

Manor Park proposal to join Cheshire Academies Trust - Feb 2020

FAQ :

Q - Can a school choose to leave Multi Academy Trust?

A - It would be very difficult to leave the trust after joining; this is why both the joining school and the trust go through a rigorous due diligence process beforehand.

Q – Why change?

A - We truly believe it is the direction of travel in education and we could be in danger of being left behind and losing control over our own destiny and identity. The Trust we are consulting on joining has been established for many years with a proven track record of successful collaboration whilst retaining their own specialisms, strengths, personality and uniqueness. It is a Trust committed to doing extra ordinary things for extra-ordinary children. There is also the appetite for ourselves to work in partnership with Bexton Primary school to create a local Cheshire East Hub.

Q - Would a failing school affect other schools in Multi Academy Trust?

A - All of the schools within CAT at the moment are either graded as outstanding or good. If CAT was asked to support a failing school from the local authority then all schools in the trust would be asked whether they have capacity to support a failing school. No school will be forced to share staff. This could be an opportunity for staff that are looking to progress further to remain in the trust. Headteachers have regular meetings to discuss vacancies and whether there are staff within the trust to fill them.

Q. How many schools are in CAT?

There are currently four schools in CAT- They are Boughton Heath Primary School, Kelsall Primary School. Mill View Primary School and Bexton Primary School. The first three primary schools mentioned are currently graded as outstanding by Ofsted with Bexton being rated good.

Q - Can CAT remove local Governing Bodies and create just one for the whole trust?

A – There is a clear plan to keep local Governing Bodies; however if a school was failing and Governing Body failed to make any significant impact on improvement, CAT would have the right to remove the Governing Body. All schools would be involved in such a decision.

Q - Would there be more strain on the Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team?

A – Mr Cotterill along with many other staff will attend regular meetings to ensure Manor Park has an equal say in and can make positive contribution to the Trust. They will be involved in Trust decision making, accountability and school reviews and checks. There will rigour and high expectations, which is a good thing for the school. There is a huge network of support within CAT.

Q - How many schools is CAT planning to take on?

A – There is a very robust growth plan within CAT and they are looking to grow from the current four schools to become a Trust with between 8-10 schools in the medium term. This would enable the trust to take advantage of economies of scale. A certain amount of pupils would trigger additional funding element as well as capital grants.

Q - How will CAT be managed once it takes on more schools?

A - The trust has a CEO, a CFO and has restructured its Board to ensure that it has capacity to support this number of schools. At every stage Manor Park would be part of the discussion and decision making.

Q - Does Manor Park see any cons of academising?

A - Parents and pupils should not experience great change but leadership and staff will inevitably be asked to work differently at times. We believe we share such commonality differences in opinions will be rare but occasionally a decision may be made that school voted against.

Q - Will we give CAT our budget?

A - Our budget will come directly from the DFE and we will give an amount to CAT to afford central services. Currently, the local authority retains a top slice so there would be no significant change.

Q - Will staff be forced to go and support a failing school?

A - All CAT schools will be asked if they have the capacity to offer members of staff, job shadowing and leadership support, but there will be no obligation to say 'yes' if we feel we would seriously suffer as a school. All of the schools within CAT at the moment are either graded as outstanding or good as are we so there would be capacity to support other schools who were experiencing difficult times. This would also benefit Manor Park as our staff would gain knowledge and experience by working with other educational professionals.

Q - Are the staff in favour?

A – Staff have been informed in the process of due diligence at every step of the way. They are currently also being formally consulted. For some months we have joined CAT for training and meetings. Staff can see the direction of travel on the government agenda. But they also see the value of collaboration to support school improvement. The staff also appreciate that opportunities for pupils will be even further enriched. Opportunities for staff professional development could also be a real bonus.

Q - Will school policies change?

A - Mostly no, although there will be some agreed policies used across the trust. These will always be in line with statutory requirements or best practice.

Q - Will we notice a difference?

A - We expect any differences that you notice will be positive. Particularly in terms of increased opportunities for pupils across the curriculum and particularly in the Performing Arts, PE Sport and IT.

Q - What if you don't agree on something they plan to introduce?

A - There is always an opportunity to discuss these things at Headteacher level. We all have a voice and an opportunity to give our opinion and persuade others. We like CAT because we have such a shared ethos, so we hope disagreements will be extremely rare. We feel Manor Park will have more influence on policy and practice than we would remaining with the local authority. We are helping the shape the future of Manor Park with other like-minded colleagues.

Q - Will you still be inspected separately?

A - Yes and our data / results will continue to be our own.

Please see questions and answers below regarding Academies in general, Manor Park and CAT.

What is an academy?

Academies are independent, state-funded schools, which receive their funding directly from central government, rather than through a local authority.

The day-to-day running of the school is with the head teacher, but they are overseen by individual charitable bodies called academy trusts and may be part of an academy chain.

These trusts and chains provide advice, support, expertise and a strategic overview.

Weren't academies all about improving failing schools?

They were once. The policy, which originated under Labour, aimed to improve struggling schools, primarily in deprived areas.

And this continues under the sponsored-academy model, where failing schools are taken over and run by an academy trust.

But it has changed radically to embrace all types of schools - successful or otherwise.

All schools - primary as well as secondary - have been invited to convert to academy status, with priority being given to the best performers.

Who oversees academies?

