

Weston Mill Community Primary School

Ferndale Road
Camel's Head
Plymouth
PL2 2EL

Headteacher: Mrs. Alison Nettleship

Deputy Headteacher: Mrs. Rachel Dibben

Chair of Governors: Mrs Dawn Jones



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Website: www.eschools.westonmill.co.uk

Email: admin@westonmill.plymouth.sch.uk

Phone: 01752 365250

Dear parents, carers and members of our local community,

We wish to inform you that the governing body of Weston Mill Community Primary School has applied for permission to become an academy under the Academies Act 2010, as part of the Discovery Multi Academy Trust. Initially, the Discovery Multi Academy Trust will consist of Weston Mill Community Primary School, Beechwood Primary School and Oakwood Primary School. In the future, other local schools may choose to approach the Discovery Multi Academy Trust with a view to joining us.

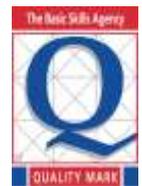
The Department for Education has carried out due diligence on Weston Mill Primary and is willing to permit us to convert if we wish to do so. However, the final decision to convert has not yet been made by the governors. We are conducting a formal consultation process over the coming weeks and we would welcome comments from any interested parties in relation to our plans, so that we may consider these prior to making our final decision.

A key factor in deciding potential partners in our Multi Academy Trust has been to choose partners who share the same ethos, vision and child-centered approach to education. We are seeking to protect and strengthen the characteristics and identity of each of the schools, whilst still providing additional opportunities to children and staff. We strongly believe and already work along the lines of collaborative advantage and feel that extending this in a more formal arrangement will ensure the future success of all of the schools.

Important points

Schools are constantly changing as they strive to improve provision for their children and this proposal is just another step in that process. Should Weston Mill Primary convert to academy status:

- We would only change in ways that we believe would continue to improve the school even further.
- For pupils, it is unlikely that they will notice any significant change in their day to day school lives.
- Our school name will be changed to Weston Mill Community Primary Academy and our school logo and uniform will only be changed to include this.
- We will remain as a non-selective, local, state-funded primary school for children in our area.
- The existing collaboration and informal partnerships we have with other schools and organisations will continue, including the Education Through Enterprise Trust.



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- A large proportion of our existing policies and how we operate will remain, with only those that affect operations across the MAT being revised.
- The current admission arrangements will be identical – all academies must comply with the Admissions Code of Practice (the National Admissions Code and Admissions Appeals Code).
- We would have conducted an extensive consultation process so that all relevant stakeholders have had the opportunity to question and challenge the proposal.

What has promoted our application to become an academy?

National and local context

Academy schools have been a significant feature of the UK educational landscape for many years. In its early stages, academy process aided schools that were failing but now it is the government's vision for all schools to become academies.

Governing Bodies' research and view

The governing body has worked hard to thoroughly investigate this opportunity and its implications. These investigations have included the setting up of a working party, which will begin to understand the impact on the schools' curriculum, finances, staff, wellbeing, governance and community. The governors and senior leadership team have also engaged in research into local and national schools that have already converted, to ensure we have as full a picture as possible. For reasons of continuity, economies of scale and governance, all governing bodies feel that becoming a Multi Academy Trust could offer real benefits for all the children.

The governing bodies have developed a model that would retain individual identities but in which communication and continuity between the schools would be optimised. Academy conversion would enable us to establish a permanent and formal structure to secure its benefits for children across all schools, now and into the future.

Implications of a potential conversion

The Academies will become the employer of staff at all sites. Under the proposed governance structure discussed by the schools to date, the Directors of the Multi Academy Trust may consist of staff, parents and members of the community, representing the interests of all schools. Under the Multi Academy Trust structure, it is also proposed that this central board of Directors will delegate certain powers to local advisory boards in each school.



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Critically, it is essential to emphasise that, should Weston Mill Primary convert to academy status, it will remain a non-selective, local, state-funded primary school for the children in our area (as it is now). All state maintained schools and academies in England are bound by a common code of practice on admissions which would continue to be the case even though the Multi Academy Trust would, as the admission authority, manage its own admissions arrangements. Further guidance on the technical issues relating to academy conversion is set out a Frequently Asked Questions document which is attached to this letter, and which has been uploaded to our website.

Significant advantages leading to benefits for pupils at Weston Mill Community Primary School

Governance

The governors, or Local Advisory Board, of Weston Mill Primary would have a narrower remit that would facilitate a greater focus on school improvement. There would also be less pressure to have certain strategic skillsets within our Board. Opportunities would also be available for joint working and training across the Local Advisory Boards of the schools within the Multi Academy Trust.

