



Ascendancy Partnership Trust Consultation FAQs

Parents and Carers

We are consulting with all stakeholders about our plan to become an academy and form a new multi academy trust, Ascendancy Partnership Trust (APT), consisting of three special schools initially, **Addington, Brookfields and Manor Green.**

If you need a translation of this document, please email Sarah Turner
saraht@addington.wokingham.sch.uk

What is an Academy?

Academies receive funding directly from the government and are run by an academy trust rather than the local authority. They have more control over how they do things than maintained community schools. Academies do not charge fees nor have shareholders or pay dividends.

Academies are inspected by Ofsted under the same framework as maintained schools. They must follow the same rules on admissions, special educational needs and exclusions as other state schools.

What is a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT)?

A MAT is an education charity, run by educational specialists. MATs are responsible for running a group of publicly funded academies (schools) working collaboratively with a shared vision and shared values, in order to improve and maintain high educational standards for all their pupils.

MATs contribute towards building a strong and sustainable wider education community by sharing expertise and best practice, and also by training, developing and nurturing teachers, support staff and leaders.

It is the Government's ambition to have all schools as part of a strong MAT by 2030 as outlined in the schools' white paper published 28th March 2022.

Why would we, as a local authority school, want to form a MAT?

We want to form a MAT as there are a lot of benefits to be gained from working in a close formal partnership with other similar schools. There are no existing local MATs for us to join which share our visions and values or have a similar cohort of pupils.

Anticipated benefits include:

- Pooling of resources to set up a shared Therapies Hub to improve therapeutic training for all staff and targeted intervention for pupils
- Shared good practice for teaching and learning across the schools;
- A continual professional development programme (CPD) that adds real value to the staff and the pupils' education and is common across all schools
- Efficiencies in administrative functions and joint procurement; this will help our finances in these more austere times to advantage the pupils;
- Improved recruitment, retention and growth of staff;

- Improved educational experience and overall outcomes for pupils;
- Secure the long-term financial future of the schools.

What difference will I notice if my child's school becomes part of the proposed Multi-Academy Trust? Will it change my child's experience of school?

In the short term, nothing will obviously change and your child's routines will remain the same. The role of your child's class teacher, the headteacher of the school, the office and support staff will not change as a result. Over time, the sharing of best practice and resources will help to secure continued improvement in pupils achievement, high quality teaching and learning and good use of resources. But the school that we believe you value, will be safe in its individuality and the way it serves the community. Your child's routines and experience

Will parents still have a voice in how the schools are run?

Schools will still have Local Governing Bodies with elected parent representatives who serve each school. A lot of decision-making is delegated to these committees, so this is an important role, and we hope some of you would consider whether this is something you could do in the future. All the schools are committed to our community values, and this includes working with parents. So, your ability to speak to your child's class teacher or headteacher about any concerns you may have will not change.

Will working with other schools mean lowering our own standards or possibly detracting resources from our own school?

No! By working closely with others, we will all be raising our own standards and increasing accessibility to a greater range of resources that are available across the three schools currently.

What happens to the individual PTAs and Friends organisations?

Each school will retain their own parents' association and fundraising ideas. We can imagine some great opportunities for joined up events and ideas in the future, however!

Will the school name change?

There are no plans to change the names of any of the schools, other than they will be referred to as academies, rather than schools.

Will the times of the school day and holidays change?

There are no plans to change the times of the school day. Schools will follow the same or very similar holiday dates and school day as they did previously, and they will keep in step with other local schools. Each school determines their term dates and training days ensuring that there are 190 days for pupils in total.

What will happen to the uniform?

There are no plans to change current school uniforms as a result of the academisation.

Will my child still get the same support?

All children will continue to receive the support put in place by their schools, and we will continue to work with the local authority and other agencies to get the best possible support for children. In forming the MAT, we will be able to pool our resources better and plan to set up a Therapy Hub centralised service for all schools in the MAT. This will enable all the schools to meet the therapy needs of all pupils better than we are currently able to do.

Will there be any curriculum changes?

There are no plans to make a sudden change to your child's learning as a result of academisation. Teachers are always thinking about what to teach and how to teach it, and schools are free to devise and implement the curriculum which suits them best. There is no single model that all schools are expected to follow. School leaders are passionately committed to investing in local curriculum design, so that leaders and teachers can tailor the curriculum to the needs and interests of pupils and allow teachers to be inspirational, to love teaching and help pupils love their learning. This of course does not preclude the use of externally produced schemes, and schools serving similar communities often share resources and ideas with each other.

All schools are required to teach a broad and balanced curriculum and to monitor the impact of their curriculum carefully to ensure children are making strong progress. All schools will have access to support both in other schools and from the proposed centralised school improvement lead to help them devise and implement a curriculum that enables children to develop to their full potential.

Is there a set model for how a MAT must operate?

Whilst there is legislation regarding how a MAT is funded and held to account, the way in which a MAT operates, its governance structure, vision and ethos will be informed by this consultation and in the longer term will be determined by the Board of Trustees and the Executive Leadership Team of the resulting organisation.

