

16th November 2020

Dear Parents, Carers and Members of the Community,

Forming a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) Consultation Letter for Parents, Carers and Members of the Community

To retain our school's identity and its capacity to sustain future improvements, the Governing Board (Trustees) and Members of The Abbey School (Faversham) Trust believe that it is vital that we work even more closely in partnership with like-minded schools so that we develop a first-class education for all students.

We are proposing entering a partnership with Brockhill Park Performing Arts College (BPPAC) in Saltwood (Hythe) to form a Multi-Academy Trust. We anticipate that the Trust would be known as the 'Kent Downs Academy Trust' but each of the schools would keep their own current names. Both schools would retain much of their independence whilst benefitting from being part of a trust. The Trust would create opportunities for curriculum improvements across the schools and facilitate sharing of best practice.

At The Abbey School, there is a KCC funded basic needs expansion to the site planned including new specialist performing arts and drama areas. The partnership with Brockhill Park Performing Arts College will enable knowledge and skills in this area to be shared as this aspect of school provision is developed. Similarly, Brockhill Performing Arts College has a nationally recognised expertise in the rural dimension of learning. Their experience in having a fully operational farm on their site means that they are well placed to support The Abbey as it attempts to develop its own curriculum that better celebrates and preserves Faversham's rural heritage.

From Brockhill Performing Arts College's perspective there is much also to be gained. The Abbey School has a specialism in Business and Enterprise and therefore offers a rich programme of learning in that area. It also benefits from superb sporting facilities including a 3G pitch and is home to Dover Athletic's Football Academy. A further area of capability is in inclusion since The Abbey School has a Specialist Resource Provision (SRP) supporting over 40 students with EHCPs linked to ASD. It is clear that each of these aspects offer benefits in skill sharing and shared professional development.

Both schools would offer support and challenge to one another through peer review within the proposed MAT. The leadership teams of the schools are highly experienced and have the capacity to improve further through synergies that can be achieved via spreading specialist leadership knowledge across the two sites. It is noteworthy that both schools have strong Ofsted track records in their recent histories with strong and stable leadership teams. Likewise, both schools face similar development challenges. The areas around Faversham

and Saltwood are sites of high future residential growth and the schools can share their expertise in responding to these pressures. Each of the schools has a strong local community that will be keen on preserving school identity and local representation. For this reason we are proposing that both schools would retain a strong local governing body (LGB) with delegated accountability.

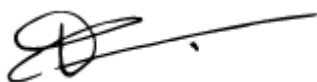
We would continue to maintain and develop our links with other local schools. Some of these may wish to join our collaboration over time. We are therefore consulting on forming a MAT with all of our community members. The earliest date this conversion could happen is 1st September 2021, but may be later in the 2021-22 academic year. The consultation is open to all, including the school's parents, students, staff and wider community. We want to hear your views, which will be considered by the Trustees and Members of The Abbey School Trust. The period of consultation will open on Monday 16th November and end on January 1st 2021 and will cover a period of more than six weeks.

There is some general information attached including some 'frequently asked questions'. Please return any thoughts, comments or questions by the start of the new calendar year to consultation@abbeychoolfaversham.co.uk. We will identify key themes in these and consider these collectively as part of the decision making process.

The strength of our respective schools means that we are confident that we have the vision, ethos and skills to serve both communities effectively to improve teaching and learning. Working as a Multi-Academy Trust will allow both our schools to continue to shape our own destinies but also will provide compelling new opportunities to our students and staff that enable school improvement.

This stakeholder consultation is part of the fact finding to inform our investigation and the decision to become a Multi-Academy Trust will rest with the Trustees and Members along with the Regional Schools Commissioner and not the headteacher.

