

**THONGSLEY FIELDS
PRIMARY AND NURSERY SCHOOL**



**CONSULTATION ON POTENTIAL CONVERSION TO
ACADEMY STATUS**

WITH

THE CAM ACADEMY TRUST



Introduction

Thongsley Fields School is currently governed by an Interim Executive Board (IEB), which is a governing body appointed for a temporary period for a school in challenging circumstances with the specific task of ensuring school improvement. Thongsley Fields School IEB was appointed by the Local Authority (LA) in the July 2017 in response to the school being judged to require improvement by Ofsted in May 2017. Its remit was to secure rapid improvement and determine the best long term arrangements for the school. The IEB is guided in all strategic decision making by what it considers to be in the best interests of the school. Fundamental to this is supporting the development of the best provision for the learning, safety and well-being of all the pupils who attend the school and also providing support and development for the staff that work there.

Where a school has been subject to an intervention of this kind (having an IEB appointed), there is an expectation that there should be discussion with the Department for Education about academy sponsorship. When a school becomes a sponsored academy it receives support from and becomes part of the trust of the sponsor. This arrangement between schools has been shown to be an effective way of helping schools improve rapidly. The IEB has been actively investigating this option.

A suitable academy sponsor has now been identified and the IEB has proposed that Thongsley Fields School, subject to consultation with the school's key stakeholders (including parents, students and the local community) and formal notification and consultation with staff and their respective unions under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 (TUPE), should join the Cam Academy Trust as a sponsored academy. The Cam Academy Trust and the Local Authority both support this proposal.

The IEB has been invited to make an application to the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) for Thongsley Fields School to become an academy and join Cam Academy Trust. This would allow the RSC, in conjunction with the local Headteacher Board, to consider whether

or not to issue a draft order which would, in principle, allow the school to convert to an academy sponsored by the Cam Academy Trust. The IEB has not taken a final decision on whether to convert to sponsored academy status; this will be made after the consultation process has been completed.

Should the IEB vote to proceed with the application to convert, the aim would be to have completed the conversion by September 2018.

To commence the consultation process, which will run from the date of issue of this document until 5th March 2018, we have set out below further information and details on the following:

1. What is an academy?
2. Why is the IEB considering if Thongsley Fields should become a sponsored academy?
3. Why has the IEB selected the Cam Academy Trust?
4. Information about the Cam Academy Trust
5. Some FAQs

Please note that details for how to send feedback to the IEB and information about forthcoming consultation meetings are set out in the covering letter to this document.

What exactly is a sponsored academy?

An academy is a publicly-funded school that is independent of local authority control with greater autonomy given to the headteacher, staff and governing body.

Some people mistakenly believe that academies are private schools or privately run schools. They are not; they are publicly funded and remain subject to inspection by Ofsted. They are accountable to the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC).

A sponsored academy is a school supported by an existing academy, multi academy trust or other appropriate organisation that is able to help the sponsored academy make and sustain rapid improvement.

On conversion to an academy, Thongsley Fields School IEB would cease to exist and the Cam Academy Trust (the charitable company) would take on strategic responsibility for the school and would be accountable for the performance of the school. The Cam Academy Trust would become responsible for the governance arrangements of all school.

Further information

For those who want more information there is a parliamentary briefing paper which has information and answers to “frequently asked questions” about academies. It can be found at:

<file:///C:/Users/Owner/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/IE/K7J04PMT/SN07059.pdf>

Why is the IEB considering Thongsley Fields becoming a sponsored academy?

The IEB has concluded that the long-term future of Thongsley Fields School would be best assured by becoming a member of a successful multi-academy trust because it considers this to be the best way for the school to get the support it needs to continue to make rapid and sustainable improvement.

The IEB considers that conversion to academy status would bring with it greater autonomy to improve and help develop the school further. If the school became an academy, the academy trust would directly employ its staff and all the land and assets would pass directly from the local authority to the academy trust, usually under a 125 year lease. Funding would also come directly to the school rather than through the local authority. The IEB feel that with these freedoms, the trust would be well placed to understand and meet the needs and aspirations of the school, its pupils, parents and its staff.

