



**Westfield School &
Specialist Sports College**



**Biddenham International
School & Sports College**

RSA ACADEMIES PROPOSAL

West Bedford RSA Trust Proposal

CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

Biddenham International School and Westfield School

Background

Our proposal is to create a new local Multi Academy Trust (MAT) of like-minded, successful schools in west Bedford in order to increase collaboration, to enhance leadership capacity, to ensure future security and to build on shared outstanding practice. The initial proposal is that by February 2017 we would establish a MAT between our two schools, coming together voluntarily under the sponsorship of the RSA Academies. The two schools have worked successfully together in an informal capacity to date but we believe that joining together as a MAT provides an exciting opportunity to improve further the education for all our children. Post conversion to Academy status, each school would retain its current name, respective ethos and values.

Through its academies' programme, the current government has committed itself to giving schools greater autonomy by creating a competitive market in education. Conversion to academy status effectively means becoming a state funded private company that is given charitable status, and rather than being answerable to parents and the local community an academy school becomes directly answerable to the Secretary of State for Education through the Office of the Regional Schools Commissioner (ORSC). It is important to be clear from the outset that our intention is not to gain greater 'autonomy' through our relationship with the RSA but to use it to forge an even closer partnership with the local authority, and with pupils, parents and the local community. Both schools remain committed to playing a leading role in school-to-school collaboration across Bedford and beyond. Having worked together successfully for many years we firmly believe that this would give us an exciting opportunity to further improve the quality of the education for our children.

What are academies?

Academies are publicly funded schools, which are not controlled by the Local Authority and therefore have additional independence in a number of important areas. This greater independence brings increased responsibilities and opportunities to build upon our current success and ensure that we continue to improve our service to families in our local community. You can view further detail on academies at the Department for Education website at:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/academies>

What is a Multi-academy Trust?

A Multi-academy Trust, builds on the principles of autonomy and self-determination, and is where two or more schools convert to academy status together. A single board of trustees (a company limited by guarantee) is formed to provide strategic leadership and oversight of the schools in the trust. Each school would retain a Local Governing Body, which would operate in much the same way as it does at present.

Who or what are RSA and RSA Academies?

The RSA is the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce. The RSA was founded in 1754, and has a strong history of informing education policy and practice, including work in the 19th century to support the spread of girls' education, and support for vocational education in the 20th century including the establishment of the RSA exam board.

RSA Academies was established as a charitable company by the RSA in September 2011 to develop a distinctive vision of what it means to provide an exceptional education to children of all ages.

RSA Academies aim to provide an inspirational education to all pupils which relates their learning to the wider world, provides experiences which broaden horizons, and enables children and young people to develop the skills needed for success and personal fulfilment. In classrooms young

people are asked to be creative, imaginative and practical, are challenged to be the best, and are encouraged to show initiative, enthusiasm and leadership skills.

RSA Academies currently works with seven schools, including first, middle and secondary schools.

You can find out more about the RSA at: <https://www.thersa.org/about-us>

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Why create this MAT?

Over recent months our two schools have worked more closely together to create the MAT through shared expertise, developing common systems, reviewing improvement procedures and supporting one another to improve standards. We believe, like many other schools that have already gone through this process, that it can be made significantly more effective if schools were to join together formally in an academy partnership, in our case, under the sponsorship of the RSA. This would be achieved through collaboration, common vision, mutual values, collective responsibility and effective accountability, ensuring continued improvement and security within an autonomous Trust of equal partners.

We believe that forming a MAT in partnership with the RSA would improve transition and continuity for our pupils, create a more seamless through-school experience and significantly improve learning outcomes. Shared leadership expertise and best practice, not only across the MAT but across all seven of the RSA's other schools, would progressively enhance the performance of our leadership and staff teams as we develop the mutual responsibility and accountability of like-minded schools.

Both schools play a leading role in local collaboration. We are a driving force within the Bedford Borough Learning Exchange (BBLE) which involves the headteachers of all schools in the borough meeting together regularly to provide support and share good practice in teaching and learning. We believe that through our shared vision, common values and collective responsibility our partnership with the RSA would mean that our commitment to local collaboration would be both protected and strengthened.

It is the view of our governing bodies that the time is now right for our schools to seize the initiative and through 'buy-back; arrangements work across the local system to better support its work and offer financial support to those services with the Local Authority that remain.

