



# Cherry Tree Primary School

Berry Avenue, Watford, Herts, WD24 6ST

E-Mail: [admin@cherrytree.herts.sch.uk](mailto:admin@cherrytree.herts.sch.uk)

Telephone 01923 245490

Website: [www.cherrytree.herts.sch.uk](http://www.cherrytree.herts.sch.uk)

**Headteacher**

Ms J. Bruce B Ed NPQH

**Deputy Head**

Mrs G. Jackson BA (Hons) PGCE NPQH

**Office Manager**

Mrs A. Osborne

Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2017

Dear Parents and Carers

As you may be aware the Government has, since 2010, wanted all schools to become either academies or free schools. Although the 2016 decision to force all schools to academise has been dropped by the government, it is clear that this agenda remains firmly in place.

Locally, the vast majority of Secondary Schools have already converted to academies and Hertfordshire County Council's business arm, Herts for Learning, has recently established its own MAT. Whereas in the past schools could convert to standalone academies, the focus is now on collaboration. Academies need to work in Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) in order to pool resources, staff and finances, so that schools can increase their expertise and performance at a local level. This is particularly important during a period of uncertainty and further funding pressures during this coming year and beyond.

The Governing Body of Cherry Tree have undertaken a significant amount of research and discussion about the benefits, and risks, of converting to an academy and joining an existing MAT. Following the Full Governing Body meeting on the 15<sup>th</sup> May 2017, the Governors agreed to register Cherry Tree's interest in converting to academy status and becoming part of the Inclusive Multi Academy Trust (IMAT). The IMAT is newly formed; the CEO is Mr James Roach. This academy trust currently consists of one school, Laurance Haines School in Watford, and another local school is currently seeking to join.

The conversion to an Academy will change very little on the surface; Cherry Tree will remain a state funded school, serving the local community as we do now. The Governors and I are committed to ensuring that our school continues to focus on meeting pupils' needs, and ensuring we provide the very highest standards of teaching and learning. There will be no changes to the school name or uniform.

Having been recently judged a 'good' school in the OFSTED May 2016, Cherry Tree is in a strong position to be able to retain autonomy over the running of our school. The conversion to academy status will enable us to maintain our school ethos in a highly changeable and volatile political landscape. We will also have some influence in the future development of the IMAT as we have been offered two places on the Trust board. As IMAT are in the early stages of developing their charitable trust status they see us as a strong partner in shaping the future of the MAT. In addition to this, we will be able to benefit from working collaboratively with the other school/s, sharing expertise, knowledge and resources.

We are aiming to convert at the earliest opportunity. Realistically this is likely to be towards the end of 2017 or early 2018. We are holding a consultation period in order to gather information and hear your views and concerns. The Governors will also undertake a due diligence review of IMAT. Likewise IMAT will undertake a similar review to assure themselves of the suitability of this school to become part of IMAT.

We are keen to hear the views of all parents and any other individuals; staff, partners and stakeholders who have an interest in the continued success of Cherry Tree Primary School.

Attached to this letter is an information sheet outlining some basic facts about academies and some specific questions and answers that may be of interest to you.

In addition, we are holding two information sessions for parents to further outline our plans and answer any questions on Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> June. You will have the opportunity to meet Mr Roach, CEO of the Trust. The meetings will take place at 9am and 6pm in the school hall. You can also share your views by submitting them in writing to Andrew Chappell, Chair of Governors, via the school office, by Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> June when the consultation period closes.

Yours sincerely



Ms Jessie Bruce  
Headteacher



Andrew Chappell  
Chair of Governors

## Frequently Asked Questions

This information sheet has been produced to answer some of the immediate questions you may have about the proposal for Cherry Tree Primary School to convert to academy status. If you have any other questions you can email them to [admin@cherrytree.herts.sch.uk](mailto:admin@cherrytree.herts.sch.uk). These will be forwarded to Andrew Chappell, Chair of Governors and Jessie Bruce, Headteacher. We will update the information sheet in response to any questions and issues raised. You will be able to find the most up-to-date version of this information sheet on the School's website or you can pick up a copy from the school office.

### What is an Academy?

Academies are charitable companies limited by guarantee. Rather than being directly funded and accountable to the local authority, they are funded and accountable to the Secretary of State. Academies are still part of the community but are free from local authority (LA) control. Academies have a number of freedoms and flexibilities that LA run schools do not have. These can be used to better meet the needs of their pupils and communities.

### What is a Multi Academy Trust (MAT)?

All academies within a MAT are governed by one trust and a single board of Trustees. This is the organisation that runs a number of academies under a single charitable company. The Trustees are responsible for decisions relating to how each academy is run, however, each individual academy retains its own governing body and the trust delegates some of its functions to the governing body. Schools who see the benefit of working together with other schools, in a more formal arrangement, choose to work as a MAT. This is now the preferred Government model with all academy conversions being directed to adopt this route.

### To whom are the Trustees accountable?

Ultimately, the academy will be accountable to the Secretary of State for Education through the terms of its Funding Agreement. The Academy would still be subject to Ofsted Inspections. The Education Funding Agency (EFA) would monitor school finances, which would be subject to an annual audit by external independent accountants. Results would be published as at present and annual accounts submitted to Companies House. As is currently the case, the Governors are accountable to the parents and the children of the school in the first instance.

### What is the process of converting to an Academy?

Cherry Tree Primary School was judged as "Good" at its last Ofsted inspection, which is one of the criteria for conversion. This means that our school can join an existing MAT or set up a MAT of our own. The IMAT has offered two places on the Trust board as they are in the early stages of developing their charitable trust status and see us as a strong partner in shaping the future of the MAT.

### Weren't academies all about improving failing schools?

Under the Labour Government, failing schools were forced to become academies and partner with stronger schools. This structure was expanded under the Coalition Government with all good and outstanding schools being offered the opportunity to convert. Currently, under the sponsored-academy model, failing schools are taken over and run by an academy trust.

### **What are the growth plans of the Inclusive Multi Academy Trust?**

In order to make the best financial efficiencies, and therefore support improvements for all pupils within the trust, the trust will need to grow. The trust will invite other schools to join, however, a process of due diligence must be undertaken for each school and all schools accepted to the trust must be aligned to the ethos of the other academies within it and the trust itself. At present the trust is working on a model of a maximum of three to four schools forming a Watford based local hub.

### **Why are the Governors considering Academy Status?**

The Governors have considered the benefits of converting to academy status and identified the following reasons:

#### **1. Autonomy**

Becoming an academy will allow us greater freedom to innovate. For example, as we would be free from the requirement to follow the National Curriculum, the school could choose to develop a specific curriculum to meet the specific needs of its own pupils, recognising the local context of the school. This way the ethos that underpins everything we do at Cherry Tree can be maintained on our terms.

#### **2. Funding**

Currently funding is de-delegated to schools, which means our school does not receive all of the funding in its budget. The LA keeps an element of funding for central services. When a school is an academy, all funding goes directly to it. Of course, the school will still need to purchase a number of services but it will be free to do so in the open market to secure best value for the school. It can then choose whether or not to purchase services from the LA, depending upon the quality and value for money offered, rather than having funding decisions imposed on it.

#### **3. Maintaining Control**

The majority of secondary schools in Hertfordshire have already converted to academies. Many primary schools have chosen to stay as part of the LA. Early conversion means we will have more choice to decide the way forward for our school.

### **Why are the Governors considering joining the Inclusive Multi Academy Trust?**

The Governors have considered the benefits of joining the Inclusive Multi Academy Trust and identified the following reasons:

#### **1. Influence**

We have been approached by the IMAT asking if we would be interested in joining their MAT. They are keen to have a 'good' school to join forces with them and they have offered us two places on the Board of Trustees (which subsequent schools joining will not have). We will, therefore, have direct influence in shaping the future of the IMAT and be able to ensure that the views, wishes and beliefs of Cherry Tree are considered in any future decisions made by the Trustees. If we decided to join an established MAT we would not have this level of influence and would therefore lose our autonomy.

## **2. Collaboration**

It will be beneficial for Cherry Tree to work in partnership with other schools. The schools will be able to share resources, staff and expertise. A programme of school improvement between all trust schools will ensure that skilful professionals who know the school, community and area well can bring about positive change. Opportunities for staff professional development will increase across schools.

## **3. Financial efficiencies**

The purchasing power of a group of schools through the trust is stronger than as individual schools. Specialist staff and services can be jointly financed across the trust and shared, and organisational, back office operations can be streamlined.

## **4. A different relationship with the Local Authority and other schools**

Although independent from the Local Authority, the Inclusive Multi Academy Trust would continue to work in partnership with the LA and other local schools. This changing relationship would mean that these relationships would be maintained to achieve the best for our pupils.

### **Will the admissions policy of the School change?**

Academy Trusts are their own admissions authority. The Trustees may adopt the current admissions policy of the LA or alter them slightly to meet the needs of all pupils and staff in the local community. Currently the LA can force schools to go over the recommended number of thirty in a class. As an academy we would have full control over class sizes.

### **Will the school day and term dates stay the same?**

The decision to change these would be controlled by the Trust. Any changes would be as a result of a full consultation with parents and pupils, and be changed to add educational value and meet the needs of the community.

### **Will the name of the school change?**

No. The school will still be called Cherry Tree Primary School although it would name the link trust as the Inclusive Multi Academy Trust.

### **Will the uniform change?**

No. The uniform will remain the same.

### **My child has a special educational need and receives additional support. Will that still be the case if Cherry Tree becomes an Academy?**

Yes. Cherry Tree School is committed to ensuring all pupils receive the support they need to achieve their best. Where students receive additional support this will continue. The School will continue to work with the Local Authority, parents and other services to ensure pupils with additional needs are supported effectively. One of the benefits of working as part of a trust is that specialist staff/expertise can be employed at a shared cost between the schools.