Leadership and Management

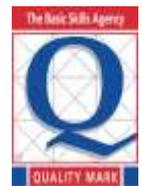
The newly formed Trust will have a Board of Directors, including individuals from the existing governing bodies. The School Leadership Team and staff responsible for finance will have support from specialist staff that operate across the Multi Academy Trust rather than from an ever decreasing resource within Plymouth City Council. The concept of a school leadership team expands beyond the staff based at our school and becomes a larger unit with a more expansive skillset. We would thereby be able to produce Multi Academy Trust specific policies and procedures rather than adopting the 'one size fits all' versions that are currently issued to all schools.

Standards

The Multi-Academy Trust will enable us to utilise the expertise of staff across the schools, to raise the educational achievement of all children through collaborative working and shared training, where appropriate. The talent of schools together become greater than the sum of their parts.

Finance

Finance decisions would be made locally for and by the Multi Academy Trust and not at a local authority level, which potentially provides greater security and less



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uncertainty. We would have access to a dedicated Multi Academy Trust Finance Director and access to capital funding direct from the Department of Education. There would also be a greater freedom over procurement and Service Level Agreements and greater economies of scale – staff, systems, contracts and purchasing.



Teaching and Learning

Multi Academy Trust economies allow greater focus on the quality of teaching and learning. There would be greater exposure to subject and curriculum specialists, best practice and different methods and approaches and a more flexible capacity to share these across the schools.

Statutory Assessments

All academies will have to undertake the usual tests like the SATs and Phonics Screening Check, the same as local authority schools.

Staffing

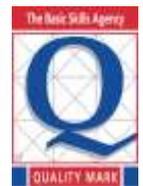
Currently, the employer for staff is Plymouth City Council. After conversion, all staff at the schools will be employed by the Trust. Staff are legally protected to transfer under the same employment terms and conditions, including pensions. Their continuity of service is protected, and all staff will be consulted in accordance with the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations. Our staff would become part of a larger team which would facilitate more opportunities for personal development, training and progression. Also, more in-house specialists would mean that it would be much easier to provide specialist support for staff across the whole Multi Academy Trust.

Support

There would potentially be a greater opportunity to appoint and pay for more experienced staff, an opportunity to minimise the duplication of roles and also there would be a greater capacity created (e.g. a team of IT technicians available to us).

Are there any disadvantages?

- There would be a reduced responsibility for governing the more strategic aspects of the school. Although Weston Mill governors would be part of the Local Advisory Board, their focus would be on school improvement and they would have less influence on some key strategic matters (e.g. staffing, buildings, finance). However, Weston Mill Primary would still maintain



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representation (irrespective of school size) at Trustee/Director level where these strategic decisions would be made.

- Staff may need to adjust to new systems and procedures that might be introduced.
- We may find that some decisions made at Multi Academy Trust level may be in the interests of the Trust as a whole but may not necessarily be in the best interests of an individual school.

How can I find out more?

A meeting will be held at school on **Wednesday 8th June 2016 at 11.30am OR 3pm.** Please return the reply slip at the end of this letter to our school reception in advance of the meeting if you wish to attend. We would encourage you to attend if you have any questions or simply want to learn more. There is a wealth of information regarding all of this on our school website: www.westonmill.plymouth.sch.uk and a leaflet will be going out to all parents and carers in due course.

Your views

In our application, the governing body has indicated a potential conversion date of **1st September 2016.** However, the school is not obliged to become an academy until the contract (known as the Funding Agreement) between the governing body and the Department for Education is signed. The governing body will not sign the Funding Agreement until parents and carers of pupils at Weston Mill Primary, staff at the school and the wider community have had the opportunity to make comments or representations on the proposals.

Any comments or representations that are made about the proposals will be considered by the governing body before a decision is taken to sign the Funding Agreement. The closing date for representations to be made is **Tuesday 31st May 2016.** Representations can be made in the following ways:

In writing to: **FAO. Discovery MAT, Weston Mill Community Primary School, Ferndale Road, Plymouth, PL2 5EL**

Or by email to: discoverymultiacademytrust@gmail.com (please put 'Academy Consultation' as the subject).

Any member of the community who wishes to discuss these proposals in more detail is invited to contact the schools in order to request a meeting with the Headteacher and/or Chair of Governors. The school will, so far as is practical, be happy to accommodate such a request.



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In addition to the FAQs attached to this letter, you may also wish to look at the information about academies on the Department for Education website:
www.education.gov.uk/academies

Yours faithfully,

Mrs Alison Nettleship - Headteacher

Mrs Dawn Jones – Chair of Governors



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I/we wish to attend the Multi Academy Trust information meeting on Wednesday 8th June at **Weston Mill Community Primary School at 11.30am/3pm** (please delete as appropriate).

