



Huntingtower Community Primary School

Academy Conversion

Consultation

December 2012



CONSULTATION DOCUMENT December 2012

Should Huntingtower Community Primary School become an Independent academy?

The Department for Education has offered schools in England and Wales the opportunity to join the new academies programme. It says that becoming an academy would “give schools the freedoms and flexibilities to continue to drive up standards”.

The Governors of Huntingtower have carefully considered the issues, and would now like to undertake consultation on whether becoming an independent primary academy will be in the best interests of the children and the school community. Therefore, the Governors would like to know what you think.

So that you can find out more about the Academies programme, the reasons why the Governing Body is considering a change in status and some of the common concerns about academies, governors have developed this Consultation Document. We hope it will help you to formulate your own view on this important issue.

It has been written in the hope that most of the important questions you may have will be answered, but we do understand and appreciate that you may have more. Consequently the Governors have arranged to be available in school to answer any additional questions on Wednesday 12th December between 8.30 & 9.30 am and Thursday 13th December between 3.30 and 4.30pm.

About the Consultation Process – how to have your say

Although, under the relevant legislation, the decision whether to convert is a matter for the Governing Body, this consultation process agreed by the Governing Body has been designed to gather as wide a range of views as possible. It is important you have your say, as your views will influence:

1. The Governing Body's decision as to whether or not Huntingtower becomes an academy.
2. How the academy will be set up should the decision be taken to convert.

Who we will consult with?

The Governing Body will seek the views of:

- Pupils
- Parents/carers
- Staff and their union representatives
- Local Grantham schools
- The Local Authority
- Local community groups such as any other interested parties, for example before and after-school clubs, etc.

How can I share my views?

If, after reading everything you would like to make any comments you wish the Governors to consider when they meet to determine whether to apply for a funding agreement, please feel free to use the back page of this booklet. The page can then be removed and placed in the box in the entrance foyer. Replies can be anonymous or sent via email but must be in school by 3.30pm on Friday 21st December 2012 which is when the period of consultation closes.

We really do want to hear your views

Kind regards

Diane Coleman
Chair of Governors

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1 What is an academy?

Academies are publicly funded, independent schools that receive funding directly from the DFE. They decide how to spend the money the local authority currently holds and spends on their behalf which means they can exercise even greater control over their budget.

2 What would Huntingtower Community Primary School becoming an academy mean for its pupils?

We are not envisaging any noticeable changes, we would have the same buildings, the same staff, the same uniform and most importantly the same ethos and vision. The increased freedom to spend all of our money, together with freedoms around the curriculum would, however, mean we have more opportunity and flexibility to innovate and ensure that our provision and environment offers a fully personalised experience for the benefit of all of our pupils – at a time when many other schools are needing to make cuts in these areas due to squeezes on budget.

3 Does becoming an academy change the relationship with local schools and the local community?

Although independent of the Local Authority, academies have a role in ensuring that the school collaborates and shares facilities and expertise with other schools and the wider community. We remain committed to working in partnership with other schools as well as the LA.

4 Would the name of the school change?

No – the name of the school will remain as Huntingtower. It is up to the Governors if they wish to change 'Primary School' to 'academy'.

5 Do these new-style academies differ from the old-style academies introduced by the previous Government?

Yes. All outstanding, good and satisfactory but improving schools are eligible to apply for the new-style academy status. The old-style academies were usually formed from underperforming secondary schools and/or schools under threat of closure due to low numbers of students attending; the new-style academies do not close first or merge with other schools, they simply change their status.

6 Academies used to have outside organisations as sponsors – is that still the case?

No - this is not applicable where a school is converting to the new-style academy status. However, as an academy, a school would be free to work in partnership or collaboration with any external organisation. We consider that academy status widens the opportunity to develop additional relationships with other schools/academies, the LA and the wider community. We would intend to use the ethos of collaboration within the academy requirements to work even more closely with other schools.

7 How does an academy work?

An academy runs very much in the same way as a school, but it receives its funding directly from the Department for Education. As an academy, we would receive the same level of funding as other local schools plus an additional grant which is money that has previously been retained by the Local Authority to provide services which are not part of its statutory duty. Therefore academies' budgets are not top sliced by the local authority, and we would receive 100% of our allocation from the DFE. By looking beyond the local authority for services and choosing ones which suit the needs of the school more closely, the school can focus its resources on maintaining and improving on existing staffing levels and bringing about improvements in line with our development plans. It is unlikely that this would be possible under the local authority, which face significant budget cuts and will have to pass these onto schools.

