

## Conversion Information & Questions Asked/Answers on the Website

As many of you will be aware, The Department for Education recently issued 'Educational Excellence Everywhere' - a document which provides a clear view about the direction of education over the next few years.

The document outlines a number of significant proposals and changes to education and includes details of schools converting to academies. The proposal suggests that, 'By the end of 2020, all schools will be academies or in the process of becoming academies. By the end of 2022, local authorities will no longer maintain schools.'

Whilst this is not yet legislation and continues to be discussed in Parliament and through educational forums, it is widely recognised that the conversion of schools to academy status is the preferred and likely policy of this government. The governing body at RJ Mitchell has recognised this for some time and has been thoroughly researching the best option for our school which will allow us to continue to grow and develop as we have over the last 10 years.

Following extensive research the governing body voted unanimously to convert to an academy. RJ Mitchell is becoming increasingly recognised for being a forward-thinking school and this decision is no different. The proactive approach we have taken has presented us with an exciting new venture; not only will RJ Mitchell become an academy but will be joining a brand new multi-academy trust called LIFE (Learning Is For Everyone). This will provide a unique opportunity for RJ Mitchell to be part of the development of the trust as we will be a founding school in partnership with Frances Bardsley and Benhurst Primary School.

The governing body submitted the application for RJ Mitchell to convert to academy status and to join LIFE which has been approved and we are working towards a conversion date of November 2017. However, the school is not obligated to become an academy until the contract between the academy trust and the Department for Education (known as the Funding Agreement) is signed.

The academy trust will not sign the Funding Agreement until parents, carers, staff, children and the local community have had been consulted on the proposed conversion to academy status.

Any comments or representations which are made about the proposals will be considered by the academy trust before a decision is taken to sign the Funding Agreement.

Comments and representations must be made by Friday 15<sup>th</sup> September in one of the following ways:

- Email - [office@rjmitchell.havering.sch.uk](mailto:office@rjmitchell.havering.sch.uk)
- Letter - Mr J Raynham, Chair of Governors, RJ Mitchell Primary School, Tangmere Crescent, Hornchurch, Essex, RM125PP.

We have posted key questions below to ensure all stakeholders are up to date with important information.

Additional questions of interest to stakeholders will be added throughout the process.

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

A MAT is a single entity established to undertake a strategic collaboration to improve and maintain high educational standards across a number of schools. A MAT is independent of the local authority and receives its funding direct from central government or from the academy trust.

### What are the benefits of being an academy?

In the school's opinion the benefits are numerous:

- academies are independent of local authority control - this means that academies have more freedom about how they conduct themselves.
- academies receive their funding direct from central government - this means that academies receive more funding because none is retained by the local authority for the provision of central services.
- academies have more freedom over the curriculum taught - this means that academies do not need to teach parts of the National Curriculum which they do not consider appropriate for their pupils.
- academies can set their own pay and conditions of service for their staff - academies have the freedom to alter the pay and conditions of their staff (subject to normal employment law protections for staff) and so can provide staff with better pay and conditions than previously.
- academies have more freedom to undertake innovative projects - academies are companies and so have more freedom to undertake innovative projects, such as setting up and utilising trading subsidiaries.

### Why is RJ Mitchell looking to join a new MAT and not join an existing well-established MAT?

We want to take control of our own destiny and shape a new organisation, not to join a trust which has been formed and procedures agreed. We also want to retain a greater amount of autonomy than many established trusts offer.

### Why work with Frances Bardsley and Benhurst?

Frances Bardsley and Benhurst are local schools within Havering which have excellent reputations and are very well led. Both Benhurst and Frances Bardsley share similar values, including a strong belief that every child should be able to succeed both academically and non-academically regardless of their starting points and the challenges they may face.

### Is Frances Bardsley and Benhurst simply taking over RJ Mitchell?

No. All the schools will continue to function as separate schools but with a common set of key principles.