What might change?

Accountability would be direct to the Department for Education rather than the Local Authority. There would be some additional financial reporting to satisfy the requirements of Companies House and the Charities Commission; this would be managed centrally by the Bedford trustees and not by the individual schools. Under the voluntary sponsorship route our relationship with the RSA is long term (25 years) and RSA Academies effectively 'owns' the trust. But we are confident that the RSA's values and our own are in total accord and we welcome the permanence solidity and mutual commitment that this arrangement would bring. It is likely that the education system will face further significant changes in the future, and the instability this will bring is a serious concern. But by creating this MAT in partnership with the RSA, we believe we would achieve a greater degree of stability in difficult times, enabling us to protect our autonomy, retain our values, manage change more effectively and generally strengthen our ability to meet the challenges of the future together as a united and committed group.

What would stay the same?

Schools joining the MAT would retain their own distinctive character and identity, including their own name, uniform, logo and website. Most importantly, our schools would keep their own ethos and values. Our main aim as a Multi-Academy Trust is to work more effectively 'behind the scenes', so things should not seem very different on a day-to-day basis for pupils, staff, parents and the local community. However, the cumulative effect of these developments over time would be quality improvements in school performance at all levels, evidenced by improved wellbeing and a step-change in learning outcomes.

What is the proposal?

The proposal is that Biddenham International and Westfield Schools become academies and join together as a Multi-Academy Trust sponsored by RSA Academies. The MAT would be called the West Bedford RSA Trust.

- Each school would retain its own headteacher, governing body and unique character, and as strongly performing schools each school would operate with a high degree of autonomy.
- The Multi Academy Trust would be managed by a Trust Board, the planned composition of which is set out below. This Board would manage the strategic direction of the MAT and any services that may need to be delivered at Trust level rather than at school level, for example finance.
- The MAT would appoint a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Trust and would maintain an overview of standards in all schools. The CEO and the Trust Board would formally begin running West Bedford RSA Trust on 1 February 2017.

Where did this proposal come from?

An initial proposal grew out of discussions among a group of schools in the west Bedford area. Some of the schools already collaborated closely on many aspects of provision and had been discussing closer collaboration for some time. Most of the schools had periodically discussed the academisation agenda at governor level. Whilst there are a number of lower schools that have expressed an interest in joining the MAT at some stage, they are keen to focus, in the first instance, on the impending move to Primary status.

Why are you proposing these changes?

We consider the main benefits to be:

- Greater confidence and freedom - in partnership with the RSA - to design a curriculum around the interests and strengths of each school.
- The opportunity to better shape our own future.
- The opportunity to be proactive rather than reactive within an ever-changing educational landscape.
- Formal partnership working between the schools with the improved mutual support and reciprocal obligations this brings (including shared subject/area specialisms, staff expertise, staff training, curriculum development, shared workload)
- Peer support and challenge across staff and leadership teams.
- Cost savings achieved by acquiring services across the schools and economies of scale.
- Creating new posts across the MAT that would not have been possible in any one individual school e.g. Speech Therapy, Special Educational needs.

Couldn't you do this without becoming an academy?

Some of it could be done without academisation, indeed our schools have worked closely together for many years and there is no doubt that this has helped us to achieve the high standards that we have. But the MAT offers protection, security, stability and autonomy in a period of anxiety and turbulent change; and joining together in formal legal structure makes collaboration the 'default approach', rather than an 'optional extra'. Also, faced with year-on-year cuts to school budgets this makes possible radical efficiency savings through enhanced purchasing power and economies of scale.

When would this happen?

Our schools have been working towards becoming a MAT over the past few months and will be applying for an official Academy Order from the Department for Education. This Order releases money to explore a change to MAT status, particularly in legal terms. However, before any final decision can be taken each Governing Body must pass a formal resolution to that effect, following public consultation.

This document is part of that consultation. Only if your school's current governing body confirms that it wishes to convert following the consultation will your school convert. If your governing body agrees this then the school will convert to full academy status on 1 February 2017.

Who makes the decisions?

A Steering Group was established during the Spring Term to explore the academisation process. The group is a temporary body that has worked very closely with the schools and the RSA to bring forward this proposal.