8 Does an academy have more independence?

Academies have greater freedom to develop their own unique teaching and learning environment. This includes freedom to develop a curriculum that suits the needs of learners at Huntingtower. They have greater freedom in cherry picking services which offer best value for money instead of being directed by the local authority to go with certain providers and contractors.

Although academies do have the freedom to adopt their own pay and conditions for staff, existing staff's rights of employment are protected and maintained on transfer. The pay and conditions of staff are governed by national agreements for teaching staff and local authority pay scales for support staff. Terms and conditions, with regard to contracts and pensions will remain as they are now, all the time the member of staff is employed at the school.

Academies also may change the length of school terms and the school day whilst still being limited by any statutory regulations. However, we also intend to maintain our current practice of coordinating term dates and times with other local primary and secondary schools.

9 What would the school's relationship be with the Local Authority (LA)?

As an academy, we would cease to be a "local authority maintained school." However, we enjoy an excellent relationship with the LA and we would like this to continue. We would probably continue to buy several services from the LA – those that we believe to be of high quality and pertinent to our school. As an academy, we would be free to purchase services from other sources in addition to, or in place of, the LA. This would enable us to buy from wherever the quality is highest and ensure we were cost effective and achieved the best value for money.

10 Does the school need agreement from the Local Authority to become an academy?

No, although Huntingtower is free to discuss its plans with local partners, including the LA. Following the consultation, a final resolution would be passed by the Governing Body to convert and once the Secretary of State had granted academy status to the school, the Local Authority would cease to maintain it.

11 For what areas would the Local Authority (LA) still be responsible?

Certain LA statutory responsibilities remain, such as Special Educational Needs (SEN) statementing, Admissions Coordination and provision of Home-to-School transport. LAs are also still expected to play a key strategic role locally, for example planning 14-19 provision and sharing good practice.

12 How long does it take to become an academy?

The process normally takes around 3 months.

13 The consultation process

The consultation process now underway will end on Friday 21st December 2012 at 3.30pm

During the process all stakeholders will be informed and consulted, and early in the New Year the Governing Body will meet to discuss the results of the process, consider any comments made and taking all these things into account, decide whether to continue with the process of converting to an Academy.

14 Would there be changes to the admissions criteria or arrangements?

If Huntingtower were to become an academy it would continue to be bound by the National Admissions Code, and would continue to be part of the LA co-ordinated admission arrangements and would envisage no changes to the above admissions criteria.

15 Special Educational Needs

The school would still have to comply with the Admissions Code and any SEN obligations. The LA would retain responsibility for pupils with Statements in an academy on the same basis as for statemented pupils in maintained schools. They would still have to:

- Ensure that academy pupils are appropriately assessed and statemented where necessary;
- Consider parents' representations for an academy to be named on a Statement and act reasonably in considering those representations;
- Fund any individually assigned SEN resources;
- Monitor arrangements for SEN pupils in academies;
- Conduct reviews of the Statements of children in academies at least annually;
- Monitor SEN provision and educational psychology services in the school;
- Fund pupil referral units;
- Fund education out of schools;
- Fund education for excluded pupils.

16 The school day and Term times

The academy would have the power to set its own term dates and length of the school day if it chose to do so; however, if Huntingtower were to become an academy, it would not be looking to set term dates and length of school days which did not match local schools.

17 Will we get more money as an academy?

Academies receive the same level of per-pupil funding as they would receive from the LA as a maintained school, plus additions to cover the services that are no longer provided for them by the LA. As previously mentioned, the school academy would receive 100% of its budget direct from central Government, allowing us to control the whole of our spending. Academies do have greater freedom on how they use their budgets alongside the other freedoms that they enjoy.

18 Will academies be forced to buy in expensive services?

No. Academies are not forced to buy in any type of service by any particular provider. The experience of academies to date is that they can buy in services more effectively for themselves which leads either to better quality or lower prices meaning they can make savings and re-invest money elsewhere. They are free to buy back the services from the LA or find them elsewhere.

19 What funding will be available to help schools convert to academy status?

All schools converting to academy status receive a flat rate grant of £25,000 to help cover any costs incurred. If costs are less than this amount, schools retain the difference.

20 Would the school have to raise its own capital funding for major building works?

No. All schools, including academies, are able to apply for Government capital funding.

21 What happens if there is an emergency at the academy affecting buildings, such as a fire?

Academies are eligible to seek an earmarked annual grant from the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) for emergencies, in the same way that the LA can pay a maintained school a contingency payment. Academies are also required to take out insurance at specified minimum levels of cover to protect against potential capital emergencies.