Yours sincerely,



Mr Trevor Martin
Chair of Governors
The Abbey School

The 'Kent Downs Academy Trust'

This document provides you with information about the proposed change to forming a MAT between the two schools listed above. Under these proposals:

- Each school will remain focussed on delivering excellent teaching and learning within its local community.
- Each school will continue to have its own Headteacher/Principal with less administration and more time to focus on the teaching and learning within their school.
- Each school will continue to have its own Local Governing Body.
- Both schools will work together on projects to improve education and learning for all.
- Both schools will share administration, technical support and resources to reduce costs and improve effectiveness.
- A Trust Board will exist to provide oversight of the performance of each school and ensure effective and equitable investment in improvements across all schools.

Rationale for Change

We believe that the proposed formal partnership will establish a clear vision and systems for working effectively together for the benefit of all of our children. This relationship will work to maximise the outcomes and personal development of all the students in our care. Specifically, we believe that the following benefits are presented to both schools by joining in a MAT:

- **Stronger Leadership** – School leaders and teachers can combine their knowledge and planning abilities to work on challenges and solutions together.
- **Strategic Management** – Members and trustees can draw on each other's experience to formulate strategic approaches.
- **Shared Staffing** – Human resources within the schools can work across multiple sites – particularly those working in an executive function or those supporting common areas of school improvement.
- **Professional Development** – This can be organised across multiple schools, thus spreading the cost per school and upskilling as many individuals as possible per session.
- **Economies of Scale** – Including improved purchasing power, improved support services (such as HR and school improvement) and efficiencies achieved through collective contracts.

- **Shared Accountability** – As a MAT represents multiple schools, it is in its interest to raise the profile of each in line with raising expectations.

There are noted to be key similarities and opportunities for synergy between both Brockhill Park Performing Arts College (BPPAC) and The Abbey School that support the case for synergy being achieved for merging the two single academy trusts into a new combined entity. These include:

- a) Both BPPAC and The Abbey have occupied similar positions in school performance tables within Kent, based on a number of metrics, over many years which provides clear indication of the relative strength of both single academy trusts.
- b) Both BPPAC and The Abbey are larger than average secondary schools. Brockhill benefits from 1400 students and The Abbey from 1200 (but growing rapidly due to basic needs expansion).
- c) Both BPPAC and The Abbey benefit from many years of consecutive 'Good' Ofsted reports and have amongst the better outcomes of their non-selective peers in Kent.
- d) Both BPPAC and The Abbey have relatively high levels of staff retention and are well thought of by their respective staff.
- e) Both BPPAC and The Abbey are semi-rural schools. BPPAC has better developed its Rural Dimension than The Abbey within its curriculum, so there are opportunities for sharing best practice. For example, The Abbey is next to Brogdale National Fruit Collection and also in a town steeped in tradition around hop-farming. Staff at The Abbey want to develop their curriculum to emphasise local culture and tradition in rural affairs.
- f) The Abbey has achieved excellent results annually in Business related subjects, where it has a specialism. The strength in this area includes BTEC, A Level and IB Diploma courses as well as multiple members of senior staff that have served as curriculum leaders in this area in a range of school contexts.
- g) BPPAC benefits from a Performing Arts specialism whilst The Abbey School has a new performing arts and drama building due to be shortly constructed, within which they aim to also include a community theatre. There are opportunities here for sharing experiences between schools.
- h) The Abbey has a very strong sports science department and excellent facilities including a 3G Football Pitch, extensive playing field facilities, multiple sports halls and gym facilities. It is the only school in East Kent to have a football academy with a club of the calibre of Dover Athletic and genuine progression to league football. Players from The Abbey have not only progressed to sports scholarships in top

American Universities but also to league football (including the Premier League). This is an expertise that could be shared.

All sole converter Academy schools nationally, including BPPAC and The Abbey School, are being encouraged to become part of a MAT by joining an existing MAT or by forming their own MAT. We believe forming our own MAT is the best option because it will enable our schools to:

- Develop an excellent education to meet the needs of all.
- Protect our schools' ethos and values
- Retain our individual identities, qualities and strengths.
- Maximise the autonomy of each school in shaping their own future.
- Enable and enhance the professional development of all staff.
- Give greater financial control to obtain the best value and greatest choice of services and ensure funding can be maximised.
- Enhance opportunities to network, to support and challenge.

