

The Ryedale Federation



Executive Headteacher: Mr Mark McCandless Chair of Governors: Mr David Dangerfield
Secondary Director: Ms Domenica Wilkinson Finance Director: Mrs Helen Coulthard Primary Director: Mrs Gill Hardacre

6th December 2019

The Ryedale Learning Multi-Academy Trust - Consultation

We are writing to you on behalf of the Federation Governing Board to inform you that we are consulting with parents, carers, staff and the wider community on proposals to convert our federation schools to academies, and to set up a 'multi-academy trust' (MAT), to be **provisionally** known as '**The Ryedale Learning MAT**'. Our proposal to do so comes after a lengthy process of discussion between the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) and the governing board. The four schools involved are:

Helmsley CP School, Kirkbymoorside CP School, Ryedale School and Sinnington CP School

Other schools may consider joining the trust over time, and we remain committed to working with all feeder primary and local secondary schools. We are simultaneously exploring the benefits of becoming an 'Academy Sponsor' so that we might in the future be able to apply to sponsor schools that require support and improvement, and are subject to an 'academy order' by the Department for Education (DfE).

Academies are state schools which become the responsibility of the MAT and which are funded directly by the government rather than through the local authority. The MAT has to establish strong and effective systems of accountability and governance to ensure that the schools are successful, sustainable, and, above all, provide the highest possible standards of education and care for children and young people. The current government is committed to supporting good schools in converting to academies and to take the lead in supporting other schools as part of multi-academy trusts; the majority of secondary schools in England are now academies and approximately a quarter of primaries. The number is increasing steadily, including within North Yorkshire. The government is also committed to converting 'under-performing' schools, or those that are placed in an Ofsted 'inadequate' category, to academies.

Because all of our Federation schools are judged 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted, we can voluntarily choose to consider academy status - it is not being 'imposed' on us. Our federation schools could also have the option of joining an existing multi-academy trust, but our Executive Leadership Team (ELT) and Governing Board believe that our schools are in a strong position to establish our own MAT, thereby protecting our collective autonomy.

It is our intention to establish a MAT to serve the local area. The success of The Ryedale Federation so far has been based on strong collaboration between schools serving our local communities and enabling all of them to make their own distinctive contribution to the partnership. There is a very strong commitment across our schools to keep our values and current ways of working.

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Head of School:	Mrs Claire Lamb	Tel: 01439 770783
Head of School:	Mr Gareth Sleightholme	Tel: 01751 431517
Secondary Director:	Ms Domenica Wilkinson	Tel: 01439 771665
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KEY INFORMATION FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

- Our schools will not change their characters and will continue to look, feel and be the same as they are now. There is no intention to grow our existing schools. Any growth would be in the way of other schools joining the MAT.
- The MAT Board will ensure that effective and appropriate oversight of all of the schools is carried out and will be responsible for the trust as a whole. However, the Board may delegate some decision-making powers to Academy/Cluster Committees. Heads of School and the Executive Leadership Team will continue to run the school on a daily basis much as they do now. Parents/Carers will be represented on the Academy/Cluster Committees.
- The name of the schools will not change.
- Children with special needs will continue to receive additional support in the way they do now.
- Our schools will continue to work closely together to support school improvement and the educational provision for your children.
- The multi-academy trust arrangements will share some central services across the schools which will help them be more efficient and make sure that funding is focused on teaching, learning and support for children.

KEY INFORMATION FOR STAFF

- The Ryedale Learning MAT will be your employer instead of the local authority (North Yorkshire County Council), unless you work for a service that is contracted by the school (e.g. catering and cleaning).
- Staff will transfer to the trust under TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment) regulations, retaining current pay, terms, conditions and pensions.
- The day-to-day responsibility for the curriculum, teaching and learning approaches and classroom management will remain with the Headteacher/Heads of Schools.
- Staff will continue to be based in individual schools unless they wish to apply for and are appointed to a trust-wide role; as now, there could be opportunities to work collaboratively with other staff and schools across the partnership.
- Executive Leadership Team members/Heads of School will continue to work closely together to agree shared approaches which will benefit teaching and learning, led by a 'Chief Executive Officer' who, held to account by the board of trustees, will be the lead with regard to strategic responsibilities across the MAT.

KEY INFORMATION FOR THE WIDER COMMUNITY

- The Ryedale Learning MAT will work very closely and co-operatively with local partners, including other schools, community groups and organisations and North Yorkshire County Council.
- The Ryedale Learning MAT will serve the local area.
- Our schools will continue to be part of Teaching School Alliances providing a range of school improvement and other services.

