



Dear Parent/Carer,

Re: Mildmay Junior School and Mildmay Infant & Nursery School – joining a Multi-Academy Trust

Just before the summer break the governing bodies of both Mildmay Junior School and Mildmay Infants took separate votes to make an application to join the Bridge Academy Trust. The votes followed a long period of investigation by both governing bodies and we now feel that being part of the trust will greatly benefit the children who attend both schools.

The Bridge Academy Trust is a small local trust that includes Moulsham High School, Oaklands Infants School, as well as a high school and three primaries in Ongar. It is committed to provide a continuous high quality education for the children in the community, right through their school life, from the age of 3 to 19. Its aim is to draw on the strength of the community and the best bits of all the schools to improve every school in the Trust.

We feel there are many benefits for the Mildmay Schools in joining a multi-academy trust, not least the capacity for the schools and staff to work much more closely with each other. This family of schools will ensure the best provision, care and support for your children and for those who will attend in the future. There is also increased financial security for the schools in this community during uncertain times in education.

The process for joining the trust is different for both schools. Mildmay Junior School is already a standalone academy, whereas Mildmay Infant & Nursery School is currently under Local Authority control. This means the pace of the process may vary over the coming months. However in both cases you will be consulted on the changes, enabling you to raise any questions and put your views forward. Further information about this consultation will follow in the coming weeks. Parents should be aware, even at this early stage, that joining Bridge Academy Trust will not affect the day to day running of the schools; our school names, uniforms and term dates remain the same. Mr Mulholland and Mrs Bradford will continue in their roles as headteachers and being part of the trust would not affect or restrict your options when choosing a secondary school for your child. Other immediate 'Frequently Asked Questions' that may help explain this decision more fully can be found on the Junior school website (or attached to this communication from the Infants school). Hard copies can be made available to parents if required.

In neither case is this process already complete and we all remain aware of the need to make sure that this is the correct decision for your schools before anything is finalised; however, we have a strong belief that the long-term future of both schools will be best served by being part of a trust that is focussed directly on our community and, therefore, we and both Headteachers collectively stand behind the decision to take this opportunity for the benefit of the Mildmay schools, the local community and all our families, current and future.

Yours sincerely,

C Futter
Chair of Governors
Mildmay Junior school

W. Stephenson & S Taylor
Co-chair of Governors
Mildmay Infant & Nursery School

Joining a Multi Academy Trust - Frequently Asked Questions

What is an academy?

An academy is an independent, state-funded school. Rather than receiving funding through the local authority its money comes directly from central government.

The day-to-day running of the school stays with the head teacher, but they are overseen by charitable bodies called academy trusts.

Academies are much freer to innovate than those controlled by local authorities and have control over things like the admissions process, curriculum, staff pay structures, and term times.

Mildmay Junior School is already an Academy, having converted on December 1st 2014.

What is a multi-academy trust?

A multi-academy trust (MAT) is when two or more academies come together in partnership. The trust is responsible for overseeing the running of the schools. It provides advice, support, expertise and a strategic overview to each of the individual schools.

Under the Bridge Academy Trust each school will retain its own governing body, with delegated responsibilities. As part of the multi-academy trust schools can work together and drive up standards by providing a cohesive strategy and vision across all of the schools.

Why are the schools considering joining a multi academy trust?

There are many potential benefits to belonging to a family of schools with a common overarching ethos and compatible values and visions. For instance;

- Working together – it is easier to share and implement good ideas through academy trusts. For example, one academy may trial an innovative teaching approach and if successful, this can be shared across the multi-academy trust.
- Combining services to make the money go further. By joining together academies can share finance, human resources and building and estates teams, and multi-academy trusts also have more buying power. This leads to cost savings that can be used to improve the school, or maintain provision when budgets tighten.
- Support and development. Access to a pool of leaders will help enrich the skills of teachers and improve teaching at the schools.

Are there any risks in joining a multi academy trust?

- The board of the multi academy trust ultimately make the decisions. Headteachers and local governing bodies have a significant voice, but may not always have the deciding vote. However, in some circumstances this can be a positive and will reduce individual differences between schools.
- There is a danger that if a multi academy trust grows too large then standards and the values of any individual school may be diluted. Nevertheless, this should not be the case with Bridge academy Trust as they have clearly set out they intend to remain as a small trust focussed on two local communities and committed to maintaining core values and standards across the trust. They are committed to working with local schools that carry the same ethos and values for delivering the best education to children.

