



Engagement with stakeholders on the question of whether or not Sir William Romney's School should join the multi-academy trust known as The Athelstan Trust

Key information

- **How long is the engagement with stakeholders open for?**
The engagement will close on 4th November 2019
- **How do I make my views known?**
There are a number of options available to you which are set out at the end of this document.
- **How do I find out more?**
- Please come along to our engagement evening on either Monday 14th or 21st October at 6pm in the school library.

Current position

The governing body of Sir William Romney's School (the **School**) is considering whether or not the School should join The Athelstan Trust (**Trust**) and want to hear your views.

This document provides further information on the pros and cons of joining a multi academy trust in order to help you respond to the engagement.

What is the proposal?

The governors are exploring whether to join the Trust. If the governors decide to proceed, this would be effective from 20th April 2020 or as soon as possible after that.

What is The Athelstan Trust?

The Trust is a multi-academy trust comprised of three secondary schools in Wiltshire and Gloucestershire (Malmesbury School, The Dean Academy and Bradon Forest School). It was established in 2015 when Malmesbury School (already an academy at that time) established the Trust and is responsible for the education of nearly 3,000 students.

The Trust's mission statement

"The Athelstan Trust is a community of comprehensive schools that work together to ensure that all our students and staff feel valued and are challenged to fulfil their potential.

We are absolutely committed to raising educational standards for all the children in our schools. We believe in developing the talents and skills of all our staff and students.

Our Multi-Academy Trust is an organisation in which children, staff and parents can feel part of a happy, caring and excellent community.

We respect and value the individual nature and ethos of our schools while believing we are more effective when we work together and support each other. We believe that successful schools are rooted in their local community. We aim to celebrate spiritual and creative diversity, success, and lifelong learning. We are inclusive and collaborative and promote a culture of openness and integrity."

What is multi academy trust status?

The School, like all other academies, is operated by a charitable company which is generally referred to as an 'academy trust'. When the academy trust which operates the School was originally set up, it was established as a 'single academy trust' on the basis that it was intended to run just one academy (i.e. Sir William Romney's School). Conversely, a multi academy trust is set up to operate multiple schools. When Malmesbury School created the Trust in 2015 this was with the intention for the Trust to operate several schools collaboratively.

Like many other schools at the moment, the governing body of the School along with its headteacher and senior leadership team, is looking at how the School can work with other schools in the area and one such option is to consider joining a multi academy trust.

Why do it?

The School could do nothing, but the governing body is aware that the School could be targeted for a pushed move into a multi academy trust at some point in the future due to the direction of travel of this current government.

What would it mean for the staff at the School?

The School's staff would transfer to the Trust under the 'TUPE Regulations'. These Regulations ensure that the staff transfer on their existing terms and conditions. Pensions for staff would also remain unaffected. When the School originally converted to academy status, the staff transferred under these Regulations to the single-academy trust.

Within the Trust, staff could choose to work across the different schools with a view to raising/sustaining standards and securing economies of scale. Existing School staff would not be "forced" to work across other schools within the Trust.

Who receives the funding for an academy within a MAT?

Under a MAT structure, funding for the School would be received by the Trust and would be under the control of its trustees - this is the group of people who would be responsible for the operation of the Trust, in much the same way as the governing body of the School is currently responsible for the way in which it operates.

It is possible for the School's funding to be 'pooled', i.e. it can be applied across any school within the Trust. This can assist in ensuring the ongoing viability of the School through fluctuations in revenue and expenditure, but does mean that part of the budget that has in principle been allocated to one school within the Trust could possibly be used to support another school.

What if the School felt that its funding was being unfairly allocated to other academies in the Trust?

The trustees of the Trust have an obligation to act in the best interests of the Trust as a whole - and therefore in the best interests of all of the schools within the Trust (existing and new joiners). They would therefore need to have due regard to the funding needs and allocations of each individual school including the School. If a particular school felt its funding was being deployed

unfairly, its headteacher could ultimately appeal to the Secretary of State for Education who could impose a restriction on how the funding is applied.

How would the School be governed within the Trust?

Any academy trust is under the control of a board of trustees, who are responsible for the way in which it operates. In the existing 'single academy trust' which operates the School, this group of people are called the governors.