### What will LIFE schools have in common?

LIFE schools will value and respect each individual school's distinctive ethos and identity but will also require individual schools to embrace the over-arching ethos of the LIFE Academy Trust.

The Life ethos consists of three key principles:

**Learning from the Past:** We recognise and celebrate the traditions of our families, cultures, schools, locality, and all religions whilst holding broadly Christian values and British values.

This principle will be evident in our school customs (House system, Team Points, key school anniversaries, children's achievements etc). Values will be taught explicitly and implicitly in a range of ways (assemblies, PSHE lessons, Circle Time, visiting speakers etc).

**Living in the Present:** We see the importance of becoming self-aware, of the need to recognise the opportunities and dangers of the current time including issues raised by the internet and social media and the dangers of extremism. All those in our communities will be taught to care for others, to work hard, to remain positive and to enjoy the present.

This principle will be evident in a sense of engagement and involvement in our learning and in a range of activities and extra-curricular experiences, a growing appreciation for our own and others' strengths and weaknesses; and charity and international work.

**Looking to the Future:** We will all seek to identify what we want to achieve in life, to plan for our future, consider future possibilities, add value to society, develop life skills and an awareness of future education opportunities and the world of work.

This principle will be evident in rich careers provision, Work Experience, visiting speakers from different sectors, student conferences and the embedding of positive thinking.

All schools will also help students develop our learner characteristics. We want our students to be: Creative, Articulate, Resilient, Empathetic, Reflective and Self-Aware.

#### What will being part of LIFE mean for my child?

Our aim is to enhance the children's education through shared learning and curriculum development utilising specialisms and resources that are available across the schools. There will be greater opportunities for children, teachers and leadership teams to work collaboratively.

We want to develop shared trust events including School Council, public speaking, sports events and music concerts.

We will also have the opportunity to use the excellent facilities and resources available at Frances Bardsley (AstroTurf, sports hall, farm, specialist science and technology facilities etc.).

#### What will happen to existing staff?

All staff currently employed by the London Borough of Havering will automatically transfer to the new academy on their current pay and conditions. Although the academy will have more freedom to amend those pay and conditions in the future, there are no proposals to do this. LIFE's commitment to staff is to retain the national terms and conditions of service as a minimum standard for the employment of academy staff.

#### Will the admissions arrangements change?

As an academy, the MAT will oversee the admission arrangements but would continue to be bound by the national Admissions Code and Admissions Appeals Code.

The current admission arrangements will remain in place for the time being. If the academy wanted to change its admission arrangements consultation would be required.

#### Do RJ Mitchell girls automatically leave Year 6 and join Frances Bardsley?

No. Parents and carers must explore the secondary setting that is right for their child. Frances Bardsley is an excellent school but there is no expectation that our girls will join. Secondary school admissions will continue in the current format and we will continue to support parents and children through this process.

#### Are there any plans to change the timing of the school day?

No.

#### Will there be any changes to school holidays?

We remain committed to the current arrangement where children are taught for three terms (Autumn, Spring and Summer) comprising of 190 school days.

#### Are there any plans to change the school uniform or logo?

No.

Who will be the Chief Executive Officer of LIFE?

Mr Dutnall, the Head teacher at Frances Bardsley, will undertake this dual role whilst the trust remains relatively small.

Who will oversee the day to day running of RJ Mitchell?

RJ Mitchell will continue to be led by Mr Read and the Senior Leadership Team. The school will continue to have a governing body which supports and challenges the school.

Will there be any significant changes to the way RJ Mitchell operates?

Initially these will focus on realigning some services that will be cheaper for LIFE schools e.g. Payroll, HR support, bulk purchasing, contract negotiations. The trust's aim is to save money and time for RJ Mitchell. These savings will be reinvested back into the school as we continue our journey towards excellence.

Can other schools join LIFE?

Yes. However, before this can happen, the LIFE Board would undertake a detailed period of due diligence to ensure only schools with broadly the same values and ethos.