Name(s):

My child/children attend Weston Mill Community Primary School

OR

I am an interested member of the local community

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Weston Mill Community Primary School Academy Consultation – Frequently Asked Questions

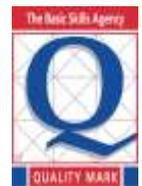
What is an academy?

An Academy is essentially a state school which is accountable to central government instead of the local authority.

- Academies are state-funded, non-selective schools run for charitable educational purposes – they must comply with compulsory Government requirements relating to provision, use of funds and admissions
- Academies are accountable to OFSTED – they are subject to the same rigorous OFSTED inspections as non-academy state schools.
- Academies are independent of local authority control – this means certain decisions (e.g. choosing suppliers of services) would be the responsibility of the academies.
- Academies receive their funding direct from central government – this means that the funds previously given to the local authority to provide central services to Plymouth schools are now provided directly to the academies.
- Academies have more freedom over the curriculum taught – this means that academies do not need to teach parts of the National Curriculum which they do not consider appropriate for their pupils.
- Academies can set their own pay and conditions to their staff – this freedom allows academies to consider deviating from nationally-agreed terms, including enabling better pay and conditions, which would not be possible as a maintained school. However, this is subject to protection under employment law (including TUPE) for all existing school employees against changes to contractual terms and conditions.
- Academies have more freedom to undertake innovative projects – academies are companies, so have more freedom to undertake innovative projects such as setting up and using trading companies of the Multi Academy Trust. For example to make the most of any existing assets and potentially generate additional income to advance the education of pupils.

Why is the Local Authority capacity reduced?

Government policy is to enable schools to have more control to run their schools in order to raise standards. To enable this, the government has moved funding from the Local Authorities (LAs) to the schools themselves. This has inevitably led the LA to review which services it remains best placed to offer. More schools are deciding,



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therefore, via academy conversion, to take control of the central budget previously retained by the LA and to acquire

directly the services previously provided by the LA. As an Academy the schools would be free to buy whatever services they wish and, although they could choose to continue to use LA services, there would be no obligation to do so and other suppliers could be used if they provide better value or more effective support.

Are there any disadvantages to becoming an academy?

The Multi Academy Trust will be directly liable for matters such as insurance, employment liabilities, pensions, health and safety, and property maintenance. However, as mentioned above, academies receive more funding from central government to help them meet these additional costs.

Will the admissions arrangements change?

There are two aspects of admissions to consider: admissions' criteria and the administration of admissions. Following conversion, the administration of admissions will continue to be managed by the Local Authority.

Academies do gain a degree of freedom on setting admissions' criteria. These freedoms are subjects to formal consultation and limited by national guidelines. The schools are currently bound and will continue to be bound by the National Admissions Code and the Admissions Appeals Code under which, for example, schools are strictly prohibited from prioritising children based on their ability, disabilities or financial contributions from parents.

In terms of the criteria applied when determining admissions, the governing body has no intention to change the current criteria. Weston Mill Primary is, and will remain, a local school for local children.

What will happen to staff?

If the school converts to academy, all staff currently employed by the local authority will automatically transfer to the new academy on their current pay and conditions. Although the academy will have more freedom to amend those pay and conditions in the future, the governing bodies do not intend to take such a step in the foreseeable future and in any event, any change to pay and conditions would need to be consulted upon with staff representatives.



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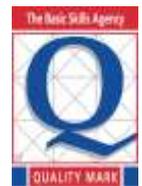
Will the individual schools change?

We do not intend to change Weston Mill Primary except in ways which we think will improve the school even more. For parents, staff and pupils, it is unlikely that they will see much, if any, change in their day to day school lives. Academies do have the power to vary their curriculums and vary the length of the school day. However, it is not intended to take any such steps at this stage and there would be engagement with parents/carers, staff and pupils if we did ever intend to make such changes in the future. We will not be changing the name of the school or the school uniform.

What steps are there to academy conversion?

The 5 steps to conversion are as follows:

1. Registration
 - Online registration of interest
 - Named contact in Department of Education (DfE) appointed to work through the conversion process
2. Application to convert/pre-approval checks
 - The Governing Body pass a resolution in favour of Academy conversion
 - Governing body starts the consultation required by legislation with interested parties.
 - Local Authority/Governing Body start the TUPE process
 - Secretary of State to approve proposal and issue Academy Order
3. Achieve Funding Agreement
 - Governance documents finalised
 - Leasing arrangements agreed for the school land and buildings
 - Local Authority/Governing Body complete the TUPE process
 - Governors complete required consultation with interested parties
 - Funding Agreement submitted to the Secretary of State for approval
4. Pre-opening
 - DBS checks carried out as necessary
 - New financial systems and contracts in place
 - Academy registrations completed
5. Academy Opens
 - The process takes a minimum of 3 months and we anticipate that Weston Mill Primary would open as an academy in time for **1st September 2016**, should we decide to proceed.



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