

27 February 2017

Dear Parent/Carer,

We wrote to you last year about the possible formation of a new local primary/secondary multi-academy trust (a MAT). The schools that chose to be involved are Buckland Newton CEVC Primary, St Andrews CEVC Primary (Yetminster), Sherborne Primary, Sherborne Abbey CEVC Primary, Sherborne Learning Centre, St Mary's CEVC Primary (Bradford Abbas), The Gryphon School and Thornford CE VA Primary. The multi-academy trust would be known as the Sherborne Area Schools' Trust (SAST).

A Project Steering and Interim Board comprising a Governor and the Headteacher from each School have been researching, evaluating and designing this Trust. The Governing Body of each School will make any final decision to join the proposed Trust. The educational benefits for the students, staff, parents and wider community will be the key factor in making any decision to change status. There are eight aspects where significant advantages have been identified:

1. Students will make even better progress and improved outcomes
2. Preserving, protecting and enhancing what we have
3. The schools have the experience, expertise and quality to operate as a MAT
4. Even better teaching and learning
5. It will provide the resources to support outstanding teaching and learning
6. High impact school to school leadership support
7. More integrated and co-ordinated support for students and families
8. Securing and managing resources and facilities to sustain high quality provision

Each of these aspects is explained in greater detail in a SAST Proposal document which will be available from the School website. It is a long document; the Executive Summary gives the key points.

Being part of a new multi-academy trust will allow us to further strengthen the links between our schools in order to support continuity of education from 0-19 within our community. The Sherborne Schools' Partnership has worked closely together for many years to provide an excellent education for our young people, and so to collaborate more closely is an exciting prospect, particularly as academies also have greater flexibility in delivering the curriculum. The opportunities include developing our provision, sharing best practice, being more creative in our curriculum, enabling further development of our teachers/staff and taking collective responsibility for all of the children's development and progress. There is also more freedom on how we spend our funding and we would be able to explore opportunities for financial efficiency, determining for ourselves which services and providers we will buy into to provide outstanding provision for our children.

Each school will keep its distinct identity, character and name. There are no plans to change the school uniform, the school day, or admissions criteria. There is a stated goal to preserve and sustain village primary schools in their community. The school's day-to-day organisation, experiences and opportunities would feel the same for students and parents. Our established culture, ethos and values will continue to underpin a high quality of education for all our students, staff and communities.

Applications to the Department for Education have been made by each school for Academy Orders. This gives each school agreement and permission to progress to become an academy school as part of a multi-academy trust. These applications were successful and approved without issue. At this stage the Sherborne Learning Centre is not part of the application as further due diligence work is required but they continue to play a full part in the process. Approval has also been granted by the Diocese of Salisbury for the Church of England Schools in the group.

Academies are state-funded schools, which are independent of the Local Authority. They are accountable to the Secretary of State rather than the County Council and are managed by their own academy trust. The Academy Trusts are given directly the money which would have been given to the Council, so academies can choose how best to spend that money on the provision of education.

A multi-academy trust is a legal entity that governs a group of schools through a single set of trustees. It is set up by a group of schools, usually a local collaboration, that share a common ethos and vision. Each school is an Academy but together they operate as one trust.

There is no 'one size fits all' approach to academies and MATs. From the outset, the Trust we have designed has been shaped collaboratively taking into account our schools' context, its history, other schools locally, the needs of the community and, above all, what we think is best for our students, now and in the future.

The next steps are:

- Schools are now in a position to share in detail the proposals for the SAST
- Through March and early April there will be further information sharing and consultation with staff and stakeholders
- There will be a Parent Meeting held in each School during March. This will explain the proposals. The date will be confirmed with you shortly.
- Further feedback and questions can be submitted directly through info@sast.org.uk
- For new potential academy schools there is formal consultation (TUPE) with staff and professional associations/unions
- The Governing Body of each school makes the final decision on whether to become an academy and to join the SAST
- SAST could be established during the Summer Term of 2017 subject to consultation and the decisions of each Governing Body

This is an exciting and important opportunity for all the schools involved and we would welcome your engagement as we progress on our journey.

Yours sincerely,



S M Hillier
Headteacher



N Rees
Chair of Governors/Chair of Academy Board