How are MATs held to account?

MATs and their leaders are held to account through regular meetings with the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Department for Education.

The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) ensures that funding is used appropriately and that MATs provide value for money through the requirement to publish independently audited annual report and financial statements.

All schools within a MAT are subject to reasonable internal quality assurance processes. Externally, they are inspected by Ofsted, and must comply with the same rules as other schools on special educational needs, exclusions and admissions.

What changes do we need to make to become an Academy?

There are three main changes which need to be undertaken by the school:

- It will enter into a funding agreement which will be agreed by the DfE
- The Governing body will become a local Governing Board and will primarily be responsible for the quality of education
- All staff will be employed by Ascendancy Partnership Trust

Are there any risks to the three schools as a result of this merger?

No, the governors would not embark on a proposal such as this if it were not clear that it would benefit all the children and young people. Transparency and communication are key to success in this area. We have already worked to establish incredibly positive partnerships between the schools' leadership teams.

All schools recognise that the school staff teams should focus on the pupils on their roll, ensuring excellent standards and achievements are built upon year on year, but also that the experience of learning and working in the schools is happy, safe, and stimulating.

As part of a MAT, however, there is also a collective responsibility for all pupils and students so that no school is left behind. Once formed, the central team will work very closely with Headteachers to identify strengths and areas for development and then determine how best to provide and/or source appropriate support.

The Trustee Board of the MAT will ensure that specific risks are identified and managed appropriately.

Will there be any changes to admissions policies from the current schools?

There is no change to admissions as a result of forming a MAT, all schools must still adhere to the SEND Code of Practice. Admissions policies are considered by Local Governing Boards and the MAT every year and determined well in advance.

What does the proposed academisation mean for staff?

When staff are transferred to the academy, they have a legal right to retain their existing terms and conditions. We do not expect that this transfer of employer will have any impact on your experience of your child's school.

Are you looking to share staff between schools in the academy?

There will be some staff that work across the trust such as the central team, however, our Teachers or Teaching Assistants will not be asked to work at other schools unless they wish to do so as a development opportunity.

How will the Trust be governed?

When the School converts to an academy and joins the MAT, there will be three tiers of governance rather than two. These three tiers will be:

- Members of the MAT - responsible for fundamental decisions such as constitution of the academy trust – most strategic decisions delegated to the Trustees.
- Board of Trustees of the MAT ('the board'). The Trust will have a Board of Trustees who will be the responsible body for all the schools. They will set the overall strategic direction for the Trust and the schools and maximize the funding for the benefit of all pupils equitably. The role of the board is more strategic than a board of a single school and the trustees will be ultimately responsible for all of the academies it runs.
- Local Governing Bodies ('LGBs') for each academy school. In a MAT, each academy will have its own LGB. These have a similar status to committees of a maintained governing body and have powers delegated to them by the board formalised into a Scheme of Delegation. Individuals serving on a LGB may not be trustees of the academy trust. It is common for them to be referred to as 'governors'. Another key

feature of the LGBs is that they ensure that positive links to the community are maintained.

Who are the Trustees?

Trustees are unpaid volunteers – they do not receive remuneration for their dedicated service to schools. Trustees are appointed by the “Members” and it is these Members who can also remove them. The board conducts a regular skills audit ensuring that it has the key skills to hold the Trust Executives and school leaders to account.

The details of Members and Trustees are provided on a separate sheet that accompanies this FAQ sheet

How is funding organised within the MAT?

Funding for schools within a MAT is allocated from the Education Skills and Funding Agency (ESFA) on an individual academy basis. It is governed through a Master Funding Agreement between the Secretary of State and the MAT, and supplemental agreements between the Secretary of State and each school within the MAT. Top up funding based on individual pupils' needs will still be allocated in accordance with the current arrangements with the schools' own Local Authority.

There are common financial procedures and delegations, and each school will be expected to maintain their own budget allocations and provide value for money.

The centralised services of the MAT will be funded by a top slice, which is a percentage of the budget from each school. The Governing Boards and school leadership teams have examined the affordability and value for money the proposed top slice of 5% will offer. The economies of scale and joint procurement benefits will undoubtedly grow the more collaboratively we work, but the Therapies Hub will be an early gain from the top slice.

What will happen to our land and buildings?

Ownership of the school sites will remain with the current owners – which is the Local Authority. These sites will be put on long leases which will be transferred to the Trust, who will have the responsibility to maintain the buildings and grounds.

How can I get the answer to a question not listed here?

You can attend one of the consultation meetings, virtual or in person, as there will be an opportunity to ask questions then. Or you can get in touch with us via this [form](#) and all questions will be collated and answered for everyone before Governing Boards make their decision.

What are the next steps?

The Governors are keen to hear your views. Once your comments and feedback have been received, they will be carefully considered by Governors as part of the decision-making process. If the decision to become an academy is made, legal processes will be undertaken for transfer of staff, legal documents will then be drawn up and final checks will take place. We expect the transfer to take place by **1st September 2024**.

We will write to you once the Governors have considered all your responses to the consultation and confirm the next steps.