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WHY AS AN ESTABLISHED AND SUCCESSFUL FEDERATION ARE WE NOW CONSIDERING CONVERTING TO BE A MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST?

Although there has been a rapid growth in the number of academies across England, it does not necessarily follow that it is the right approach for every school. When we established the Ryedale Federation in 2016, we felt that the federation model, within North Yorkshire County Council, was the right one for us. Operating as a federation over the last three years has given us the opportunity to develop a more integrated approach to the leadership, teaching, and administration of our four schools. We believe that this has not only delivered significant benefits for our schools but also provided us with invaluable experience. Since the Federation was established in 2016 the Board of Governors have, from time to time, considered the merits of developing the Federation into a Multi-Academy Trust, but it is only now that we feel that we are ready to do so. We have spent some time considering the benefits and the challenges of converting to a MAT and believe that we are now in a position to submit a successful application. All of our decisions are guided by what we consider to be in the best interests of our schools, our staff, our young people, and the communities we serve. As noted above, the federation model has already provided many benefits but we consider the key additional benefits of converting to a MAT to be:

- **Greater opportunities as we grow the MAT for recruiting new staff**, retaining our existing staff, leadership development and staff professional development.
- **More financial stability** and sustainability and a further **opportunity to strengthen our schools' organisation and infrastructure** – facilities (e.g. buildings and grounds, ICT, catering), finance and HR functions.
- **Strong governance** at a strategic level, clearer local accountability for school improvement and more capacity to support each school. Structures for governance within a MAT, enable the delegation of decision-making powers to local academy/cluster committees, which is not permitted within a federation.
- **The ability to apply to sponsor local schools** that require support and improvement, and are subject to an 'academy order'.
- **Choosing our own structure** and reducing the risk of our own schools becoming part of other multi-academy trusts, with an 'external' sponsor, if any became 'eligible for intervention' by the Department for Education.

These key additional benefits will enable us to further enhance the educational provision for our young people in each of our schools.

Furthermore, as local authority capacity to support school improvement reduces, the national expectation is that schools will group together to support – and challenge – each other through effective governance and accountability at local level. As good and outstanding schools working together in a strong MAT, we would be very well-placed to achieve this.

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Potential challenges for us – and how they will be addressed

- **Our schools would no longer be local authority maintained but would still be part of the network of North Yorkshire schools:** the view of the council is now that “every school should have the space and freedom to make the best decisions for the children of the community that they serve both now and into the future”.
- **The MAT would be taking on more significant and complex financial, legal and employment commitments** but will be able to appoint new, or train existing, staff to do this – or continue to buy services from the local authority or other providers as schools do at present.
- **We need to make sure that our school leaders and governors are able to focus on leading and governing** during any significant change process by using funding from the government (£25,000 per school) to help create expertise and capacity to carry out the legal and other processes involved in the conversion process.
- **We need to get the balance right** between individual school autonomy and the ‘collective’ accountability of the multi-academy trust (‘MAT’). We have done this by developing a ‘Scheme of Delegation’ which outlines the responsibilities and relationships between the schools, Academy/Cluster committees and the MAT Board.
- **We need to make sure that our MAT governance arrangements are both representative of our schools, wider community and of the range of skills and qualities needed** to be effective. We are fortunate that a number of people from our locality with relevant knowledge about running complex organisations and experience of school governance have offered to be Members or Trustees in the Ryedale Learning MAT, should the decision be made to proceed with academisation.

WHAT WILL BE DIFFERENT – WHAT WILL STAY THE SAME?

In a MAT, the Trust becomes the employer not the local authority and the ‘TUPE’ arrangements guarantee that all staff transfer on their existing pay, pensions and conditions. The Trust can choose to continue to buy (as the schools currently do) North Yorkshire payroll services to administer staff payment arrangements and to buy other services from the local authority too, if they represent high quality and good value. **Schools are not financially disadvantaged by becoming academies.**

Each school will retain its own unique identity and distinctive characteristics, and the daily life of the schools will continue to be run as they are now. Our existing partnership activities around teaching and learning, curriculum enrichment, staff development, joint training, guidance and support for vulnerable children and young people will all continue and grow.

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The most important differences concern governance and accountability. Multi-academy trusts are governed by Boards of Trustees who are chosen for their relevant skills and experience, their willingness to commit time to the role (they are unpaid) and their ability to both challenge and support the work of the schools.