As with all academies, the West Bedford RSA Trust would be a limited company and would be registered at Companies House. Following detailed discussions with the RSA, as the proposed sponsoring body, a group of five Members and nine Trustees has been identified who would have strategic responsibility for the successful running of the MAT. If the process is successful, the Board of Trustees and the Chief Executive Officer will assume the running of the MAT from 1 February 2017.

How will the MAT be organised?

There are five levels in the organisation:

- the individual schools
- each school's Governing Body (known as the Local Governing Board)
- the Board of nine Trustees (known as the Board)
- the five Trust Members (known as the Members)
- the Secretary of State at the DfE

Who are the Members and Trustees and what is their role?

The Trust Board is responsible for the legal and financial probity of the schools in the MAT and for ensuring that they continually drive up standards of pupil progress and attainment. Trustees bring their knowledge, skills and expertise to bear to make sure that this is achieved.

The Members - or more accurately 'founding members' - oversee the work of the Trust Board and are able to add or remove Trustees to improve its effectiveness.

There will be nine members on the Trust Board comprising:

Sheraz Amin
Carole Bell
Juliet Fern
David Fraser
Jim Gunther
Rae Levine
Dinka Miocinovic
Mrunal Sisodia
Jim Weir

There will be five Members comprising the four people below and one other Trustee from the Trust Board:

Sue Hind Woodward
Dr Sue Horner MBE
Tony Withell
A N Other

All Trustees and Members will be volunteers and none will receive a salary for carrying out their roles.

Will my school continue to receive the same funding, and how will it be managed?

Academies receive the same basic funding as other schools. However, local authorities always deduct some funding before it reaches schools, which will be added back into the MAT's budget. The DfE will pay the money directly into the MAT, rather than via the LA, and it will then be divided up according to a similar funding formula to that currently used by Bedford Borough Council. Therefore, each school will still have its own budget to spend as it sees fit. Although a small percentage of the overall budget might be top-sliced by the Trustees in order to meet central expenses, each school will receive at least as much as it would have done under Bedford Borough Council allocations.

Capital funding (money to spend on expensive equipment or on buildings) has been very low in local authorities since 2011, although Bedford Borough Council has been very supportive of schools and has recently announced significant investment in new classrooms to enable schools to become full primary or secondary schools. Academies may bid for capital funding from a different pot, and there are some indications that it may be a little easier to get at the moment. However, such funding may be increasingly difficult to obtain for all types of schools as austerity continues.

The schools will pay a membership contribution to RSA Academies based on pupil numbers, currently £25 per pupil for primary aged children and £31 per pupil for secondary aged children.

Will the final decision about whether to join the West Bedford RSA MAT be taken by our Governors?

Yes. Your school's governors will have the final say as to whether they wish your school to join the MAT or not. However, they must consult fully and openly with parents and staff, neighbouring schools and the LA before doing so, and take everyone's views into account.

Some general FAQs

Are all Multi-Academy Trusts the same?

No. Sometimes very successful schools are asked to 'take over' another failing school as a 'sponsored' academy. They are both then deemed to be Academies joined together in a MAT or a Chain. Sometimes this is done with one Executive Headteacher across the Chain. This is not the model we are proposing. In our model, each of the schools will play an equal part and there will be no 'lead' school.

Are there any rules about pupil admissions for Academies?

Yes. Academies have to follow the law for school admissions, special educational needs and exclusions as if they were a LA maintained school. Currently academies cannot select pupils on the basis of ability.

Who will schools be accountable to once they leave the Local Authority?

Schools are accountable in various ways and different bodies will continue to hold us to account for certain aspects of provision, e.g.

- For standards of teaching and learning schools will be accountable to Ofsted.
- For Safeguarding & 'looked after children' MAT schools are still accountable to Bedford Borough Council's Children's Services.
- For Finance, the MAT will be accountable to Companies House and the Education Funding Agency.

Also, the LA still has a duty to monitor the overall quality of education for all its schools, whether academy or maintained.

Who deals with complaints for schools that have become Academies?

Parents who have a complaint about their child's school will need to contact the academy directly, as they would normally do in accordance with the Borough Council's Complaints Policy. However, there is no next stage through to the LA, as academy schools are independent of the LA. In summary, the route for academy complaints would be:

1. Speak to the appropriate headteacher.
2. If you are not happy with the response from the headteacher, contact the Board.
3. If you are not happy with the response of the Board, contact the Education Funding Agency (EFA). The EFA is the funding body for academies, and represents the interests of the Department for Education.

