations and procedures remain in place when a school converts to academy status.

### **Can a child with an Educational Health & Care Plan nominate an academy as their school of choice?**

Yes. Schools converting to academy status can retain the admissions criteria they currently use. These arrangements and related processes must at all times comply with the School Admissions Code.

### **Since the school has been supported by the Trust there has been a greater focus on Collective Worship and RE and not all parents support this. Why has the Trust introduced this?**

Dartington has always been a Church school and collective worship forms an integral part of this offer inviting all pupils to take part in daily reflection. As a Church school, we are distinctive by our Christian vision and values through which children are encouraged to grow, flourish and dream big and with support from the Trust it has continued to develop its distinctive Christian ethos. We welcome children of all faiths and none.

The teaching of RE is a statutory requirement for all schools and the development of this has been through the curriculum offer: it is not a Trust offer. What is said and what is lived is an invitation to pupils to make choices for themselves about how they feel and view the world around them. It encourages their feelings of belonging, difference and an understanding of global matters enabling them to make informed choices and educating them to respect other faiths.

### **I've noticed a change in the provision for SEND children. How do the Trust ensure that children who face significant barriers receive the highest quality of provision?**

The provision for SEND children has been improved across the school during this partnership. Although we have identified further areas of development, SEND children are now safe and making progress from their starting points. The offer of education for children at Dartington was not inclusive and there was little equity of provision for pupils, due to support from across the Trust more children are now getting the provision and funding that they need to achieve the best that they can and flourish in their day.

### **Why don't we have a teaching assistant in every class? Is that because academies do not provide this?**

In all schools teaching assistants are strategically placed across the school to support the most vulnerable who receive funding to access learning. There is no link to the amount of teaching assistants and whether schools are an academy. The allocation of support staff is solely dictated by the funding from the local authority for vulnerable children. Sometimes it falls that some classes do not have any children with teaching assistant support and some classes have two or three teaching assistants working with children for different parts of the day.

### **Our concern is that joining a Trust means Dartington will lose it's distinctiveness and everything will become corporate?**

As a Trust, one of our 6 principles for our schools is Distinctiveness. We embrace, encourage and celebrate the uniqueness of each of our schools, recognising the context of the community that it serves and the curriculum that it offers to meet those needs. An example of this would be the curriculum offer of Forest School that is unique to Dartington and this would be something that as a Trust we would nurture and not lose.

### **How will you support parents and vulnerable children after conversion?**

Parents have told the school that they have already improved the amount of timely communication to help parents know what is happening. The Trust has introduced consultations, coffee mornings and questionnaires to ensure that parent voice supports what they do.

The Trust has also provided a Family Support service so that the school can help families when they need it. Parents have told the school they value the support from Mr Trewinnard and things such as food hampers and Christmas hampers have been well received.

In terms of children with Special Educational Needs, the Trust has ensured that Mrs Stubbles has a sole role of SENDCo and last year the Trust gave additional support through Miss Priestley.

The children also benefit from the expertise and skills which sit in the Trust wide team of SENDCos. The Trust is committed to supporting all children, including the most vulnerable.

### **Will our school be subjected to the same policies and approaches as the other schools in the Trust, which are all very different? Will we stop being individuals?**

One of the Trust's Principles of Excellence is Distinctiveness. The Trust's schools are not carbon copies of each other. They serve communities in both rural and urban areas and both affluent and deprived communities. Each community has a different need and therefore each school tailors what they do to meet the needs of the community which they serve.

### **Outdoor learning is very important to our child? Does the Trust value this or will my child experience a curriculum which is purely Maths and English?**

Dartington sits in a wonderful environment and outdoor learning is very important to parents. The Trust has started by improving the Forest School provision and how often children access it, and will continue to improve this.

There is still more to do. The curriculum plans are underpinned by the local environment and there are plans which enable the children to learn in their environment. We are of course limited at present due to a global pandemic.

The Trust will balance the curriculum with the basic skills that children need to be able to access the curriculum and ensure future choices with a rich curriculum which is threaded with outdoor learning opportunities.

### **How does the Trust support the development of wellbeing and mental health for pupils?**

Unhappy children cannot learn, it is that simple. The Trust approaches this in a number of ways including the Relationships and Health Education curriculum, how we use collective worship to support wellbeing and we also have specialist interventions and support for children when they need it. It is also about the culture we have in school where children are valued and celebrated.

**The Trust is in the Top10 performing Trusts in 2019 and academic outcomes are high. Does this mean children have a narrow curriculum which only prepares them for tests and exams?**

No! The basic skills in maths, reading and writing are important because they unlock the curriculum and enable children to access all sorts of exciting avenues. We have to remember that without these basic skills children are disadvantaged in the education system and it can remove their choices about their careers and journeys as an adult.

Children get one shot at primary education and often any gaps that are not closed when they reach secondary school is too late. The Trust wants our children to flourish in all that they do and basic skills help this.

That said the Trust wants to inspire the next generation of artists, medical professionals, authors, sports champions....the sky should be the limit. This can only happen by exposing them to a rich curriculum where they apply their basic skills but also develop new skills which may inspire them when they leave education. The Trust wants all children to flourish and lead happy successful lives and the Trust wants to fulfil the role that primary schools can plan in that.

**PERSONNEL**

**How will being an academy affect staff?**

After conversion, all staff at the school will be employed by the Learning Academy Partnership. Staff are legally protected by the TUPE regulations to transfer under the same employment terms and conditions, including pensions.