The Government is clear that becoming an academy should not bring about a financial advantage or disadvantage to a school. Academies should receive the same level of per-pupil funding as they would receive from the local authority as a maintained school. However, academies have greater freedom over how they use their budgets, and this could benefit Thongsley Fields School because its resources could be targeted exactly where they are needed. In addition, as an academy, the school would be able to apply for capital grants from central government.

As an academy, Thongsley Fields School would have a greater freedom to determine its academic curriculum. Pursuing a broad and balanced curriculum as required by the Education Acts, without the rigidity and bureaucracy of the national curriculum, would enable Thongsley Fields School to be innovative in its curriculum and more responsive to its pupils' individual needs. The IEB feel that this ability to further personalise and tailor learning to the specific needs of pupils is a distinct advantage.

Under the academy legislation and Government policies, school improvement is increasingly the responsibility of schools through collaboration with other educational establishments. As part of a multi-academy trust, the school would be able to benefit from the expertise of its sponsor and take advantage of useful academy-wide programmes including Continuing Professional Development (CPD), Finance and Curriculum Design to enhance teaching and learning within the school.

Why has the IEB selected the Cam Academy Trust?

1. The Cam Academy Trust has evolved out of the Comberton Academy Trust which was initially established in 2011. The Cam Academy Trust is a local Multi-Academy Trust (MAT). It currently consists of 8 schools: 4 primary and 4 secondary schools. The primary schools in the Cam Trust are Hartford Infant School and Hartford Junior School which are both in Huntingdon; Gamlingay First School in Gamlingay; and Jeavons Wood Primary in Cambourne. The secondary schools are St Peters School in Huntingdon, Comberton Village College, Cambourne Village College and Melbourn Village College.
2. The Cam Academy Trust is a relatively small multi-academy trust which we feel is an advantage. It is large enough to offer opportunities for mutual support and exchange of ideas between the schools but not so large that our school becomes lost in an anonymous organisation. Although the Trust is still growing at the present time we have been assured that they have no plans to become a very large trust as they wish remain focussed on the local area.
3. The Cam Academy Trust is very local to our school. Two of the primary schools, Hartford Infants and Hartford Juniors, are nearby and Thongsley Fields is a feeder primary for one of the secondary schools, St Peters. This will allow for the development of meaningful local support networks both within phase (that is the primary schools working together) and cross phase (that is working with secondary schools to enhance the primary school curriculum and also to prepare year 6 pupils for transition to secondary education).
4. Since its inception the Cam Academy Trust has been very much focussed in our locality. We have met with the Chief Executive, Stephen Munday, who has explained the vision for improving education in west Cambridgeshire. Many of you are probably aware that when St Peters School joined the Trust in September 2016 it was judged by Ofsted to be inadequate when they inspected the school in July 2016. It was inspected in March 2017, after it had joined the Cam Trust, and was judged as good. In that reports Inspectors said, "The Cam Academy Trust has provided valuable support in raising standards. Trustees and advisers ensure that the school has the necessary capacity to drive forward further improvements. The work of the trust's director of education has been systematic in supporting staff to improve and in mentoring middle leaders."

5. Gamlingay First School was the first primary school to join the Trust. It joined in 2016. At that time the school, although judged good by Ofsted, was facing particular challenges. Members of the IEB have visited all the primary schools in the trust, including Gamlingay First School, and have been very impressed with the levels of support that the school's Headteacher told us the Trust provided.
6. The Cam Academy Trust appointed an Executive Primary Leader, Chris Jukes, specifically to lead the Trust's primary schools. When we met with the primary school Headteachers in the Trust they all described how he visits them very regularly each term and gives them advice and support in addition to providing professional challenge.
7. The primary Headteachers also described how the Trust provides practical help with things such as assessing and tracking pupils' progress, budgeting and recruiting staff. They all described how they felt they had the autonomy to do what they felt was best for their own schools but also had the back up from multi academy trust to make real changes if they needed to.
8. When members of the IEB visited the four primary schools which are already in the Trust we were impressed with the levels of support they receive from the Trust and also the progress they have made since joining it. The primary Headteachers spoke to us about how they support each other and all were very open and welcoming to the possibility that Thongsley Fields might join them.

