



Proposal to become an academy and join Enlighten Learning Trust: Your questions answered

This document has been issued by the Governors and Head Teacher of St. Giles' C of E Infant VA School, Ashted, Surrey as part of the consultation about whether the school should become an academy and part of the family of the Enlighten Learning Trust (ELT).

What's the current education landscape both nationally and locally?

At a national level there is a clear direction of travel towards greater academisation and locally Guildford Diocese is strongly supporting this strategy, encouraging its church schools to join together in formal structures, based on membership of a MAT or a federation of schools as they believe that this is the best way to continue to develop and maintain the high quality Church of England education that we have within the Diocese.

What is an Academy?

An academy is a state school, funded directly from central government rather than through a local authority. Legislation requires that an academy has the following characteristics:

- That it offers a balanced and broadly based curriculum;
- That it provides education for pupils of different abilities; and
- That it provides education for pupils who are wholly or mainly drawn from the area in which the school is situated.
- Curriculum – an academy has to offer a broad and balanced curriculum for pupils of differing abilities, including maths, English and science, but it does not have to follow the National Curriculum; the Funding Agreement requires that an academy teaches Religious Education. Schools that are not academies have to follow the National Curriculum. In reality, our school would continue to offer our varied and exciting curriculum which follows the National Curriculum. The leadership team will continue to be responsible for the curriculum at St Giles' ensuring we continue to deliver a curriculum which is high quality, broad and ambitious in content, empowering our staff with the flexibility to adjust lessons appropriately to the particular needs and interests of a class to enhance the educational outcomes for all our pupils.
- Funding – the Academy receives its existing school budget and also its share of the funding that is retained by the Local Authority for maintained schools.

What is a Multi Academy Trust (MAT)?

Multi Academy Trusts are charitable companies limited by guarantee that have responsibility for running a number of academies. They cannot, as charities, be run for financial profit and any surplus must be reinvested in the Trust. The Academy Trust signs the Funding Agreement (the contract) with the Secretary of State as part of the establishment of the academy. Enlighten Learning Trust (ELT) would be responsible for all the schools within the Trust. Local Governing Bodies continue to provide local governance, support and challenge to the Heads of Schools and wider leadership team, and retain representatives from the church, parents and staff.

What are the potential benefits of being part of a Multi Academy Trust (MAT)?

The power of any partnership must be to provide opportunity for collaborative improvement, enrichment and sustainability. Academisation is NOT about commoditising education. It's about a deep and purposeful collaboration, with a moral purpose about getting education right. There are strong educational arguments for the power of groups of schools; MATs can do improvement at scale. They are knowledge-building organisations providing huge opportunity.

By working in partnership with each other, the schools within a MAT can share staff and resources, curriculum expertise and effective teaching practices, and work together to deliver the best outcomes for pupils. While other types of school partnerships can be effective, the key difference with academy trusts is that there is shared accountability for standards across the trust; all schools within the trust support each other and the trust is accountable for them all.

- As a family of schools MATs improve children's education by sharing ideas and expertise with each other. The family of schools share good practice on curriculum, assessment and behaviour.
- Collectively MATs offer greater and more structured career pathways for staff supported by high quality professional development opportunities.
- As a family of schools MATs help teachers and leaders spend more of their time focused on the one thing that counts the most – the education of children. As a small school staff at St Giles', Nicky and her team wear many hats. Being part of a MAT would mean that there was considerable administrative and operational support freeing up time to focus on education.
- The support the trust provides to schools – HR, finance, and school improvement services, make this possible.

Why is the Governing Body proposing to be part of Enlighten Learning Trust versus another academy trust?

As a diocesan school we can only join academy trusts with 'Articles of Association' which support the Church of England Education. Many academies do not fulfil this criteria. We have looked at other local academy trusts and have concluded that Enlighten Learning Trust (ELT) is the best fit for St Giles'. The reasons for this are:

- We believe their vision, values, moral purpose and ethos is aligned with ours in getting the very best outcomes for all children.
- They are a small church schools MAT – currently 4 schools, and keen to focus on schools within a fairly tight geographical area. Over time they will grow; however, joining now will enable us to be part of this exciting journey.
- They are keen that each member school retains its identity and uniqueness.
- We like the fact that they are genuinely interested in the children and education and aren't too 'corporate' in feel.
- They value a strong sense of commitment to local community and respect the individuality of member schools.

Will St Giles' remain a C of E school?

Yes.

Will the school operate under a different leadership team?

No. There are no plans to replace the current leadership as part of the academisation process.

Will my child still have the same teacher?

Joining an academy trust does not influence this, as such decisions will remain with the school's leadership team. Staffing could of course change if a staff member leaves the school. Staff

recruitment (with the exception of the Head Teacher) remains the responsibility of the school.