Will RJ Mitchell only work with LIFE schools?

No. We will continue to work alongside any school where shared collaboration will benefit our children, staff, parents and carers and the local community.

Do staff contracts transfer across and our length of service remains as it was before?

Yes.

Will LIFE honour the current maternity/paternity arrangements staff receive?

Yes.

Can changes be made to the wages and conditions of people who have a RJ contract?

Community schools and academies have the power to restructure and review contracts at any time - joining LIFE does not make the process any easier or harder to do. LIFE is likely to follow the Essex restructure and redundancy policies rather than Havering as this gives a greater length of salary protection for support staff and the same length for teachers. This has been welcomed at Frances Bardsley and Benhurst by support staff.

Will LIFE uphold all of the terms and conditions set out in the Burgundy Book?

LIFE fully intends to honour or exceed the national negotiations on terms and conditions of staff. This has been the case since Frances Bardsley converted to an academy in 2012.

If a member of staff leaves a LIFE school and re-joins a Havering community school, will their continuity of service be continued? (entitlement to sick pay, maternity/paternity pay etc)

This is a decision for the local authority but they have made the school aware they will.

Will teachers still be entitled to PPA and if so will it still be carried out in the same format within the LIFE academy?

Teachers will continue to receive the same PPA entitlement as now (10% of their teaching time). Where possible, RJ Mitchell continues to remain committed to year groups sharing PPA time together.

Will Mr Dutnall take part in any lesson observations or Performance Management meetings?

There is no intention for Mr Dutnall to take part in the teacher's performance management process (possibly with the exception of Mr Read's). RJ Mitchell Lesson Visits/Triangulation will remain in place in their current format but are subject to review/updating but through consultation with teachers - this is what we do now.

It is possible Mr Dutnall or other staff from Frances Bardsley will be interested in our procedures and may request they learn more about our process. Should this be the case, we may ask teachers if they would be comfortable with a colleague from Frances Bardsley observing a learning conversation, lesson, feedback etc. However this would be voluntary and something we would also expect from Frances Bardsley. This is simply schools sharing good practice to develop and refine their current procedures.

What is LIFE's position regarding unions?

LIFE will continue to recognise trade unions and wishes to work with them on key matters. We would also recommend staff are in a union for, at the very least, support and advice in an increasingly litigious school environment.

Will the pay scales remain on the national pay scale? What will be the mechanism for progression? Will it still be performance management related?

Academies do have the opportunity to rescale however this is not something we are considering. Pay is currently in line with the national pay scale at Frances Bardsley and has been since converting to an academy in 2012. We remain committed to performance management as a mechanism for reviewing staff performance. This will continue to be used by governors to review pay progression.

Does the academy plan to change to length of the school day or change the school term dates. Will they remain in line with Havering?

Academies do have the authority to change the length of the school day or term dates; however, this is not something we are considering. We will remain mindful of local schools arrangements for our parents and staff. Inset days remain the decision of the local governing body.

Currently, teachers are directed to work 1,265 hours over 195 days. Will these working directives remain the same or will the working hours change? Will there still be an expectation that staff can maintain a reasonable work/life balance e.g. not being required to work on a Saturday?

Current contracts and directed work time will form part of the TUPE process and will remain in place. LIFE is committed to ensuring staff having a sensible work/life balance which will allow them to undertake their duties to the best of their ability.

If Mr Dutnell is Chief Executive does this mean he makes all the decisions and if Mr Read were to disagree does this mean he would still have the final say?

This will very much depend on what was being discussed. Matters concerning the operational running of RJ Mitchell and day to day decision making remain with the school. On wider issues, we have a board of 8 members who make the significant strategic decisions for LIFE.

Can you confirm that the maternity arrangements including pay and leave will remain the same as London Borough of Havering is at the moment. Will there still be opportunities for flexible working?

Maternity rights remain the same in LIFE. Flexible working arrangements and opportunities will remain an option as they are now.