Information about the Cam Academy Trust

The Cam Academy Trust has a very straightforward mission Statement:

Excellence for All

This is evident in the Trust's 5 Core Principles:

- **The excellence principle** - Education must be of the very highest standard.
- **The comprehensive principle** - Education must be for all kinds and abilities.
- **The community principle** - Every Academy must be at the heart of its local community and serve it well.
- **The partnership principle** - Each Academy must seek to work positively in partnership with others for mutual benefit.
- **The international principle** - The curriculum inside and outside the classroom must have a clear international dimension.

Their aim is to ensure that all pupils attending a Trust school become:

- **Capable:** Through skills developed, attributes nurtured and qualifications gained, our pupils will be able to take a full, positive role in society.
- **Confident:** Having had their abilities confirmed and seen them flourish, our pupils are confident to be able to make the most of their talents and contribute to their communities.
- **Caring:** An emphasis on working with each other and recognising the position of other people throughout the world helps our pupils to develop a proper caring attitude.

The Cam Academy Trust has evolved over the last 7 years and now comprises:

Comberton Village College (founder member in February 2011, last inspected and graded "outstanding" by Ofsted in February 2013)

Melbourn Village College (joined the Trust in September 2013, last inspected and graded "good" by Ofsted in September 2017)

Cambourne Village College (a new school opened by the trust in September 2013, last inspected and graded "outstanding" by Ofsted in June 2015)

Gamlingay First School (joined the Trust in April 2016, last inspected and graded “good” by Ofsted in October 2013)

St Peter’s School, Huntingdon (joined the Trust in September 2016, last inspected and graded “good” by Ofsted in March 2017)

Hartford Infant School (joined the Trust in January 2017, last inspected and graded “outstanding” by Ofsted in December 2008)

Hartford Junior School (joined the Trust in January 2017, last inspected and graded “requires improvement” by Ofsted in September 2016 and is awaiting inspection)

Jeavons Wood Primary, Cambourne (joined the Trust in July 2017, last inspected and graded “good” by Ofsted in April 2015)

The Cam Academy Trust is outward looking and seeks to work with and learn from others whenever possible.

In 2014 it was successful in its bid to become the Maths Hub for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. This is a DfE programme to create a national network of Maths Hubs each led locally by an outstanding school.

Both Comberton and Cambourne Village Colleges are designated Teaching Schools. They work with many other schools within the Cambridge Area Teaching School Alliance and the wider Cambridge Teaching School Network.

Schools in the Trust hold the British Council International School Award which requires schools to show an outstanding level of support for:

- nurturing global citizenship in young people
- enriching teaching and learning

More information about the Cam Academy Trust can be found at:

<https://www.catrust.co.uk/>

Some Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

What will be the effect on my child?

The whole purpose of becoming an academy is to improve the education that the school can provide. The best school is the one that can best meet your child's needs. A good school is one whose staff provide good opportunities which inspire and enable children to learn. The school wants to ensure that it can continue to appoint and develop the best staff to deliver an exciting and innovative curriculum which provides a challenging and supportive education for all pupils. The Cam Academy Trust is committed to achieving this in all its schools.

What freedoms do Academies have?

Academies can benefit from greater freedoms that enable it to innovate and raise standards.

These freedoms include:

- Freedom from local authority control
- Ability to set their own pay and conditions for staff
- Freedoms around the delivery of the curriculum
- Ability to change the lengths of terms and school days.

(After consultation with parents and staff and should it wish to do so)

Who would fund Thongsley Fields school as an Academy?

In the context of Thongsley Fields School, funding would come from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) to the Cam Academy Trust who then resource Thongsley Fields according to a negotiated funding agreement. The ESFA is administered by Central Government. Previously Thongsley Fields School would have received funds via the Local Authority.

What will the Thongsley Fields School do about the services that it currently receives from the Local Authority?

As an academy the school would be free to buy-in whatever services it wished and, although it may turn to the council for those services in the first instance, there would be no obligation to do so and other suppliers could be used if they provide better value. The Multi Academy Trust uses its ability to bulk purchase for its schools in order to reduce costs and so receive better value for money.

What would be the role of the Cam Academy Trust?

The Cam Academy Trust is a charitable company which would be responsible for the overall running of the school and it would have control over the land and other assets. It would have a strategic role in running the school which it would fulfil through the Cam Academy Trust Board of Directors. Day-to-day management would be delegated to the school's Headteacher. Strategic governance would be provided by the Trust Board but a Local Governing Body would be responsible for supporting the school and the Headteacher through providing support and challenge on pupils' progress and attainment. The Trust Board has overall responsibility for ensuring proper and effective use of finances but each school's budget is set and agreed by the board in conjunction with each school's Local Governing Body.

