



Park Grove Primary School
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Empowering Children through Creative Learning

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12th September 2016

Dear Parents/Carers

At Park Grove Primary, we are always looking at how we can develop our school so that we continue to provide the very best learning opportunities for all of our children. During the last 3 years, Park Grove has seen very rapid improvement in all aspects of school life and, under our current leadership team, the school was judged by Ofsted as “good in all categories” following its inspection in April of this year. This was a huge achievement as it followed the last inspection in November 2013, which rated the school as “requiring improvement”, and was secured under Ofsted’s new and much more demanding inspection framework. Even more gratifying is the fact that we were the first school in York to secure a “good in all categories” rating under this new framework.

One of the key roles of Governors is to set the strategic direction of the school and for the last 12 months Governors, the Head Teacher and Senior Leaders have been together exploring the best options so that our school can continue this journey of improvement. This exploration culminated in July with Governors deciding to launch a consultation to explore the possibility of converting to Academy status. **This does not mean to say we will become an Academy; it is simply to commit to exploring the options and seeing if this move is right for us – our staff, our children and our community.**

The rationale for such a decision was as follows:

- it provides a solution to the financial pressures schools are increasingly facing, whereby increases in national insurance contributions, teachers’ pensions and general inflation coupled with higher costs of Local Authority services because of cost savings imposed from central government are now preventing schools balancing their annual budgets. Fortunately, Park Grove is in a position to manage such pressures in the short term but the situation can only deteriorate further and will inevitably lead to the school having to reduce front line teaching resources in order to live within its means with no prospect of adding them back,
- it allows us to expand our curriculum to better address the areas of modern foreign languages, the visual arts and music as well as the needs of our disadvantaged pupils ,
- it allows us to fully share examples of best practice to continually challenge and improve teaching and learning ,
- it provides increased professional development opportunities for all staff.

In examining the available Academy and non Academy options, Governors' key considerations were to ensure that they not only facilitated our adoption of each of the above, but also enabled Park Grove to retain its unique identity and control of its finances, leadership and local decision making. The only option that met all such considerations was the Ebor Academy Trust, a York-based Multi Academy Trust currently comprising eight schools across York, Selby, the East Coast and West Yorkshire. In early, informal talks with Ebor, we have discovered that they are a charitable, non-profit-making organisation, share our child centric values and ethos, are Primary as distinct from Secondary led and demonstrably believe in full autonomy at the "local" level. If therefore, it is decided that becoming an academy is the best option, Governors would begin formal discussions to join the Ebor Academy Trust.

The consultation will run from 12 September to 21 October and meetings and drop-in events have already been arranged so that parents and carers can discuss the principles of becoming an Academy. Representatives from senior staff, the governors and the Ebor Academy Trust will be available at each of these meetings. **We very much welcome your views and comments concerning the best way forward for our school. Rest assured there will be every opportunity for everyone's views to be heard and questions answered. Any decision as to whether or not to convert to an Academy and whether to join Ebor has to be taken by our full Governing Board based on what is best for our children, our families, our staff and our wider community both now and for the future.**

We know that the prospect of change can be worrying but we want to reassure you that **no decision will be taken before governors are completely satisfied they are in possession of all the information they need, including considering feedback from this comprehensive consultation with all our stakeholders.**

A timeline of consultation activities, together with some questions and answers are provided below. We also enclose a brochure from the Ebor Academy Trust that provides more information about the organisation we are considering joining. We ask you to read these carefully as they provide further information and context concerning the Academy option. Our website also has this information, and any further questions and answers will be posted on line as they come up.

Below are meeting dates and times any or all of which you are welcome to attend. You can also submit questions or comments to the school's email address or write via the School Office. All contributions will be presented to governors, who will consider them before making their final decision. parkgrove@york.gov.uk

Timeline:

1. Monday 12 September: Consultation begins.
2. Tuesday 20 September: Information evening at school for parents, carers and local community, 6pm until 7.30pm. Governors, the school leadership team and Ebor representatives will discuss Academisation and what it may mean for Park Grove.
3. Tuesday 27 September: Drop-in at school from 3pm until 5pm. This will be an opportunity to informally discuss Academisation and talk to governors, the school leadership team and Ebor representatives.
4. Tuesday 11 October: Drop-in at school from 8am until 9am and again from 3pm until 4pm. This will be an opportunity to informally discuss Academisation and talk to governors, the school leadership team and Ebor representatives.
5. Thursday 20 October: Drop-in at school from 8am until 9am and again from 3pm until 4pm. This will be an opportunity to informally discuss academisation and talk to governors, the school leadership team and Ebor representatives.