22 What support is available to academies if they get into financial difficulty?

Academies, like all schools, are expected to maintain strict budgetary controls and are required by their funding agreement to balance their budgets. In fact, tighter budget management is applied to academies, as accountants are employed to make sure everything is being done correctly. The academy receives an ongoing Grant ("General Annual Grant") which covers the running costs of the school. The YPLA monitors academies financial position on behalf of the Secretary of State, and if a deficit occurs or appears likely, it will intervene. It will provide advice and support to the academy to find an appropriate solution to bring costs and income back into balance, usually in the form of a restructuring plan, and will give additional contingency funding if absolutely necessary.

23 What effects would Huntingtower becoming an academy have on the building?

The academy would enter into a 125 year lease agreement with the freeholder which is the Local Authority. There would be a General Annual Grant that would be paid by the Government to the academy. This would cover the normal running costs of the academy including: repairs; servicing and maintenance of buildings, maintenance of grounds, cleaning materials and contract cleaning; water and sewage; fuel and light, rents and rates; purchase, maintenance, repairs and replacement of furniture and fittings and insurance.

24 How will the school be run and who will hold it to account if it is no longer under Local Authority control?

The Governing Body would need to set up an Academy Trust Board. This will include parent governors, staff governors and co opted governors. Staff and parents will be able to address concerns through the school complaints procedure as they do currently. There will also be an Annual General Meeting of the Academy Trust Board, just as there is for Governors now. Part of the funding agreement with the Secretary of State will be that we continue to serve the needs and interests of the local community. The academy would still be subject to OfSTED and HMI inspections as it currently is; and the school will still be subject to meeting all the national standards and expectations linked to children's attainment and achievement, year on year, as it currently is. The LA played a middle role here and the school would still have the option of buying in services from the LA to advise them in this area, if they felt this was necessary.

25 What will the responsibilities of the governing body be?

Governors have a very similar responsibility to that of now. The key responsibilities are to:

- ensure the quality of educational provision;
- challenge and monitor the performance of the academy;
- manage the academy trust's finances and property; and employ staff.

It is for the members of the governing body of the school to decide and agree, in discussion with the Secretary of State, who among them would wish to be members of the academy trust and which of them would wish to be governors of the academy trust (it is possible to be both a member and governor).

26. Will parents still be represented

Yes definitely. We value the input from parents, and there will continue to be a proportion of parents on the board of governors of the academy, alongside staff and other co-opted members. Many of the existing governors who know the school well will sit on the new board and continue to work to drive the school forward.

27 So what about the school uniform

The Governors will not be asking parents to buy a new uniform. There are no plans to change.

28 Would there be help available to ensure a smooth transition should a decision be made to transfer to Academy status

As part of their initial research, the Governors have spoken to solicitors, accountants and Banks who have specialised expertise in the process of transfer to an Academy. Their experience and help will ensure that the process is smooth, and no changes felt in the day to day running of the school as a result.

29 What about the curriculum

We will continue to develop our exciting curriculum and provide a meaningful, purposeful education for your child. Having the ability to use our resources to best meet the needs of our school and its community means that we will be able to extend and refine the range of opportunities we can offer our pupils.

30 Will the school day change

There are no plans to change the time or length of the school day.

31. Can we withdraw from the conversion process

Yes. We can withdraw right up to the point at which we sign the funding agreement. After that we are committed for seven years. We will continue to look at all our options throughout the consultation process.

32. Will it mean a lot of work for the school to the detriment of the children

There will be some additional work, but the Governors will ensure that the Administration staff are given the appropriate additional time to carry out the work required. Many of the statutory tasks involved in the conversion process will be carried out by the external accountants, solicitors and banks. The Governors have been meeting with a number of these professionals, to ensure that should a decision to convert be made, we will be getting 'Best Value'

33. Who will oversee the process.

If a decision to convert is made, we will be allocated a Representative from the Academies department at the Department for Education who will be responsible for overseeing the process, and to whom the school, solicitors and accountants will liaise.

We hope that this has answered some of your questions, but you are very welcome to pop in to our drop in sessions should you wish to chat or find out anything more on Wednesday 12th December from 8.30 - 9.30 a.m. or Thursday 13th December from 3.30 - 4.30 pm

If you prefer you can email enquiries@huntingtowerroad.lincs.sch.uk

Or complete the form at the end of this booklet, and return to school in the box in the entrance foyer by 3.30pm on 21st December

We look forward to hearing from you.