Academies, like all schools, are inspected by Ofsted. Regional School Commissioners were introduced in 2014 to approve academy conversions and monitor standards at academies and free schools in their area.

What is a Multi- Academy Trust (MAT)?

A multi-academy trust (MAT) is a single entity established to undertake a strategic collaboration to improve and maintain high educational standards across a number of schools. A group of schools form a single MAT which has overarching responsibility for their governance.

The MAT is accountable for the performance of each school in the group, although each can still have their own governing body which operates subject to delegation of power from the MAT.

Are you setting up a new MAT or joining an existing one?

We are seeking to work with an existing MAT called Cheshire Academies Trust (CAT). Our school already knows the schools well, we have worked with them on previous projects, share their ethos and commitment to being the best we can be. We were particularly attracted to the group because they all continue to be themselves, celebrating their uniqueness, retaining their ability to innovate and focusing on sharing best practice for school improvement.

Will you still be assessed by OFSTED as an academy?

Yes. Academies are subject to the same inspection process as maintained* schools. *maintained schools are schools maintained by the Local Authority

How does the application process for new starters (admissions) work?

The application process would work in exactly the same way as it does presently. Initially, the Local Authority would continue to process school applications.

Will the uniform be kept the same?

There are no plans or expectations to change the uniform. If the school were to change the uniform, this would involve a consultation process between parents, children and staff. This could happen whether or not the school was an academy.

Is it just the school governors who make the final decision on becoming an academy?

There will be a full consultation with the school community, unions and other stakeholders in which all opinions, concerns and questions will be heard and taken into consideration. Ultimately the Governing Body will then make the final decision. The Governing Body consists of representatives of parents, staff, community and Local Authority.

What happens if the governors don't agree?

A vote will be held by the Governing Body with a majority decision carried. Governors have been researching and discussing various options over the last two years.

How much are you going to deviate from the curriculum / SATs etc?

The school will continue to offer a rich and varied, broad and balanced and still undertake National Assessments and Tests.

What would be the working relationship with the other four schools?

Manor Park would be an equal partner and would have representation at various levels of the MAT structure.

Academies often specialise – how does this affect the curriculum? Would there be excessive focus on one area at the expense of another?

It is more common for secondary schools/colleges to offer a specialism. Manor Park will continue to offer a rich and varied, broad and balanced curriculum in line with the National Curriculum. We will continue to be committed to Inclusion and value the Performing Arts, PE and Sport.

Is there anything that you have to change to become part of CAT? E.g. operationally?

We are committed to ensuring that parents and pupils will not notice any operational differences day to day. One of the key reasons for becoming an academy is the benefits around working closely with other schools, sharing resources and cost savings through purchasing as part of a group. The school would therefore adapt its administration to respond to the different ways that academies are funded and held accountable.

What are the negatives and risks of becoming an academy?

The Governors have looked and continue to look very closely at the risks and opportunities associated with becoming an academy and believe the benefits of joining CAT significantly outweigh the risks.

Who are CAT accountable to?

Cheshire Academies Trust are directly accountable to the Department for Education (DfE) in the same way that other Multi Academy Trusts and sponsors are. The schools remain accountable to OFSTED.

Regarding finance – how could a failing school affect the allocation of funds to Manor Park? Could they get some of our funds?

The school would be funded directly from the Education Finance Agency (EFA) and would pay a relatively small contribution to CAT to fund training, administration and the oversight from the CEO and CFO. The school will benefit from economies of scale, the enabled collaboration and increased access to areas of school expertise. Manor Park would continue to set its own budget and therefore would not be liable to divert funds away from Manor Park for the other schools.

Where is the final decision made whether to academise?

There will be a full consultation with the school community, staff, unions and other stakeholders in which all opinions, concerns and questions will be heard and taken into consideration. Ultimately the Governing Body will then make the final decision. The Governing Body consists of representatives of parents, staff, community and Local Authority.

Are the results e.g. SATS presented as a trust or as individual schools – do you get your own individual OFSTED rating?

All SATs results, OFSTED reports and league table information will be presented as an individual school in the same way it is at present.

Is there a maximum number of schools that can be in a trust?

There is no published maximum figure although all schools that join new sponsors or MATs have to be approved by the DfE and can be stopped from taking on to many schools.

Is CAT wanting to expand further?

Cheshire Academies Trust may take on additional schools in the future but there are no firm plans as to numbers. CAT position is that they do not intend to become a large group and want to focus on delivering quality of teaching across their schools.

Do CAT vote to accept us? Who here votes to join CAT?

The Directors of CAT are keen for Manor Park to join their trust as they have identified the expertise, knowledge and value that we can add to their already successful trust. The directors will need to officially vote to agree that Manor Park can join the trust. At Manor Park, the Governing Body will hold a vote, following the consultation.

Things change – does the success of Manor Park depend on the current leaders in place?

We believe that any school's success is linked closely to the quality of leadership at the time and therefore feel it is important that we always develop leadership in our school. We believe that working with CAT gives us the best opportunity to retain our existing leaders and develop future school leaders.

Is it inevitable that Manor Park would have to become an academy at some point?

We believe so. The majority of schools within our local authority have already converted to academy status and more schools are continuing to do so. The current government has made a commitment to support schools converting to academies moving forward.

Simon Cotterill -Headteacher

Geoff Mason – Chair of Governors