6. Friday 21 October: Consultation period ends at 9.30am, when all responses received will be collated and sent to governors.
7. Tuesday 8 November at 6pm: Governors hold an Extraordinary Meeting of the Full Governing Body to consider responses and vote either to continue to explore Academisation or to reject the proposal.
8. The results of this vote will be communicated to all stakeholders as soon as practically possible and if the result approves the decision to join Ebor Academy Trust, a timescaled action plan will also be provided.

Academisation and joining the Ebor Academy Trust - Questions and Answers for Parents & Carers:

What is an Academy?

Academy schools are state-funded schools in England which are directly funded by the Department for Education and independent of Local Authority control. Academies have greater independence and freedom to enhance the curriculum and expand resources for the benefit of their pupils. They are still inspected by Ofsted and have to follow the same rules on admissions, special educational needs and exclusions as other state schools.

Which schools can choose to become Academies?

Only schools judged “good” or “outstanding” by Ofsted, like Park Grove, can choose to become an Academy.

Who runs an Academy?

An Academy is run by an Academy Trust that is led by a Board of Trustees who are a non-elected body of normally 8 to 12 individuals chosen for their experience and area of expertise in such issues as education & teaching, general management, finance, legal, marketing, HR etc.

How much does it cost to convert to an Academy?

The DfE gives a grant of £25,000 to cover legal and administrative costs most of which is usually used in the process of academy conversion. Any remaining monies are retained by the applicant school.

What is a Multi Academy Trust or MAT?

A Multi Academy Trust is a partnership of Academy schools who work together under formal, legally binding agreements for the benefit of all schools in the partnership. Each school in the partnership can benefit from being stronger together whilst retaining its own leadership and day to day decision making.

Why a Multi Academy Trust?

In recent years, the Government has progressively reduced local authority funding forcing Councils to make savings in all areas of their operations including Education. This means that they (Local Authorities) are no longer able to provide the support and services for schools that used to be available. As a result, schools across the country are being encouraged to work more closely together initially through informal “clustering” arrangements but increasingly by becoming academies and joining other like-minded schools to form a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) so that they can share services and each member school can concentrate on the teaching and welfare of its pupils.

What are the advantages of joining a Multi Academy Trust?

There are a number of benefits of joining a Multi Academy Trust. These include:

- providing a solution to the financial pressures schools are increasingly facing,

- allowing schools to expand their curriculum to better address the areas of modern foreign languages, the visual arts and music as well as the needs of our disadvantaged pupils in all their forms,
- allowing schools to fully share examples of best practice to continually challenge and improve teaching and learning,
- providing increased professional development opportunities for all staff,
- shared buying power means specialist expertise can be funded and extra-curricular activities provided,
- economies of scale in schools' purchasing power,
- services such as finance, HR and IT can be centralised, freeing member schools up to focus on teaching and learning.

How do I find out more about Academies?

A useful starting point is www.gov.uk/types-of-school/academies

Who are Ebor?

Currently, Ebor is a Multi Academy Trust comprising a total of 8 schools across York, Selby, the East Coast and West Yorkshire. Ebor's plans are to have 3 to 4 "Hubs" in each of these geographic areas with each "Hub" containing 6 to 8 schools or around 2,000 pupils. A number of discussions are on-going within all the areas but in York, Hob Moor Primary and Hob Moor Oaks have agreed to join Ebor within the next 6 months and others are currently in discussions with a view to joining by the end of the year. Ebor is a teacher led, charitable, not-for-profit organisation and any financial surplus generated on a year to year basis is reintroduced into the education provision in its schools. A copy of Ebor's 'School Report' brochure is attached which gives examples of the ways schools have benefitted from joining. Ebor's child centric values where the child is at the centre of everything they do closely mirror those of Park Grove. More information can be found on their website at www.ebor.academy.

Is this a good move for my child, for Park Grove and its staff and for the wider community?

