



Worplesdon  
Primary School

Envis Way, Fairlands,  
Worplesdon, Guildford  
Surrey, GU3 3NL

Consultation on potential Academy conversion joining the Bright Futures Learning Trust

Frequently asked questions **\*UPDATED**

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**\*UPDATED 8<sup>th</sup> July 2021 in response to questions received during consultation with parents/carers, staff, the local community and other stakeholders**



## Academies and the Conversion Process

### What is an Academy

An academy is an independent state school that is run by an academy trust. The academy trust enters into an agreement with the Secretary of State for Education that sets out its responsibilities and accountabilities for the effective running of the academy. The academy is funded directly by the Government and is no longer run by the Local Authority. The academy trust is given charitable exemption, which means it must operate much like a charity.

### What is a multi-academy trust (MAT)?

A multi-academy trust (MAT) has two or more academies as members.

### Why would a school want to convert as part of a multi-academy trust?

A MAT, as a single legal entity, allows schools to achieve strong collaboration and to use this collaboration and accountability to drive up school standards. Having the MAT as employer of staff also allows flexibility around sharing resources to meet the needs of the individual schools involved. The MAT can also provide a clear, consistent strategy and vision across a group of schools working together. MATs can often negotiate contracts and services that achieve much better value for money than if each school was to negotiate individually.

### Is this the right time to consider converting to an Academy?

Yes. The Government is actively looking at how to get more schools to join MATs over the next five years. The school's Governing Body must consider the option to convert as part of our duty to improve the quality of education we can provide for our pupils.

### **\*UPDATED In light of the removal of 'enforced' academisation, is it still a requirement or expectation that schools will have to convert?**

Although the government has decided to no longer impose a deadline for schools to become an academy, or to have the process in place to become an academy, by 2020, it is still advocating that all schools become an academy. In the most recent government paper, "By 2025 we want to see far more schools residing in strong families than we do today, and are actively looking at how we can make that happen."

### Has the decision to convert to an Academy already been made?

No. Until the views of our parents, staff, the local community and other stakeholders of our school have been obtained, a final decision will not be made. The Governing Board has to weigh up both the pros and cons of Academy conversion.

### How long does it take for a school to become an Academy?

Most schools are able to convert to academy status in around 5-9 months after achieving the initial approval to proceed from the Department for Education.

### Which MAT is it proposed that we join?

Bright Futures Learning Trust (BFLT), a local MAT currently comprising the following schools:

- Goldsworth Primary School
- St. John's Primary School



- Knaphill Infant and Junior Schools

### **Will the admissions policy change?**

As an academy, the Local Governing Body will be the admissions authority for the school. The only change will be that the Local Authority cannot direct a child to join our school. If any changes are proposed in the future to admission arrangements there would be a full consultation prior to any changes being made. We will continue to publish our admission arrangements on our website well in advance of each academic year.

The Local Authority retains responsibility for co-ordination of admission arrangements for entry into Year R, year 3 and for our COIN (the Haven).

### **Do schools need to consult before converting?**

Yes. All schools are required to carry out a consultation but it is up to each school to decide whom and how to consult. There is no legally specified length of time for the consultation and schools have flexibility in how it is conducted. We are currently consulting with parents, staff, local schools and the local community.

### **How does the governing body consult with stakeholders?**

A consultation document will be shared with all stakeholders with follow up meetings to take viewpoints and answer questions. During the process a FAQ will be kept up to date on the school's website.

### **What does the conversion process involve?**

The key steps we must take are as follows:

- The Governing Body formally agrees to consult on becoming an academy and within which MAT
- Secure approval, in principle, from the Local Authority to convert to academy status
- Obtain the Secretary of State's initial consent by securing an "Academy Order"
- Carry out the necessary consultation and decide to proceed
- Agree a supplementary funding agreement with the DfE and BFLT;
- Ensure that the school site is made available to the Academy Trust via leases and/or supplemental agreements
- Ensure that financial systems are in place to manage funding
- Transfer, renew or procure new contracts, service level agreements and licences and purchase insurance as appropriate
- Transfer under TUPE all contract arrangements for staff. This is a formal legal consultation process which is separate from the consultation with all stakeholders. This would not start until after the vote by the Governing Body to apply for academy status
- Agree and transfer surplus balances held by LA to the academy
- Ensure appropriate admissions policies are in place.



