



21<sup>st</sup> October 2022

Dear Parents,

In July we wrote to you about the work we have been doing in partnership with several other local schools with a view to forming a new Multi Academy Trust. We are writing now to give you an update on this and open a wider consultation with you about the future.

The schools that have expressed an interest in the possible formation of a Trust are Hawkedon, Hillside Primary School, Willowbank Junior and Infant School, Waingels College, Lambs Lane Primary, Church End Academy, Southlake and Highwood Primary School. In addition to this, we are working alongside other schools who have also expressed an interest in joining with us.

It is the government's clear policy that all schools should become academies and join a family of schools in a Multi Academy Trust by the end of the current decade. They published a White Paper in March 2022 and although the government's priority at present is the economy, we believe that the government will continue to encourage schools to become academies. Nationally, over 80% of secondary schools and 40% of primary schools are academies.

A Multi Academy Trust can be defined as *"a group of schools working in collaboration as one entity to improve and maintain high educational standards across the group of schools"*. If a school academises and joins a multi academy trust they move away from local authority control and the Trust becomes accountable for the school. Seven of the interested schools are still at present Local Authority schools and joining the trust will result in them being independent from the local authority.

It is our view that over the last few years the Local Authority has found it challenging to provide the quality and range of school improvement services that schools want. For many Wokingham schools this has been frustrating. The Local Authority's dwindling school improvement funds can only stretch so far and so five years ago a group of school leaders decided to use the expertise that exists in all our schools and form an alliance, the Schools' Learning Alliance. The purpose of this alliance was to collaborate with other schools and learn from each other. The SLA has been very effective and supported each other to improve schooling for your children. The natural next step for some of the schools in the SLA was to investigate forming a multi academy trust where schools are funded directly by the Department of Education and not the local authority,

We are still in the process of designing and constructing the structures and systems that will enable all interested schools to work together, while maintaining their distinct individuality, but belong to one organization. When we have finished this work, we will formally consult with staff, parents and communities, before the Governing Board makes a final decision about joining the new Trust.

However, we have already decided on a name for our Trust, and we have identified the values that we all have in common which will determine our Mission and Vision for the future. The MAT will be known as the Orchard Learning Alliance, although all schools will keep their existing school names. An orchard is where we plant young saplings, where we nurture and fertilize these saplings so that they grow into strong trees which bear abundant fruit – the metaphor for what we do in schools is clear. Together, we chose to call our trust the Orchard Learning Alliance because everything we do in schools is about learning and we are a group of allies, who have come together to form a trust for the benefit of our communities.

The Orchard Learning Alliance has been successful in recruiting a board of trustees who have a range of experience and skills. This voluntary, unpaid, body provides advice and challenge to schools in the trust while steering the direction of travel. Although trustees are overall accountable for the trust, each school in the Trust will maintain its local governing body. The trustees are working closely with head teachers and governors to ensure that the trust can operate smoothly and all parties are aware of their roles and responsibilities.

Before making a decision as to whether join the MAT or not, all stakeholders in the community need to be fully informed of the process and the impact of joining. Therefore, we will be sending out to you Frequently Asked Questions that will inform you further – the first of these FAQs is attached to this letter. We will hold in person meetings at the start of next half term as part of the consultation period. If possible, governors will make the decision to join or not after taking all views into account, before the winter holiday.

Please look out for and read all the communications regarding the Orchard Learning Trust and if you have any enquiries, please forward them to us via [admin@lambslane.wokingham.sch.uk](mailto:admin@lambslane.wokingham.sch.uk).

Kind regards,

Sharon Finn  
Head teacher

James Birtwistle  
Chair of Governors

## FAQ

### **Q: If we join the Orchard Learning Alliance, will the school uniform change?**

*No, all schools in the trust will retain their own identity and uniform policy will be a matter for individual schools.*

### **Q: Will all the schools have to teach the same curriculum?**

*No, schools have worked hard on developing their own curriculums that are bespoke to individual schools, therefore schools will teach what they have planned to teach the children.*

### **Q: Will the staff in the school change?**

*No more than usual. Staff will remain in the school but will have opportunities to move to other schools if they wish, as they do now.*

### **Q: Will the timings of the school's day change?**

*No, schools will decide in consultation with their parent bodies the timings of the school day, as they do now.*

### **Q: Why should we join an the Orchard Learning Alliance – what do we get?**

*When schools join multi academy trusts, over time many aspects of running a school become centralised. For example, health and safety procedures, IT infrastructure and policy production. At present all these fall under the remit of the individual schools. However, with a centralised system, school leaders are able to focus on what they know best – teaching and learning, this will result in better schooling for all children in the Orchard Learning Alliance*

### **Q: Will schools have to pay to be in the Orchard Learning Alliance?**

Yes. At present, funding is sent to the Local Authority who then distribute funds to schools. The local authority take some of this money to run their services. In the Orchard Learning Alliance, all funds will go to schools who will be charged small percentage to pay for the centralised systems. This figure will be agreed with the governing bodies.

### **Q: What will the school get for its money?**

In addition to the centralised services the Orchard Learning Alliance trustees are committed to the formation of a head office that will employ people to focus on providing support to schools so that they can improve. At present the local authority can only provide very limited support (4 hours of support for Good schools per year), the Orchard will provide a far more intensive support programme that will improve educational outcomes for children.