The board of trustees of a MAT has the responsibility of running all of the schools operated by the MAT. They have certain obligations in relation to the financial position of the MAT and risk management. In practice, the day to day running of each school within a MAT is carried out by the relevant headteacher or principal.

If the School was to join The Athelstan Trust, the School's governors would sit on a 'local governing body' (we explain this in more detail below).

What is a local governing body?

The board of trustees of the Trust have set up 'local governing bodies' for each of the schools operated by the Trust. A local governing body would have more local oversight of each school. It would be established in a similar way to the governing body of the School, with representation from parents and staff. The local governing body for the School within the Trust would therefore largely be made up of the existing governors of the School.

What are the benefits of becoming a multi academy trust?

The governing body is exploring this option as they consider that working with the schools in the Trust could:

- enable the School to create efficiencies in how we buy supplies and how we minimise the impact on students of the cuts in government funding;
- potentially increase the curriculum subjects the School is able to offer our students and widen the extra-curricular and community engagement offering;
- increase the opportunities for career development and training for staff; and
- enable the School to support a wider number of children in Gloucestershire and the surrounding areas.

The governing body believes that working within a group structure with other schools like those operated by the Trust will enable the School to pool resources and skills to ensure the best delivery of education to its students as is possible.

What about the status quo?

The governing body finds itself in a strong position and is hugely proud of the success of the School and all its students and staff. However, the governors are not complacent and they consider that for the School to work in isolation limits future opportunities including those identified above, and that all of the schools within the Trust can learn a lot from one another.

How would the admissions arrangements work?

There is no proposal that the admissions arrangements for the School would change were it to join The Athelstan Trust.

The School would continue to be bound by and comply with:

- the School Admission Code and the School Admissions Appeal Codes; and
- the local authority's Fair Access Protocol.

Would the uniforms change?

No there is no proposal for the uniform to change.

Would the school have the same name?

Yes.

Is the School being forced down or under pressure to follow this route?

No, any decision to join the Trust is a voluntary decision of the School's governing body.

What are the legal steps required for the School to join the Trust?

The School / the Trust would need to:

- submit an application to the ESFA setting out the details of the proposal to join the Trust for approval by the Secretary of State (acting through the Regional School Commissioner's office).

Once approval had been given, the Trust would need to:

- enter into a deed of novation and variation to the funding agreement with the Secretary of State in order to vary the terms of the School's existing funding agreement to put in place a supplemental funding agreement (new documentation would be based on the DfE models);
- establish the local governing body for the School under its terms of reference; and
- transfer all assets (including land) and staff from the School to the Trust.

What about the governing body's obligations under the Equality Act 2010?

The governors are mindful of their duty to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The relevant protected characteristics are:

- a) age;
- b) disability;
- c) gender re-assignment;
- d) pregnancy and maternity;

- e) race;
- f) religion or belief;
- g) sex; and
- h) sexual orientation.

The governing body will be carrying out its own assessment of any such impact on the protected characteristics of a decision to move forward with joining the Trust, but if there is anything related to this which you would like to draw to the governors' attention, please get in touch.

How will the consultation impact on the governing body's decisions? The governing body will not take a final decision on the question of whether to join the Trust until the engagement with stakeholders process has been completed. You have the option of providing your comments in writing (in whatever format you would prefer) or by coming to the above engagement sessions. You also have the option of making an appointment to meet with Mr Bell (Headteacher) if you would like to discuss the proposal further.

How do I respond to this engagement?

There are a number of options open to you:

- send any comments by email to matconsultation@swr.gloucs.sch.uk with the heading "MAT engagement";
- deliver any hand written comments to the school reception marked "MAT engagement";
- attend our engagement evening on attend our engagement forum during our forthcoming Year 8 and 9 Information Evening on Wednesday 9th October
- attend an alternative engagement meeting on Monday 21st October at 6pm.
- arrange a meeting with the head by contacting Mrs J Green on 01666 502378 or at admin@swr.gloucs.sch.uk

Please respond by 4th November 2019 in order that the governors will have the opportunity to take your response into account when making its decision.