**\*UPDATED Has the school already registered its interest in becoming an academy?**

The school has registered interest with the Regional Schools Commissioner. This was done to understand the conversion process and options pre-application. The RSC project lead does not engage until an application to convert is made. We have not made an application as we believe to do so would pre-suppose the outcome of consultation, which we are engaging with openly and fully.

**\*UPDATED Is the consultation process including the local community, local education authority, staff and union(s)?**

We are consulting with staff, parents and carers, prospective/incoming parents and carers, local schools and Freemantle's, the Local Authority and the Unions. Through our website and in all communications, we are open to hearing from all other local community views. We are following all statutory DfE guidance. It should be recognised however that we have not made an application to convert, and therefore secondary consultations and due diligence in specific areas will follow at the relevant stage, should that be decided.

## Staffing

**What happens to staff contracts?**

All staff are entitled to transfer, under TUPE regulations, to the Academy with their same terms and conditions as at present.

**Can academies alter the pay and conditions of employees?**

When a school converts to a new academy, employees are entitled to transfer under the same employment terms and conditions. There is a legal process to go through, which is called TUPE, whereby staff maintain existing pay, conditions and length of service. Any alterations can only be made as they would have been by the Council (for example, changes to pay and annual leave negotiated with employee's representatives). This position will continue unless the contract of employment is varied with the agreement of the employee.

It's important to note that there are no plans to alter the pay and conditions of staff. Any changes made nationally would apply.

**\*UPDATED Teachers will still be required to hold Qualified Teacher/NQT/ECT status**

**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.

**How do the staff feel about conversion?**

Staff are being fully involved in the discussion regarding conversion. Meetings for staff with representatives from BFLT 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.

**\*UPDATED Should we be expecting a leadership change in the School?**

As part of our planned 'outward facing school' strategy, it is proposed, subject to contract, that Mrs O'Brien will support BFLT and Goldsworth Primary School in an acting Executive Headteacher (EHT) role on a part time basis for



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the Autumn term 2021/2022. This will mean that the existing leadership team shall be offered the opportunity to step up into acting Head of School and acting Deputy Headteacher roles for the duration, and additional Assistant Headteacher roles are currently advertised for internal applicants.

**\*UPDATED What does the role of Executive Head Teacher (EHT) involve?**

It is proposed that the EHT will initially be seconded to BFLT for 3 days per week and will remain at Worplesdon for 2 days per week, for the duration of the Autumn term. This provides the opportunity for Worplesdon to work with BFLT at a strategic level prior to full academy conversion. This will be reviewed regularly and as the role evolves and the academy Heads of School at both Worplesdon and Goldsworth gain confidence, the EHT role will develop into a wider trust improvement role.



## Pupils and the Curriculum

### **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 curriculum'. We believe that Worplesdon has already significantly invested in the design and implementation of an exciting curriculum that meets the needs of our children. We will continue to review and adapt this curriculum annually.

**\*UPDATED** BFLT has confirmed they follow the National Curriculum, but within this, each school's curriculum must be tailored to meet the needs of its own children, so they aren't necessarily all the same.

### **What would happen to SEN provision?**

We would continue to provide the same support for pupils with an EHCP 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.

### **Will academies be free from Ofsted inspections?**

No, academies remain fully under Ofsted's inspection arrangements.

**\*UPDATED We have great faith in school leadership and have continued to improve our own pupil outcomes. How do we ensure that this is not 'diluted' when joining with a Trust including schools with outcomes that are less good?**

School executive leadership has identified that for Worplesdon School to continue to drive further improvement in outcomes, the school needs to engage in authentic collaboration with other schools and leverage the benefits that drives to higher quality teaching and learning. Working with a wider group offers staff further opportunities and aids retention and growth. Worplesdon School has invested significantly in teacher and staff development in recent years and the capacity exists now to support wider development.



## Finance

### **What is the financial impact of becoming an academy?**

There are two aspects to the financial impact of academy conversion – the impact on how an academy is funded, and the impact on the amount available to spend (additional costs or potential savings).