At a time of great changes in education, reduced local authority budgets and consequently less support for schools, we believe teaming up with a like-minded organisation such as Ebor that is already well established, would give Park Grove greater financial stability and provide more opportunities for our children particularly in the areas of curriculum and speciality teaching, both of which should lead to enhanced pupil outcomes. In addition, Ebor already have an established School Improvement Programme that is offered under Local Authority licence, to schools outside Ebor's operating area as well as specialised teaching programmes. These are used to create enhanced career opportunities for staff, as well as additional sources of revenue which are used for the benefit of all members of the Trust.

Will there still be the same leadership structure?

There are no plans to change the school's leadership structure.

Will we still keep our own core values or are there academy ones?

The school's own core values would not change unless the local governing body wants to change them. Ebor's core values are Excellence, Belonging, Opportunity and Respect and these are the trust's overarching values on its website and in all trust level literature.

Will teaching standards change?

Joining a Multi Academy Trust and Ebor in particular would enhance the continued training and development of our staff, enabling us to achieve even higher standards and widen curricular opportunities.

Will the curriculum change?

No, but it would be enhanced through Ebor's access to specialist teachers in the area of modern foreign languages, music and the creative arts, as well as providing access to additional resources to better address all areas of the "disadvantaged" agenda.

Will we employ non-qualified teachers?

There are no plans to employ non-qualified teachers. We believe the quality of the school is reflected in the quality of our staff and we would wish to retain this.

Will our funding change?

As an Academy, the school would have more control over its funding and decision making. An academy receives its money direct from the DfE, not via the Local Authority, giving it greater freedom to spend its money in a way which better meets the needs of its pupils by paying only for the services used by the school. By becoming part of a Multi Academy Trust we would be able to pool our resources with other member schools and choose the best way to use such funds for the benefit of our children and wider community.

Will school lunches change?

No, school lunches will not change as a result of our becoming an Academy. Our buying power as part of Ebor would however ensure we can secure the best quality and value for money.

Can we set our own policies for subjects?

Yes.

Can we set our own policies for wider issues such as behaviour management etc?

Yes.

Does becoming an academy change the way in which exclusions are dealt with?

No.

Would we need to change the way we assess and track pupils?

There are no plans to change the way Park Grove assesses and tracks the attainment and progress of pupils.

Could the school field be sold?

School land is leased to the Academy Trust for 125 years and it cannot be sold.

Will we be changing term dates?

No.

Will the school day have the same timings?

Yes.

Will any jobs be lost if we do decide to proceed and will staff terms & conditions remain the same?

No. Staff would be transferred across under TUPE arrangements under exactly the same terms and conditions of employment.

Will the schools continue to work with the local council and other schools?

We have a very good relationship with City of York Council and other schools in the city, and we intend to continue to develop these partnerships for the benefit of our children and their families. Ebor also works well with clusters and other organisations, as do other schools in their trust.

Will we actually see any differences on a day-to-day basis and will our name change?

Signage and stationery would change slightly, saying that Park Grove Primary School is part of the Ebor Academy Trust. The school name and logo would not need to change but the letterhead would change in order to comply with Companies Act requirements. Children would be in the same classes and taught by the same teachers. However, longer term benefits would be access to more teaching and learning resources, more support from specialist teachers in subjects such as modern foreign languages, music and the creative arts, and the ability to leverage the additional income generated from Ebor's School Improvement and Specialist Teacher programmes outlined above.

Will a uniform be introduced?

No. Park Grove would remain a non-uniform school.

Will the PTA still fundraise just for the school or for the academy chain?

For the school, as at present.

Will the school still fund pens, books etc for the children?

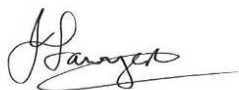
Yes.

Will there be any changes to admissions?

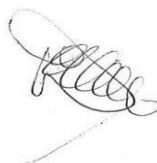
No. There would be no changes to current admissions arrangements.

We invite you to join this process and sincerely hope you will be able to attend at least one of our consultation events. If you can't get to any of the meetings and/or wish to ask a question in advance, please fill in the question slip below and place it in the Academy consultation box located on the trophy table in the main entrance or email us or write to us care of the school office.

Yours sincerely



Miss Jo Sawyer
Headteacher
head.parkgroveprimary@york.gov.uk



Mr David Hare
Chair of Governors
david.hare@york.gov.uk

Question Slip:

Name:

I would like to ask the following question(s):

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We will collate all questions and provide feedback through both the public meetings & our website rather than on an individual basis.