The Board of Trustees are appointed by up to five 'Members' who represent the local and wider community. It is the duty of Members to appoint Trustees who have a wide range of skills and experience – not just on education but also on finance, legal matters, HR, facilities management etc.

The Board of Trustees is accountable to the government for both funding and school standards. Schools will continue to have their own Heads of School/Headteachers and will have Academy/Cluster Committees ('Local Governing Bodies'), which will have parent and staff representatives. Schools will have delegated levels of decision-making powers, as they do under local authority control, but the funding will come 'through' the MAT under a 'Master Funding Agreement' between the MAT and the Department for Education. The MAT Board will agree the school budgets and there is a scheme of financial delegation which sets out what spending decisions the schools can take. The Academy/Cluster Committee will be accountable to the Board of Trustees for standards and outcomes for pupils and the Board will intervene to support and challenge the Academy/Cluster Committee if there are concerns about a school.

A key 'new' role is that of the Chief Executive Officer. In the same way that each school must have a designated headteacher, a MAT has to have a designated leader (referred to as a Chief Executive Officer or CEO). The role of the CEO is to work with both the Board of Trustees and the other Heads in developing the MAT, with a particular focus on teaching, learning and school standards. The current role of Executive Headteacher within the Ryedale Federation, will become the role of the CEO in the MAT. The current ELT, heads and other staff will continue to play a vital part in leading activities across the partnership in much the same way as they do now.

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What will the structure of the Ryedale Learning Trust look like?

MEMBERS (3 to 5)
The 'guardians' of the governance of the trust.
The Members appoint the Board of Trustees
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Board of Trustees (up to 9) will be chosen by the Members on the basis of their relevant skills and experience in education, facilities management, HR, legal matters and finance, as well as their understanding of our schools and communities.• The Trustees are accountable for standards across the schools in the multi-academy trust and for the funding, which comes directly from the government.• There will be a number of committees: Audit, Finance and Resources, Standards.
The Trustees appoint the Chief Executive Officer
The Chief Executive Officer is accountable to the Trustees. He or she works closely with the headteachers / heads of school and is the link between the schools and the Board of Trustees. The Executive Leadership Team (ELT) is, in effect, the 'senior leadership' group of the MAT and works together to ensure coherence in implementing trust-wide priorities across the schools. The Chairs of Committees group will meet on a regular basis and is an important forum for ensuring two-way communication between individual schools and the Board of Trustees.
The Schools
Individual schools will be led by their headteachers/heads of school and academy/cluster committees (including parent and staff representatives), supported by the Trust Board. Schools have delegated decision making powers but the Trust Board and CEO will have the authority to intervene and support a school that is at risk of becoming vulnerable. Individual schools keep their unique identity, name and distinctiveness.
Support Services
Some services may be shared between all of the schools – e.g. finance, facilities management, HR functions, ICT systems. Some will be provided 'in-house', others by 'external providers', including the local authority. There will be a very strong shared focus on teaching, learning and raising standards, building on the success of The Ryedale Federation.

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WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

- Formal consultation begins on Monday 9th December and concludes on Monday 20th January 2020.
- There is a consultation questionnaire with this letter. If you would like to give your views, or have any questions, please complete it and return it to your child's school (if a parent/carer) or your school (if a staff member) or your nearest school (if a local resident), or email to: sfrench@theryedalefederation.org.uk by Monday 20th January 2020 at 4pm.
- There will be opportunities for staff briefings in each school and unions will also be consulted.
- All are welcome to attend a public consultation event at Ryedale School on Wednesday 15th January 2020 from 18.30-20.00.
- The Steering Group will meet on Wednesday 8th January to consider initial feedback and any issues which have arisen so far during the consultation period.
- The Governing Board will meet on Tuesday 11th February at Ryedale School (18.00 to 20.00) to consider all feedback received during the consultation period. This will provide an opportunity to decide whether or not to proceed further with the conversion process.
- Applications are considered by the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) for The North (a Department for Education post), advised by a Headteacher Advisory Board. It is the RSC who decides on whether or not to approve the application.
- If the application is approved, the government provides funding (£25,000 per school) to pay for the legal and other costs of conversion; during this time, the Members, Board of Trustees and Chief Executive Officer would be formally appointed.
- This process may take several months, after which the schools formally convert to academy status. Therefore, the earliest the conversion could happen for our schools would be during the summer term 2020.

Mr Mark McCandless
Executive Headteacher

Mr David Dangerfield
Chair of Governors

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