### **How are academies funded?**

Academies receive the same level of per-pupil funding as they would receive from the Local Authority as a maintained school. Most school funding will come directly to the multi-academy trust (MAT) from central government and is then passed on to the academy after a proportion is retained – the amount retained and how that is managed differs from MAT to MAT. Most of the funding is received in monthly instalments, and so managing cashflow is a new and important responsibility for both MATs and their academies. SEN and Early Years funding still comes to the academy directly from the local authority.

### **What extra costs are there?**

All MATs must retain some proportion of its academies funding to pay for the staff and resources they need to provide services and support to their academies – this is often referred to as a service charge, retention or top slice. The amount retained will vary from MAT to MAT as will the level of service provision.

### **What savings can be made?**

- Some local authorities such as Surrey retain an amount of school's funding under the heading of de-delegation – this no longer happens after conversion.
- The amount payable by the school for non-teaching staff's pensions contributions will differ from the LA rate.
- Some costs previously met from the school's budget may be paid for from the service charge. Some examples are subscriptions, IT licence fees and school improvement support.
- The larger the MAT the greater the opportunity to negotiate discounts from suppliers which can then be passed on to academies, such as via energy bills and staff absence insurance packages.

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

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

### **Will there be a capital fund or a specific grant for insurance to cover for emergencies in academies?**

Academies are required to cover insurance at specified minimum levels of cover. BFLT will ensure that the necessary insurance is in place through the Government's approved insurance scheme (Risk Protection Arrangement).

### **Who would own the land and buildings?**

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

### **Will we retain the existing financial systems?**



The financial system will change to better reflect the requirements of an Academy trust and meet the company accounts requirements.

**How would we get a capital building project carried out?**

BFLT will be part of a pooled capital funding scheme co-ordinated through the Trust who are awarded an annual allocation from the Department for Education for schools. This is allocated to schools based on the condition survey, which is updated as part of the conversion process.

The school will continue to receive an annual devolved formula capital (DFC) allocation for small capital projects as we do currently.

**\*UPDATED BFLT has recently secured significant (£400k+) CIF funding for works at St. Johns Primary, and previously for both St. Johns and Goldsworth.**

**What about the financial impact? I've heard that you need to pay a % of budget to the Trust.**

This is true. The school would receive a small uplift based on the central funding but would be asked to contribute more than this to the Trust services. Typically, this is in the 3-5% range and this is set currently with BFLT at 4%. This number itself though only tell part of the picture as the impact depends on what services can be provided through the trust rather than procured or bought in by the school directly. This activity is being worked on by the Board and Trust and an outline financial impact statement will be made available.

**\*UPDATED Is there the potential to save money through joint training and other initiatives?**

The potential does exist to capitalise on shared services models over time and through sharing the costs of external consultancy, training and continuing professional development.

**Would we be able to buy services such as HR and payroll more cheaply if the school was not buying from the local authority?**

BFLT will procure some services on behalf of schools in the Trust and will be able to negotiate better deals for a group of schools. The Governing Body will be able to procure services from a wider range of providers (and can continue to buy some services from the Local Authority – where they are still available).

**\*UPDATED I understand that dealing with funding and procurement are two activities that are quite different under an academy model and may require additional resource. How is this addressed in the proposal?**

Due to the change in the legal structure this is correct, and further detail can be found in Part 2 and Part 4 of the Academy Trust Handbook 2021 ([https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/60c8d0318fa8f57ce8c4621e/Academy\\_trust\\_handbook\\_2021.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/60c8d0318fa8f57ce8c4621e/Academy_trust_handbook_2021.pdf)). Bright Futures Learning Trust confirmed that their central team includes the accounting function, to satisfy the statutory requirements and processes, and that support, training and guidance shall be provided to the School Business Manager role.





## Governance

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

On the day of conversion, our Governing Body would cease to operate and a new Local Governing Body (LGB) will 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 LGB, who will be responsible for the day-to-day operational matters in the school, just as the current Governing Body acts.

