

13th September 2018

St George's Lower School - Proposed Conversion to Academy Status

As you may already be aware, the governing body of St George's Lower School has applied to become an academy under the Academies Act 2010 and is proposing to join The Shared Learning Trust. In accordance with the requirements of the Academies Act 2010, the governing body is consulting on whether the school's academy conversion should take place. Further information about what becoming an academy means, and how to comment on the proposals, is set out below.

Will St George's Lower School definitely become an Academy?

The governing body has submitted an application to convert to academy status and is working towards a conversion on 1st January 2019. However, the school is not obligated to become an academy until the contract between the academy trust and the Department for Education (known as the Funding Agreement) is signed.

The academy trust will not sign the Funding Agreement until parents and carers of pupils at the school, staff at the school, and pupils themselves have had the opportunity to comment on whether the school's academy conversion should take place. I have written to all parents and carers and have invited them to a meeting on 10th July with a follow up session on 18th September at 3:45pm to learn more about the proposals to become an academy, or to comment on the proposals. I have also held meetings with staff and kept them informed throughout the process.

Any comments or representations, which are made about the proposals will be considered by the academy trust before a decision is taken to sign the Funding Agreement. Details of how to provide comments and representations are set out below.

The academy trust will not sign the Funding Agreement unless they are content that conversion would be in the best interests of the school taking account of all of the legal and practical ramifications.

What is an academy?

An academy is essentially an independent school, which is funded by the state. It is independent of the local authority and receives its funding direct from central government.

It is proposed that St George's Lower School will become an academy as part of The Shared Learning Trust. This means that the school will be part of an academy group comprising: The Vale Academy (ages 2-11 in Dunstable), The Linden Academy (ages 4-11 in Luton), The Chalk Hills Academy (ages 11-19 in Luton) and The Stockwood Park Academy (ages 11-19 in Luton).

What are the benefits of being an academy?

In the school's opinion, the benefits are numerous:

- **Academies are independent of local authority control** - this means that academies have more freedom about how they conduct themselves (for example: academic calendar dates, curriculum design, enrichment programmes etc.)
- **Academies receive their funding direct from central government** - this means that academies receive more funding because none is retained by the local authority for the provision of central services
- **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 of service for their staff** - academies have the freedom to alter the pay and conditions of their staff (subject to normal employment law protections for staff) and so can provide staff with better pay and conditions than previously
- **Academies have more freedom to undertake innovative projects** - academies are companies and so have more freedom to undertake innovative projects, such as setting up and utilising trading subsidiaries.

Are there any disadvantages to becoming an academy?

The Shared Learning 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, and in any event, The Shared Learning Trust already deals with these matters for its academies.

Will the admissions arrangements change?

As an academy, The Shared Learning Trust will deal with admission arrangements in partnership with Central Bedfordshire Council. This would still be bound by the national Admissions Code, and with the Admissions Appeals Code.

As a local authority school, St George's admissions arrangements are set by the local authority, and the local authority also decides which pupils should be offered places at the school. As an academy, The Shared Learning Trust will put in place admission arrangements, and with Central Bedfordshire Council, decide which pupils should be offered places in accordance with those arrangements. The academy will still be bound by the national Admissions Code, and Admissions Appeals Code.

The current admission arrangements will remain in place for the time being. If the academy wanted to change its admission arrangements consultation would be required.

Will staff leave?

If the school converts to an 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 Body does 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.

Will St George's change?

We do not intend to change St George's Lower School except in ways which we think will improve the school even more. For 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 would engage with parents/carers, staff and students if we did ever intend to make such changes in the future.

Schools currently in The Shared Learning Trust have names influenced by their location and community. In keeping with this, the proposed name for St George's on conversion would be "The Rushmere Park Academy".

Our uniform would change very slightly; the red accent colour on our current uniform will be replaced with a royal purple. We are currently looking into financially supporting this so that the cost is not passed onto the parents.

How can I find out more?

A meeting will be held at the school on 18th September at 3:45pm. We would encourage you to attend if you have any questions, or simply want to learn more.

There is also more information about academies on the DfE website:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/academies>

If you can't find the answer to your question here, or on the DfE website, and cannot attend the meeting on 18th September, please email

reception@stgeorgeslowerschool.co.uk who will try to assist.

How can I make representations?

To respond to this consultation on whether the school's academy conversion should take place, representations can be made in writing to:

Mr S. Tikin
Chair of Governors
St George's Lower School
East Street
Leighton Buzzard, LU7 1EW

Or by email to:

clerk@stgeorgeslowerschool.co.uk

The closing date for representations to be made is 12th October 2018.