**How will union membership (NUT, NASUWT, Unison, etc) work?**

Union recognition would remain as it currently stands; all employees are entitled to be part of a union.

**Do we have enough support staff to cope with the change of status?**

As the school is proposing to join the Trust, many of the additional tasks associated with conversion and academy status are met by the Trust. It is not anticipated that further support staff would be required. However, the Governing Body would keep this under review.

**How do the staff feel about conversion as part of the Trust?**

Staff have already been working with the Trust through the Management Partnership and experienced the benefits of joining the Trust not only for the children but how they are supported as staff, both professionally and personally.

Staff are fully involved in the discussions regarding conversion, and consultation meetings for staff are being held to answer questions both about the process and being part of the Trust. The views of staff are held in the highest regard by the governors and school leaders. Ensuring that all viewpoints are listened to and all concerns addressed is a critical part of the conversion process.

**I've heard that academies do not need to employ qualified teachers? Will unqualified people be teaching our children?**

All of the teachers in the Trust are qualified and there are no plans to change this.

**Is it true that when a school joins a Trust it removes all of the current staff and replaces them with staff from their academy schools?**

Dartington has an amazing staff team who are achieving brilliant things with the children. Since the beginning of this partnership, due to staff vacancies and because of the school improvement needs at Dartington, 10 members of Trust staff are already deployed as members of teaching or support staff as part of the Dartington team. We want staff to stay as part of the Trust and ensure stability for the school. We would not want to lose a single member of staff. Quite simply, this is not an approach adopted by the Trust, we believe in nurturing and developing staff.

**Academies can pay their staff whatever they want? Will our teachers and staff have a pay cut?**

Teachers within our Trust will have at least the same Teachers Pay and Conditions as if they were in a Local Authority school and they are never disadvantaged. The Trust pays teachers in line with or above the nationally designated pay scales. We value our staff and want to support their development and growth.

## **ADMISSIONS**

**How will admissions to Dartington be affected?**

When a school becomes an Academy it also becomes an admission authority responsible for its own admission arrangements. As the school is joining a Trust, the Trust will be the admissions authority and will continue to be required to adopt clear and fair admission arrangements in line with the admissions law and the School Admissions Code.

The Trust will manage the admissions process including regularly publishing the Academy's admissions policy. Any changes to the policy will need consultation in line with the School Admissions Code.

**Will the school remain non-selective?**

Yes - we remain non-selective. Trusts are required to follow the law and guidance on admissions, special educational needs and exclusions as if they were Local Authority maintained schools. It is the aim of the Trust to ensure that all of our schools provide high quality, inclusive education for

local children.

## FINANCE

### Does the school have to cover the full cost to convert to an academy?

No. The Department for Education pays a grant of £25,000 and the conversion will not impact on the school's normal budget.

### Will we get more money as an academy?

We receive the same amount of per-pupil funding as they would receive from the Local Authority as a maintained school. We also receive additional funding in the form of the Education Services Grant to cover the services that are no longer provided by the council and to cover the costs of academy status. Dartington will however, benefit from joint savings and access to shared resources, expertise and opportunities for pupils that would not have previously been possible.

### What savings can be made?

The Trust has greater opportunities to procure services and negotiate discounts from suppliers which can then be passed on to schools, such as via energy bills and staff absence insurance packages, as well as providing centralised services such as Finance, HR and IT.

Some local authorities retain an amount of school's funding under the heading of de-delegation but this no longer happens after conversion.

### How will the school be accountable financially?

An academy is governed by the rules and regulations for charitable trusts, e.g. the Trust will be required to produce and file accounts and trustees cannot be paid. There will continue to be robust systems with annual audits conducted by external independent auditors.

### Who would own the land and buildings?

The land and buildings remain in their current ownership, ie. Exeter Diocese, but are made available to the school via a 125-year lease and/or a supplemental agreement.



## GOVERNANCE

### What are the expected changes to the Governing Body?

On the day of conversion, the school's Governing Body would cease to operate and a new Local Ethos & Governance Committee (LEG) would be established in its place, as a committee of the Board of Trustees. With the consent of the Governors, they are transitioned to the new Local Ethos & Governance Committee with delegated responsibilities through a Scheme of Delegation. The day-to-day operational responsibilities remain are matters for the Headteacher and Trust leadership staff.

### Will the change to academy status change the demands on Governors, and how will we find the right governors with the necessary skills, experience and time?

Being part of the Trust means that the Board of Trustees will have the necessary range of skills required at a strategic level in line with the requirements under the Companies Act, therefore the roles and responsibilities of the LEG Members will not be any more demanding.

Recruiting and retaining governors with key skills and experience remains a key task for all schools and the Trust is committed to supporting governors in their role through training and advice.

## PARENT VOICE

### As part of a larger Trust, how would parent voice continue to shape the direction of the school?

Parent voice plays an important role in the journey of the school. There is parent representation on the Local Ethos & Governance Committee as you would have on a maintained school governing body. We will continue to do all the normal activities that involve parents in school life and continue to offer forums and coffee mornings and use strategies such as parent questionnaires.

### How will you ensure that parents are valued and remain part of the educational journey of their child?

Since the beginning of this partnership, Dartington has adopted many of the strategies we use in the Trust. Parent relationships are key to your child's development and we will continue to have formal opportunities to meet both Mrs Huish and the leaders as well as formal reporting opportunities throughout the year, as well as being available daily on the school gate. Teacher availability for parents will continue (pending COVID restrictions) and once COVID is over we will continue to have numerous community events and workshops so that parents feel part of the school community.