### **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 BFLT 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 and the roles and responsibilities of the LGB Members will not be any more demanding. Recruiting and retaining governors with key skills and experience remains a key task for all schools and BFLT are committed to supporting governors in their role through training and advice.

### **\*UPDATED Does the BFLT Board of Trustees have any current vacancies, and if so, will these be available to the Worplesdon School community?**

BFLT has vacancies on its board of Trustees. The BFLT Members would welcome applications from Worplesdon School board members who are experienced governors or those with director level experience in the business/charity sectors. The board has particular need of individuals with skills in law, HR and marketing at this time. Appointment is at the discretion of the Members. BFLT currently has 5 members which is the DfE ideal number. Members do not have a term of office and remain members until they resign.

BFLT Board of Trustees can have up to 12 trustees and currently have 7. Their terms of office are for 4 years and they have all been appointed since February 2019 when the governance of the trust was reconstituted.



## Bright Futures Learning Trust (BFLT)

### **How many academies are there in BFLT, and how many are there planned to be?**

BFLT currently has the following schools:

- Goldsworth Primary
- St Johns Primary
- Knaphill Infant & Junior Schools

BFLT are not a fast-growing trust but are aiming to grow to 8-9 schools so that they are able to benefit from economies of scale.

### **\*UPDATED Are BFLT schools fully subscribed?**

Surrey admissions projected numbers for the area are falling, however, currently the schools in the trust are going against the trend. BFLT are expecting to have full Reception year groups in both Goldsworth and St. John's and that these schools are at or near capacity over the next three years (626/630, and 198/210 respectively). Knaphill Federation is expected to be around 88% of capacity over the next three year period (553/630).

### **Does the school have to change its name and uniform?**

No, with BFLT there is no requirement for us to make any changes to the school name, logo or uniform. Should we decide to convert to academy status there is no plan to change the school name or the uniform requirements.

### **What will happen to local links and partnerships that our school already has?**

These will continue. By joining BFLT it does not stop us from being part of local partnerships which are for the benefit of the school.

### **\*UPDATED Will WPS lose its identity, or any changes to its ethos and values planned?**

Bright Futures Learning Trust has in part been selected as an ideal partner as all schools retain their identity – you can get an appreciation of this by looking at the individual school's websites. Analysis completed already shows there is close alignment on our shared ethos and vision. BFLT have confirmed that on the surface, initially very little outward change would be visible (no changes to branding, signage, uniforms etc)

### **\*UPDATED Is there a benefit to size – what is the 'critical mass'?**

There is research and discussion not only on the size, but other factors of high performing trusts. These look at the phase make up (primary only or mixed), geographical clustering, degree of standardisation etc. Based on research we feel that a Trust should look to grow to 8-9 schools optimally to reach some economies of scale, and further subject to clustering, capacity, and the right structures in place if this in the best interests of the pupils. Further guidance can be found at

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/987336/Building\\_strong\\_academy\\_trusts\\_guidance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/987336/Building_strong_academy_trusts_guidance.pdf)

### **\*UPDATED If economies of scale arise at a larger number of schools, is there an opportunity to achieve this if many of the local schools are already in MATs?**



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It would be a challenge in the immediate vicinity but opportunities do exist. Due to the renewed focus on conversion, it is also possible that other small school converters in reasonable geographical vicinity may cluster and convert and join, in order to achieve the benefits of doing so.

**\*UPDATED Are there any other schools in the consultation period to potentially join BFLT?**

There are no other schools currently consulting to join BFLT at this time. Informal conversations have taken place with two other schools, however, BFLT confirmed these are by no means necessarily going to lead to further expansion at this time.

Part of the Regional Schools Commissioner's (RSC) role is to consider whether a MAT has the capacity to take on additional schools at the point when a school registers its interest in joining a MAT. This is to prevent the potential for growing too quickly and to ensure new schools are sufficiently supported upon joining a MAT.

**\*UPDATED Are you able to ensure that all future schools joining the Trust will be primary, and not secondary, schools?**

BFLT's current vision is focussed on primary schools only. Whilst it isn't possible to guarantee this remains the case in perpetuity, BFLT has indicated there would need to be a very compelling reason to consider the possibility of a secondary school joining the Trust.