



3rd July 2019

Dear Parents

The state and provision of education, both in our country as a whole and in our local area, is continually changing and challenging. At St Michael's we are not exempt from these changes and both the staff and governors are always looking to see how we can provide the very best schooling and learning for our children. At the same time, we also want to protect the things that make St Michael's a special place for our children to grow, develop and flourish; such as our Christian ethos, the fact that we are a small friendly school where almost everyone knows everyone else and our enviable reputation for caring and nurturing the children you trust us with every day.

We want to ensure that despite the financial challenges and the threat of large schools that surround us, we can continue to be the best school we can. Our governors and the school leadership team have therefore spent a lot of time over the last year or more considering the options available to us. As part of this exercise we have also factored in the increasing costs coupled with reducing levels of support and service that we receive from the local authority and what other schools have done.

We have come to the conclusion that it could potentially be in St Michael's best long term interests to become an academy within the Southwark Diocesan Multi-Academy Trust (MAT). This has the very special advantage of making sure that we continue as a Church of England school supported by other church schools within a church-founded Multi-Academy Trust.

We would therefore like to invite you to a special meeting so that you can learn more about our reasoning and you can have the opportunity to let us know your opinions and views about this proposed change. The meeting will take place on Tuesday 23rd July at 9.00am in the school hall. There are a set of Questions and Answers below which may help with some concerns you may have especially if you are unable to attend the meeting.

At the current time, we would ask you to keep this information confidential whilst we are consulting about the proposed change.

Yours faithfully

Ms Gouws
Headteacher

Mrs Fielder
Chair of Governors

Frequently Asked Questions

Will the school name change?

No, we will still be known as St Michael's Church of England Primary School

Will the uniform be changed?

No, everything will stay the same – although we regularly review the uniform to make sure it remains suitable and affordable.

Will the school lose its identity?

No, one of the benefits of joining the SDBE MAT is that they value and celebrate the individuality and uniqueness of each of its member schools.

Will the teachers/other staff change?

No, all our teachers and other staff will remain unless they choose to move on to further their careers, resign or retire, just as before. The teachers and other staff will however change to being employed by the MAT rather than St Michael's Governors. Their pay rates, pension and terms/conditions of service will remain the same.

Will the role of Governors change?

The Governing Body will still meet and decide the priorities of the school although the MAT is ultimately responsible. In practice, the MAT will delegate responsibility for budgets, curriculum and staffing back to the governors. The MAT would be included in the appointment process for a new headteacher.

What will be the financial impact for parents joining the MAT?

There will no additional costs or extra fees for parents to pay. Fees for afterschool club, breakfast club will continue to be at the school's discretion and joining the MAT will not change that. The amount paid for school dinners, will continue to be determined by the school and, where possible, be maintained in line with other Lewisham schools

Is the MAT responsible for everything?

Whilst the MAT is responsible for the whole school, there are some areas for which the Local Authority (i.e. the Borough of Lewisham) has a statutory duty of responsibility such as Special Educational Needs, Child Protection and Attendance.

Who decides whether the school applies to become an academy and join the SDBE MAT?

The Governing body. After consultation, the governors would need to meet and pass a formal resolution to convert to an academy – and this must be recorded in the minutes.

Is there a requirement to consult?

Yes. Whilst there is no requirement to consult regarding the intention to apply to become an academy, once the Department for Education (DfE) grants the academy order there is a need for a

formal consultation exercise. This current exercise is part of the informal consultation/discussions with key stakeholders and follows recommended best practice.

Can the school change its mind and stop being an academy?

No. Once the school converts to an academy, there is no route, under current legislation, to return to being a voluntary aided school.

Is approval required from the Church?

Yes, through the Southwark Diocesan Board of Education (SDBE). The SDBE must give written approval.

Does the school need the consent of the SDBE MAT?

Yes. Once the school's application has been received, the SDBE MAT will carry out a process known as 'due diligence' and then decide whether it consents to the school joining the MAT.

If we start the process, can we stop?

Yes. If, during the consultation process, or in the light of due diligence procedures, the school considers that it would not be in our best interest to become an academy then we can stop and not go any further. This can happen at any time before the DfE issues the formal Academy order.

Can the school leave the SDBE MAT if it is not happy with the service provided?

Theoretically, yes. It would be hoped that the school and the MAT would be committed to making the partnership work successfully. If there were difficulties that could not be resolved then the school could follow the complaints procedure developed by the MAT. If this did not resolve things satisfactorily, then there is the possibility that parents could petition the Regional Schools Commissioner to move the school to a different Diocesan MAT. As a church school we could only move to a non-Church MAT in exceptional circumstances and the Christian ethos of our school must be protected.

What is the timescale for conversion?

It normally takes between four and six months for the conversion process to be completed and can, in theory, take place at anytime during the school year. In practice, the SDBE MAT controls the numbers of schools joining so that the process is gradual and sustainable. The earliest/likely date for us would be 1st April 2020.

Will the school retain its religious character when it converts to an academy?

Yes, the religious character remains exactly the same and cannot be changed through the process of becoming an academy. The SDBE MAT will also ensure that the school's Christian ethos is protected.

Will the school still be inspected by OFSTED and SIAMS?

Yes, OFSTED is still responsible for monitoring academies. Church school inspections - the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) will also continue unchanged.

Will the school still be responsible for setting its own admissions policy?

Yes. Whilst technically the SDBE MAT becomes the admissions authority, the Local Governing Body will have delegated responsibility for determining its admissions policy, which must in any event comply with the DfE Admissions Code and Appeals Code. The governing body will still be required to consult with the SDBE, as now, on any proposed changes and have regard to their guidance. The Local Authority will still co-ordinate admissions to the school as it does at the moment.

So, what are the main benefits of joining the SDBE MAT?

- Protection of the school's ethos and unique identity
- Better opportunities to share best practice and maintain/improve children's attainment
- Control of our own curriculum and opportunities for all children
- Improved staff recruitment with better opportunities to work across all schools within the MAT
- Greater access to partnerships and links developed by the MAT
- More opportunities for staff retention
- Increased economies of scale and efficiencies in running central services such as payroll, finance, premises and Human Resources as well participating in centralised purchasing
- Greater freedom on how to utilise our allocated budget
- Improved support across many areas of school life
- Fills the vacuum left by reduced services and support provided by the Local Authority
- Potentially more money in our budget
- Potentially greater access to capital funds for building improvements and maintenance.