



Frequently Asked Questions for the Thomas Gray Academy Consultation



- **Why does the Governing body want to join Northern Schools Trust?**

The Governors of Thomas Gray Primary School see joining the Northern Schools Trust as a positive way forward for the school to develop in the future and we hope that you will agree. The school and the Northern Schools Trust vision for what we want to achieve are very closely aligned, which is why we have chosen to partner with them.

- **How does the TG vision align with the NST vision?**

Team TG vision is to 'Bring out the best in Bootle', bring out the best in our children and give them a chance to make a better future for themselves. We are unwavering in prioritising basic skills which will enable every child to succeed in future life - English, Mathematics, Oracy and Computing, along with a strong focus on personal development that will enable our pupils to be resilient and confident and treat themselves and others with respect.

Team NST vision is to establish world class, secondary, primary and specialist schools that are centres of excellence for personal development, leadership and teaching and learning. The focus of the Trust is on providing exceptional, life changing opportunities for all students.

- **What are the benefits of TG joining NST?**

In short, an opportunity for every member of the TG family to reach their potential!

- Closer collaborative working between strong schools so that staff can build upon sharing their expertise in order to raise standards even further for our children.
- Securing best value for money on products and services thereby achieving greater economies of scale, so that we can spend as much as possible in classrooms.
- Opportunities for the trust to apply and benefit from grants and bids that schools do not have access to under local authority control.
- Greater collaborative working with a wide range of schools across other trusts and opportunities for other schools to join in order to build capacity even further.

- **What will change for your child?**

If we proceed, you and your child are unlikely to see any change in your day to day experience of school. The students will not notice any immediate difference. They will be in the same school in the same classrooms. Leaders, teachers and support staff will remain and have their terms and conditions protected as part of the conversion process; the school will continue to have a governing body; all children on roll at the school will continue; times of the school day, term dates.

We will continue to strive for an outstanding education for all our children. However, in time, the children may notice changes and improvements in the way that they learn, resulting from the greater training opportunities given to teaching staff to innovate and improve the pupil experience.

- Will the name change?

No

- Will the uniform change?

No, we will honour the individual characteristics of our school.

- How will the money raised by the Friends Association / fundraising be used?

Each school will continue to have its own autonomous mechanism for fundraising, although they will be free to collaborate if they wish. The money raised by each school's fundraising efforts will only be used for its own school and will continue to be independent of the school, raising money for agreed resources or projects that have been asked for by the school's leadership.

- What are the implications of not joining Northern Schools Trust?

There is a direction of travel within UK education which indicates a large growth in the number of Multi Academy Trusts. Currently schools have a free choice in the selection of working with a selected MAT or collaborating with other schools to form a new MAT. However, in the future, schools who have not joined a MAT on a voluntary basis could be directed to join another Trust, not of their own free choice.

We thought it far better to join a MAT which aligned with our mission, vision, ethos and strategic direction but also understands and meets the needs of our community.

Frequently Asked Questions about academies in general

- What is an academy?

Academies are state-funded schools but they are independent of local authorities meaning they are not run by councils. They can decide on their own curriculums, term dates, school hours, and much more. They're still funded by the government but they get to decide how they spend their money, from how much they pay teachers to how much they spend on classroom equipment.

Over half of pupils in England are already educated in academies and there are three types:

- Converters - formerly council-run schools that chose to become academies - Thomas Gray.
- Sponsored - previously underperforming council-run schools in need of support, and/or judged 'Inadequate' by Ofsted, where the law requires them to become academies; or
- Free schools - brand new schools established to meet a need for good school places in the area.

- What are multi-academy trusts?

A Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) is a group of academy schools overseen by a charitable trust, and governed by a board of trustees. Rather than being financed by the local authority, a MAT is directly funded by, and accountable to, the Department for Education. While the schools that make up the trust are still firmly part of their community, the trust is there to support the schools and help them work together for the benefit of all children

Multi-academy trusts are charities that have responsibility for running a number of academies. They cannot, as charities, be run for financial profit and any surplus monies must be reinvested in the trust.

By working in partnership with each other, the schools within a trust can share staff, curriculum expertise, and effective teaching practices, and work together to deliver the best outcomes for pupils.