Does an academy take on all responsibilities that the local authority would previously have had?

Academies have freedom from local authority control, which means that they have autonomy over the decisions they make and the education they deliver to their pupils. There are, however some responsibilities that remain with the Local Authority. These are:

- Home to school transport
- Education psychology, SEN statements and assessment
- Assigning SEN resources for pupils who require high levels of additional resource (this is a top-up to formula funding under a separate contract with the local authority)
- Monitoring of SEN provision and parent partnerships
- Prosecuting parents for non-attendance
- Provision of school places to meet local need

The academy and/or the trust would be responsible for:

- SEN support for pupils
- Behaviour support for pupils
- Free School Meals Assessments
- Maternity cover arrangements
- Redundancies, should the need arise
- Management of the school's assets

- School improvement services such as visits from Advisers
- Education welfare services
- Arts and music services from peripatetic or other providers
- The school's ethos

Could the Thongsley Fields School become an Academy on its own without joining an existing Trust?

No. This can only be done by schools that Ofsted has graded as outstanding or good. The current arrangements do not allow schools such as the Thongsley Fields School, which was graded as requires improvement when Ofsted last inspected the school in May 2017, to become standalone academies.

Does Academy status create new opportunities for staff?

Yes, for example teachers would have the opportunity for career development by working with the other schools in the Trust. All staff would have opportunities for CPD including new opportunities that might involve in collaboration with other schools. There would also be increased opportunities for innovative practices to be adopted. The opportunity for staff to work with or in other schools in the Trust is just that: an opportunity not a requirement. Staff could choose to continue to work at Thongsley Fields if they wish.

Who makes the final decision on being an academy?

If the IEB decides to go ahead, the RSC, on behalf of the Secretary of State at the Department for Education (DfE), would make the final decision.

When would Thongsley Fields School become an Academy?

If the IEB decides to proceed, it would plan for the school to become an Academy on 1st September 2018, although this would be subject to all the final agreements being agreed and in place.

Would the Thongsley Fields School change its name?

It could do so if this is what the Local Governing Body chose to do but there is no requirement to do so.

Will there be a uniform?

There is no trust-wide uniform. Each primary school has decided on its own uniform which consists of basic clothing in the agreed school colours which are available from many retailers. Some items, such as sweatshirts with the school's logo, are also available from the schools themselves. There are no plans to change the uniform at Thongsley Fields although the Local Governing Body could choose to do so in the future.

What opportunities are there for working with other schools?

The Cam Academy Trust works collaboratively with other trusts and academies, local maintained schools and the Local authority. It very much believes that no one has the monopoly on good ideas and always seeks to share knowledge and best practice and to learn from others.

How would a change to academy status affect staff?

The Cam Academy Trust would be the employer of all staff, with day-to-day management being the responsibility of the Senior Leadership Team. All staff would have to transfer to the employment of the Cam Academy Trust. Before any conversion to become an academy detailed discussions would take place between all staff and their representatives under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations known as TUPE.

What is TUPE?

A conversion to academy status is a transfer to which the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 (TUPE 2006) will apply. Under TUPE the employment of all current employees would automatically transfer to the academy trust on their current contractual terms and conditions of employment. For the avoidance of doubt, this includes nationally incorporated contractual terms and conditions under the Green Book for support staff and the Burgundy Book for teaching staff.

TUPE also ensures that the period of continuous service for any transferring employees of Thongsley Fields School is preserved. Current Thongsley Fields School employees would therefore transfer over as is and TUPE prohibits as unlawful any future unilateral changes to those terms and conditions at any time after the transfer because of, or for a reason connected with, the transfer.

Staff should note there is a statutory obligation on the current employer (in Thongsley Fields School's case the local authority) to inform employee representatives (i.e. the recognised union/s for teaching and support staff) of certain matters in writing under TUPE in good time before the proposed date of the potential conversion.

These are:

- the fact that the transfer is to take place
- the date of the transfer and the reasons for it
- the legal, economic and social implications of the transfer for any affected employees and the measures which the employer envisages it will, in connection with the transfer, take in relation to any affected employees or, if it envisages that no measures will be so taken, that fact.