Will the academy follow the National Curriculum?

Although academies are not required to follow the national curriculum, regulations state that the curriculum must remain 'broad and balanced' and if an academy is to move away from the national curriculum, there should be sound educational reasons and evidence to support this move.

Since academies are still subject to National Curriculum test procedures and national accountability measures at the end of each Key Stage, it is sensible to construct a curriculum within each academy that ensures that National Curriculum content and coverage is at least matched.

Academy freedoms provide us with greater opportunity to try different approaches to the curriculum and give each school greater flexibility to ensure that what is taught is relevant to our pupils and their specific needs.

Are academies bound by the same rules and regulations as local authority schools?

Academies are bound by a published set of regulations that mean that there are some differences to local authority controlled schools. For instance an academy (or academy trust) acts as its own admissions authority and can set its own admissions criteria. However, academies are still required to follow the law and guidance on admissions relating to special educational needs and also to regulations relating to pupil exclusions.

Academies and multi-academy trusts are also subject to the same external inspection procedures via HMI (Her Majesty's Inspectorate) and Ofsted and therefore must secure an expected quality of education for all children. Academies are subject to the same intervention and monitoring should they show signs of being unable to do so.

Academies and trusts, being in sole control of their own finances, are subject to published financial regulations and are subject to rigorous accounting and financial regulations.

Do the parents still get a choice of secondary school for their child?

Yes. The Mildmay Schools and the Bridge Academy Trust are committed to the successful transition of all their pupils whatever their chosen school is. There will be no obligation for any child to transition to a school within the academy trust. Transition to any secondary school will be subject to the usual application procedure and the relevant school's admissions policy and criteria.

Will the uniform change?

No. There are no plans to change the uniform.

Will the name of the school change?

No. The names will stay the same.

Will the Infants and the juniors continue to be separate schools?

Yes. The schools will still be run as separate schools and will still have the same head-teachers.

Will the Resources Base(s) for Hearing Impaired Children be affected?

No. The resources bases provide commissioned places for children with profound hearing impairment and are funded separately to the schools. Their money will come via the Trust, but is ring-fenced to continue to provide this enhanced provision within both schools.

Will there be an impact on the schools funding?

The Department for Education provides funding directly to each academy (via the multi-academy trust where applicable). Academy funding is calculated in the same way as it is for local authority schools. This means the academy will have the same budget as it would as a local authority school.

Some of the money will go to the trust for central services such as finance and human resources in the same way that local authorities withhold funding to provide centralised services to authority maintained schools.

Like other schools, an academy cannot run at a loss or agree a deficit budget.

How will the school be accountable financially?

Academies and Multi-Academy Trusts are 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 be robust systems with an audit conducted by an external independent auditor.

Is an academy like a business?

No. Academies are run like charities and are run on a not for profit basis.

How does academy status affect funding for children with special educational needs?

This funding will continue to come directly from the government through the Education Funding Agency. Funding allocated to a named child would continue to be funded directly by the local authority.

Have the schools been required to consider joining a Multi-Academy Trust?

No. The infant school is currently rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted and is Local authority controlled; therefore the DFE have had no influence on the school directly in this decision.

The Junior school is already an academy and is accountable to the Regional Schools Commissioner (DFE), however, despite the most recent Ofsted judging the school as 'requiring Improvement', Leadership of the school was identified as a strength and, as a result, no pressure has been brought to bear.

In both schools the decision is being made in the long-term best interests of the school and the community they serve.

Has the decision to convert to an academy already been made?

No. Until the views of our parents, staff, and the local community have been heard, a final decision will not be made. The governing bodies of both schools have voted for this proposal in principle, but at the end of the consultation period the governing body of each school will weigh up both the pros and cons of academy conversion in the case of Mildmay Infant & Nursery School and the proposal to join Bridge Academy Trust, before coming to a final decision.

What happens next?

Both schools will send out consultation paperwork to you explaining the process. As parents you will be invited to participate in the consultation process, enabling you to raise any questions and put your views forward. As part of the consultation process you will be invited to a consultation evening with representatives from the school and the Bridge Academy Trust.