How are the children affected?

The children will not notice any immediate difference. Day to day life at St Giles' will continue as now providing a happy, stimulating and exciting environment and a fulfilling and positive school experience. However, in time, the children may notice changes and improvements in the way that they learn which will result from greater training opportunities for staff, the sharing of best practice across schools within the Trust, and wider opportunities for children across the Trust such as music and sports festivals.

How will being an Academy affect staff?

Currently, the employer for staff at St Giles' is our Full Governing Body. After conversion to an academy, all staff at all the schools within the MAT 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.

Does OFSTED inspect academies?

Yes, in exactly the same way as for maintained schools.

Does SIAMS inspect academies?

Yes. Following conversion to academy status, St Giles' will continue to operate as a school with religious designation. Therefore, we will still be required to undergo SIAMS inspections, to evaluate our Christian character and effectiveness.

How would the academy be governed?

Enlighten Learning Trust (ELT) is already a Multi Academy Trust. The Academy Trust signs a Funding Agreement with the Secretary of State for each school within the Academy Trust. ELT has a Board of Trustees that is legally responsible for all of the schools within the Trust. Each school within ELT has a Local Governing Body to provide local governance, support and challenge to the Heads of Schools and leadership team, and includes elected parent and staff representatives. An Academy Trust also has a small number of Members. These Members have a similar role to 'shareholders' in a private company limited by shares (although there is no dividend), with the ability to appoint some of the Trustees.

How would parents become part of the Local Governing Body?

The same process applies as for the school currently. When there is a vacancy, applications are sought from the parents at the school, which may outline particular skillsets that would be useful to the Local Governing Body. If there are the same number or fewer applications as the vacancies, then those individuals who applied are appointed. If there are more applications than vacancies the parents vote to decide who becomes a governor.

Do academies receive extra funding?

No. Academies receive their funding from the Government rather than via their local authority. The budget is calculated in the same way as now, with a few (fairly small) technical changes for areas such as rates. The academy financial year runs from September to August.

Will St Giles' receive less funding as a result?

No. We will receive exactly the same funding as we currently do under the national funding formula.

Do Academy Trusts make money?

Academies are schools run by charitable trusts via a contract with the government. The Trusts are private in that the state does not own them, but they cannot run schools for profit.

Would there be changes to the numbers of pupils admitted to St Giles' School or to the admissions criteria?

There are no plans to do this, and our admission numbers will continue to be considered in light of local demand. We exist to serve our local community whose needs may change over time. In Surrey, birth rates have been declining year on year since 2012. In our part of Surrey it's a decrease of around 22-25%. St Giles' - and other smaller schools - are particularly vulnerable to changes in place planning and competition from other schools in the locality.

What are the safeguards for vulnerable pupils?

Under the terms of the Funding Agreement (which is the contract between the Academy and the Secretary of State), an academy has to act in exactly the same way as a maintained school in relation to Special Education Needs, behaviour and exclusions.

Who is responsible for deciding if a pupil needs an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)?

The process doesn't change and the award of an EHCP remains a local authority's statutory duty.

How does an academy access capital funding?

Academies receive some capital funding, called Devolved Formula Capital, according to the same methodology as maintained schools. This funding is provided directly to the academy. In addition, academies can bid directly to Government for School Improvement Funding (SIF).

How can the Secretary of State intervene in an academy?

The Secretary of State has the ability to terminate the Funding Agreement for each of the schools within an Academy Trust in specified situations, predominantly if a school is in 'special measures' or 'requires significant improvement' following an OFSTED inspection, pupil performance is unacceptably low, there has been a serious breakdown in the governance or management of the academy, or the safety of pupils or staff is threatened. In this situation the Secretary of State would be able to enter into a Funding Agreement with another Academy Trust to take over the governance and management of the academy.

How can we be sure that ELT is the right Trust for St Giles' to join?

We have entered into a Trust Partnership with ELT with effect from 21.02.2023. This is a bit like a try before you buy arrangement. Essentially it is a time limited, formal arrangement where we will be working together, testing whether a formal partnership will benefit both parties. This arrangement will allow us to explore the benefits of collaborating (for instance, sharing expertise through headteacher and subject expert forums,) and also support us in streamlining our administrative systems and processes. During this period, the governing body will give due consideration to academisation.

What will happen to St Giles' School if we do not become an academy and join ELT?

The school will, for the time being, remain a maintained, Voluntary Aided, Church of England school as it is currently. If we do not successfully complete the process of joining ELT, it is conceivable that the Governing Body may in the future be pushed towards joining an academy trust which may, or may not be our first choice.