Where a school proposes to take any measures in relation to current staff because of or for a reason connected with the proposed transfer, there is also a statutory obligation to consult employee representatives regarding those measures.

Would employees' pension entitlements change?

No. If the school were to convert to academy status, all teaching staff (including any newly recruited to the academy) would continue to have access to the Teacher's Pension Scheme (TPS) and all support staff to the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS).

Pension entitlements would therefore remain unchanged.

Pension administration would change in that if the school became an academy, the Cam Multi Academy Trust would become responsible for remittance of employer contributions.

Would Thongsley Fields School's current admissions policy change if it became an Academy?

No, admissions to the school would continue in the same way: the local authority would continue to manage admissions. All schools have a published admissions procedure which must comply with the School Admissions Code. There are no plans to change the criteria

by which children are admitted to the school. The catchment area would remain the same. Any child currently at the school (or any admitted in the future) with a Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) or an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) would continue to have their needs met by the school in the way set out in their Statement or EHCP. Children with a Statement or EHCP that names Thongsley Fields School will continue to be given first priority. Children with a Statement or EHCP that does not name Thongsley Fields School will be admitted on the same basis as other children.

Would the Freedom of Information regime continue to apply to the school if it became an academy?

Yes. The Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) applies to academies in respect of information held by the academy trust for the purposes of its functions under an academy arrangement.

What would happen to Thongsley Fields School's curriculum if it became an academy?

Whilst as an academy the school would not be obliged to follow the national curriculum and could enjoy freedom from unnecessary prescription and bureaucracy in that respect, it would be required to have a balanced and broadly-based curriculum which continues to satisfy the current requirements under the Education Act 2002 and the express provisions set out in the Department for Education's model funding agreement. Children attending an academy take the same national tests as those at any other primary school.

How would becoming an Academy affect the way exclusions are dealt with?

Academies are required by their funding agreement with the Secretary of State to follow the law and guidance on exclusions as if they were maintained schools. This includes reporting exclusions to the local authority. However, academies do not have to consult the local authority before deciding to exclude a pupil and they can arrange their own independent appeals panel.

Are there any plans to change the school meals arrangements?

No, there are no plans to change the school meal arrangements. Any changes in the future would only be implemented after careful consideration of the potential benefits. All children

who are receiving free school meals when a school becomes an academy continue to do so without re-applying. The process for new applications would not change and decisions made would be on the same basis as now unless the Government changes the scheme.

How would becoming an academy impact on Thongsley Fields School's community involvement?

The principle of community involvement has been incorporated into the Department for Education's model funding agreement, which requires an academy trust to "be at the heart of its community, promoting community cohesion and sharing facilities with other schools and the wider community". This principle of "community cohesion" is central to the Cam Academy Trust's principles and the trust's vision for the Thongsley Fields School as a Cam Academy Trust academy.

Would the school day or term dates change if the school became an academy?

An academy does have the power to change the times and lengths of the school day and the dates and lengths of the school terms. There are no plans to do this but if there were any in the future the Trust would consult with parents, carers, staff and learners about any potential changes.

Would trade union recognition or trade union rights change if the school became an academy?

No. Current local representational rights for the key unions for teaching and support staff would be unaffected.

Where an independent trade union is recognised, to any extent, by the school in respect of any category of staff (teaching or support) that recognition is deemed to pass to the academy trust. This is provided for under TUPE 2006.

Employees' rights, amongst other things to join a union, seek support and advice from a union representative, be accompanied by a trade union representative at a meeting to which that right applies, would be unaffected.

The additional statutory rights afforded to employees who are also representatives, for example to take a reasonable amount of paid time off for union duties and activities, would not change.

What differences in the school will we notice?

Other than continuing to improve the education for the children and benefiting the wider community by enhancing current education provision, the pupils, parents and staff should not notice any real difference in the day-to-day operation of the school if, as proposed, it joins the Cam Academy Trust.

The IEB looks forward to receiving and considering your feedback, comments, views and suggestions which you may share by means of (email address) and/or at one of the appropriate meetings detailed in the cover letter to this document.

The IEB aims to review, respond to and consider all feedback no later than 5th March 2018 whereupon it will reconvene to decide whether to move forward with an application to convert.