While other types of school partnerships can be effective, the key difference with academy trusts is that there is shared accountability for standards across the trust; all schools within the trust support each other and the trust is accountable for them all.

- **Why is the government's focus now on supporting schools to join strong trusts?**

Joining a multi-academy trust remains a positive choice for schools. They enable the strongest leaders to take responsibility for supporting more schools, develop great teachers, and allow schools to focus on what really matters - teaching, learning, and a curriculum that is based on what works.

Multi-academy trusts have the capacity to provide high-quality training and evidence-based curriculum support for already great teachers, freeing them to focus on what they do best - teaching.

- **If they have all this freedom, how are they accountable?**

This freedom does not mean academies are not regulated. The department's National and Regional Schools Commissioners and their teams, together with the Education and Skills Funding Agency, provide robust educational and financial oversight of all academy trusts. Individual academies are still subject to Ofsted inspections and ratings in exactly the same way as council run schools. In fact, academies are subject to greater accountability than council-run schools because of increased financial regulation.

- **Why are schools grouped in a Multi-Academy Trust?**

Grouping schools within a multi-academy trust affects the quality of education we can provide for your child in a beneficial way. Improved learning outcomes are behind everything we do. The MAT provides collaboration opportunities for pupils and staff and an efficient Central Team and effective Executive Team to provide challenge and support.

- **What other benefits are there to a multi-academy trust?**

A significant benefit of becoming a MAT is the ability to collaborate and share expertise across the Trust. Children can benefit from a wide range of specialist staff; a particular feature of the trust is that it employs many qualified and experienced teachers who share expertise across the Trust. This allows us to deliver both a broad curriculum and a range of enriched extra-curricular activities to children across all the schools. These benefits will develop further as the trust grows.

- **Will we get more funding as an academy?**

The academy trust will receive a *General Annual Grant* from the Secretary of State calculated as the equivalent to that which would be received by a maintained school taking account of the number of pupils at the academy. Capital funding is also available, channelled through the Academy Trust. Every academy trust must abide by the requirements of and have regard to the guidance in the Academies receive the same amount of per-pupil funding as they would receive from the Local Authority as a maintained school. They also receive additional funding in the form of the *Education Services Grant* to cover the services that are no longer provided for them by the County Council and to cover the costs of academy status.

- **Is there a hierarchy of funding within the MAT?**

No. Trustees have an obligation to act in the best interest of the Trust as a whole and therefore in the best interests of all schools within the Trust. There must be due regard to the funding needs and allocations for each individual school.

- Do the large schools have larger voting rights when it comes to decision making?

MATs do not operate on a one vote one school principle. The Trust has a board of Trustees which have the responsibility of running all the schools within the MAT, in relation to the financial position, operational management and the risk management of the organisation. The day to day running of the school is carried out by the relevant headteacher. The local governing body would have a focus on educational standards and outcomes.

- How does the staffing model operate?

General employment law applies to academies in the same way as to other organisations. Teachers must be suitably qualified. The Academy Trust has responsibility for setting pay and conditions. All teachers employed at an academy have access to the Teachers Pensions Scheme and all other employees at an academy have access to the Local Government Pension Scheme. Teaching staff would benefit from having greater opportunities for career developments and training. Members of staff could choose to work in different member schools to support school improvement or as career development opportunities.

- What is the curriculum model in an academy?

Academies are required to have a broad and balanced curriculum that promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental, and physical development of pupils and prepares them for the opportunities, responsibilities, and experiences of later life. The curriculum must include English, Maths, and Science; Religious Education; and Relationships education and health education. Academies are required to take part in the same pupil assessment arrangements and to report on the achievement and attainment of pupils in the same way as all other state-funded schools.

- What about SEND?

Academies should be fully inclusive local schools and in common with all other schools have a clear legal duty to do their best to meet the needs of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

- What is the admissions policy for an academy?

Academies are required to provide education for pupils wholly or mainly drawn from the area in which the academy is situated. Academies must have admission arrangements that clearly set out how children will be admitted, including the criteria that will be applied if there are more applications than available places.

Academies are required to provide education for pupils of different abilities.

- Are the schools still inspected by Ofsted?

Yes, academies are still subject to Ofsted inspections.