How do I find out more about Academies?

You can find out more information from the Department for Education website (see above). The page on Academies gives a starting point.

Will the schools have to change their names?

No. Each school would retain their name, followed by the description '*part of the West Bedford RSA Trust*' or '*part of the RSA family of Schools*'.

Will I still be able to claim free school meals?

Yes, this would be done in exactly the same way as in local authority schools. Infant children would still receive the Universal Free School Meals funded by the government. In years 3 and 4 all schools will still have a statutory obligation to provide Free School Meals and other benefits for families who are entitled to them.

Will my child's Special Educational Needs still be met?

Yes, this would be done in exactly the same way as in local authority schools.

What about SEN and exclusions?

Our responsibilities as an academy will be just the same as they are now. We do, however, believe that the schools working together will be able to develop higher quality support for SEN pupils. We would be able to pool our resources in order to gain access to high quality advice and expertise in this area, as in others.

Will the school uniform change?

No. Each school will retain its unique identity and there is no intention to change the individual character of any of the schools, including the uniform.

Will the staff be expected to work in other schools or provide cover in other schools?

Nobody currently employed by the schools would be expected to work in a partner school if they did not wish to do so, although having the ability to move staff between schools could provide a great opportunity for career development, if it was consensual.

Will any staff lose their jobs?

No staff will lose their jobs as a result of the conversion process. In the face of expected real-term cuts in funding for all schools by the current government, the aim of the partnership is to seek job security through greater flexibility rather than to make changes to existing staffing structures.

Will staff have to re-apply for their own jobs?

No. Staff would go through a 'TUPE' process. At Biddenham this would transfer them from the Biddenham Campus Trust (established in 2010) to the new MAT, and at Westfield this would transfer them from being Council Employees to being employed by the new MAT. All transfers will be on existing terms and conditions.

Will my pension be safe?

All teachers will be able to stay in the Teachers' Pension Scheme. Support staff will be able to continue to stay in or join the Local Government Pension Scheme.

Will there still be unions for staff in an academy?

Yes. All schools enjoy good relations with trades unions and would recommend their staff to belong to a union. Unions will be consulted as part of the formal consultation.

What if I have other questions to ask?

Please go along to your school's open meeting on Monday 3rd October:

- At Westfield in the Main Hall at 5.30 pm.
- At Biddenham at in the Main Hall at 7.00 pm in the Main Hall.

Parents and community members are welcome to attend either meeting

Alternatively, talk to your headteacher or write to the Chair of Governors, care of the school, and they will endeavour to answer your questions.

Event	Timescale
Consultation process	3 rd October 2016 - noon 11 th November 2016
Parents/Carers Consultation Events	3 rd October 2016: Westfield School Hall 5.30 pm 3 rd October 2016: Biddenham School Hall 7.00 pm
Analysis of responses and preparation of Consultation Report	11 th November - 18 th November 2016
If Governors decide to proceed, proposals will be submitted to the Education Funding Agency (EFA) for consideration and then final approval by the Secretary of State.	November 2016
Decision by Secretary of State via the Regional Schools Commissioner	December 2016
Final Implementation of Proposals	1 February 2017

**CONSULTATION ON PROPOSAL FOR BIDDENHAM INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL
AND WESTFIELD SCHOOL
TO FORM A MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST UNDER THE SPONSORSHIP OF
THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF ARTS (RSA)**

Please take the time to read our Consultation outline and complete this questionnaire. Your feedback is important to us. You can give you feedback in the following ways:

- complete questionnaire and email either to office@westfieldschool.net or enquiries@biddenham.beds.sch.uk
- hand in at either of the school offices
- send by post either to:

Consultation Responses
Westfield School &
Specialist Sports College
Chester Road
Bedford
MK40 4HW

Consultation Responses
Biddenham International
School & Sports College
Biddenham Turn
Bedford
MK40 4AZ

- on the schools' websites www.biddenham.beds.sch.uk or www.westfieldschool.net

All responses must be received by noon on 11th November 2016 please.

PROPOSAL:

Should Biddenham International School and Westfield School seek to form a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) under the sponsorship of RSA Academies?

Yes	Don't know	No

Comments: