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Dear Parents, Carers and Stakeholders,

Questions and Answers Regarding Multi Academy Trusts

Inspire would like to form its own Multi Academy Trust and not be forced, in time, to join an existing MAT where we may be asked to change how we work.

There are lots of myths surrounding Multi Academy Trusts that may cause concern. I would like to put your mind at rest by answering some of the concerns that have been brought to light.

First of all, I would like to explain the reasoning behind Inspire pursuing a conversion. As you are aware, Seal and Four Elms have been working collaboratively since 2017; this model of schools working together had a very positive impact on both schools. In September 22, Maypole formally joined the Inspire Federation and all three schools have benefited. The leaders and governors of Inspire are always looking for ways to improve our schools, and following the White Paper that was released by government in March 22, we decided to look further into forming our own Multi Academy Trust.

The White Paper stated that all schools would need to be part of a Multi Academy Trust by 2030; while this paper is not of as high importance at present, the agenda remains. The government has seen the worth of schools working together and sharing good practice as we have.

While we are in complete agreement with the White Paper in regard to working collaboratively with other schools, we did not want to join another MAT and change the way we work.

The main driving force behind the desire to convert was to prevent the need to join an existing MAT. There are many MATs in the area and if we do not create our own, in time we would be forced to join an existing MAT.

We have been incredibly fortunate as more recently the Department for Education has declared that no new MATs should be formed, unless in exceptional circumstances. Those schools wishing to become a MAT should look to join an existing MAT. With the agenda being that all schools should be planning for this by 2030, I am delighted to say that the DfE has recognised the impact Inspire have had on the pupils within its schools and agreed to our conversion. Having this agreement means that we are now protected from the possibility of having to join an existing MAT.

It is important to note that NOTHING will change, with the exception of staff who will no longer be employed by KCC, they will be employed directly by the Trust.

Q. Will there be changes in the way the schools are run?

A. The way in which we operate will be exactly the same as it is now, and the pupils and families will see no difference.

A huge benefit to being a MAT is that schools will be financially better off. When schools are allocated their budget each year, the government pay the money to the local authority, which is then passed onto schools. Before the money is paid to schools, the LA take their top slice which is a % of each school's budget in order to fund the local authority. When schools become a multi academy trust, the funding comes direct from government and therefore receive more.

Q. Are schools within a MAT financially worse off?

A. This is not the case. While there will be one bank account, each school will be allocated a budget in exactly the same way as now – according to the number of pupils on roll.

Q. Can Academies choose their own curriculum?

A. No. Academies are still statutorily obligated to teach the National Curriculum, this is checked and verified by Ofsted. There will be no changes to the curriculum delivered at present.

Q. Are schools in Academies subject to Ofsted Inspections?

A. Yes, all schools undertake inspections from Ofsted and are judged by the same criteria.

Q. Are Academy Trusts businesses?

A. Academy Trusts are not a business, nor are they run by 'private' people. Academy trusts are education charities that are set up purely for the purpose of running and improving schools. Trustees have strict duties under charity law and company law. Trustees hold public office – they do not run the trust for 'private' interest but are required to advance education for public benefit. They are required to uphold the Principles of Public Life.

Q. Can Trustees or Directors/Members make a profit?

A. As education charities, academy trusts are not allowed to make profits or distribute profits to trustees or members. All surpluses are invested into the front-line to improve the quality of education.

Q. Do Academy Trusts no longer have accountability to the local authority?

A. Academy trusts are held to account to a higher standard than maintained schools. The obligation of transparency and accountability is much greater than maintained schools. They are held to account by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), Ofsted and Regional Schools Commissioners. They are required to have an independent audit annually and to publish their accounts. They are also required to disclose pay in thresholds. If the ESFA investigates a trust, the investigation report is published on the government's website. There is no similar requirement on local authorities to publish investigation reports or disclose head teacher pay.

Q. Do Academies have the same legal responsibilities as maintained schools?

A. Academy trusts are subject to most of the same direct statutory duties as maintained mainstream schools, in respect of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). As such, mainstream academies must:

- Have regard to the statutory SEND Code of Practice
- Use their best endeavours to make sure a child with SEN gets the support they need
- Designate a qualified teacher to be the SENCO
- Co-operate with the local authority in respect of the child
- Admit a child where the school is named on that child's Education, Health and Care plan
- Ensure that children, young people and their families are involved in decision-making and planning.

Q. Do Academies have to comply with the same admissions law?

A. The DfE's model funding agreement for mainstream academies requires them to comply in full with the DfE School Admissions Code and the law relating to admissions.

Why are Trusts a good thing?

Trusts are specialist organisations set up to run and improve schools – this is why it is clearer to talk about School Trusts, rather than academy trusts. There are very clear lines of accountability in the School Trust model.

Many academies now work together in a group of schools as one entity to improve and maintain high educational standards across the group. Where a Trust runs a group of schools, it has the power to create a collaborative framework.

A group of schools working together in a single entity can do lots of things that are harder for stand-alone schools to do:

- Teachers work and learn together to improve the way they teach;
- Schools share practices that make a difference to the quality of teaching;
- Teachers and leaders can work together on the things that matter – like curriculum and assessment;
- Failing schools can improve – only one in 10 schools that were required to join a trust were judged good or outstanding before they converted, compared with almost seven in 10 after they joined a trust (of those that had been inspected);
- It is more possible for teachers and leaders to move to another school to help improve the quality of education where that school is struggling – and these moves are more likely to be to schools with more disadvantaged pupils; and
- It is more possible to be efficient – and thereby to invest money in supporting pupils to have wider opportunities.

Having read this information, the question remains, which is the better option, to join an existing MAT or form our own Inspire MAT?

Yours sincerely,

Liz Mitchell
Executive Headteacher