The Kent Downs Academy Trust Vision

- To provide an excellent education for all students through a highly effective partnership based on mutual support and challenge
- To provide outstanding learning opportunities to all our students irrespective of background
- To prepare our students for 21st Century challenges through promoting lifelong learning
- To teach knowledge and skills that enable students to access a broad range of learning and progression in later life
- To enable all of our children to develop the sense of wonder, aspiration and community mindedness needed to become an effective and active citizen

Frequently asked questions

1. What is an Academy?

An academy is a state school that is run by an Academy Trust. The Academy Trust enters into an agreement with the Secretary of State for Education that sets out its responsibilities and accountabilities for the effective running of the Academy. The Academy is funded directly by the Government and is no longer run by the Local Authority. The Trust is charitable, which means it will operate as a charity and not for the profit of individuals or businesses. Currently, both The Abbey School and Brockhill Performing Arts College are Academy schools and have operated independently as Single Academy Trusts for around a decade.

2. What is a Multi-Academy Trust?

A Multi-Academy Trust is when 2 or more Academies come together in partnership. In our case we are looking to form a MAT, initially encompassing two non-selective schools in South and East Kent. Each school will keep its own name and the MAT will probably be known as the 'Kent Downs Academy Trust'. It will be possible for other schools to join the MAT in the future including other secondary schools or primaries.

3. Who will be responsible for running our school?

The MAT will have an overarching Board of Members and a separate Board of Trustees which may include some individuals drawn from the current schools' Members and Trustees. The Trust Board will ensure that each school has a Local Governing Board (LGB) and propose to delegate many powers to them. The Local Governing Board will continue to work as part of the Leadership and Management of the school.

4. What is involved in becoming a Multi Academy Trust?

We have registered our interest with the Department of Education following each school's Trustees and Members voting in favour of exploring this possibility. Each school will complete a period of consultation with parents, pupils, staff and the wider community which the Trustees and Members will take into consideration in reaching their final decision.

5. Would the school change its name or logo because of this change?

The school is not required to change its name or logo or make any changes to its organisation. The school uniform and iconography in each school is intended to remain the same after this change.

6. How will being an Academy affect staff?

Currently, the employer for staff is the Single Academy Trust overseeing each school. After conversion all staff will be employed by the Multi Academy Trust. Staff are legally protected to transfer under the same employment terms and conditions, including pensions. Their continuity of service is protected and all staff will be consulted in accordance with the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations.

7. How are the students affected?

The students will not notice any immediate differences. They will be in the same classrooms, with the same teachers with the same expectations. We will continue to strive for an outstanding education for all our pupils. Over time, the pupils may notice some changes and improvements in the way that they learn, resulting from greater training opportunities for staff and innovative learning opportunities.

8. Will we get more money as part of a MAT?

The school will receive the same amount of per-pupil funding as part of a MAT as they would have previously as a sole converter academy. All funding comes directly from Government to the MAT which controls the overall budget and then distributes the money to each of the schools within the MAT. Each school does not have more money but as a group of schools can enhance the economies of scale and choose services that benefit all the pupils within the MAT schools.

9. What are the risks of becoming a MAT?

It is difficult to quantify the risks involved in conversion to a MAT, as every conversion process is different. Some stakeholders involved in any conversion situation may be concerned about the financial arrangements which will be put in place in case these adversely affect their own school, about the degree of independence their school will have in managing and recruiting staff and in setting a curriculum, and about the way that leadership and governance will function within the MAT.

We feel that these risks have already been mitigated through agreeing the high level of groundwork already undertaken by the leadership in both schools to agree a positive and collaborative ethos based on mutual trust and respect. There will be a Scheme of Delegation which will clearly define how the leadership and governance of the school will operate, the limits to their responsibilities and their individual accountabilities. It is clear that the representatives of both schools want to preserve their local identities and the unique characters and so the Scheme of Delegation will be designed with this in mind. Key decisions on staffing, curriculum, and the use of resources will be made so as to benefit the families of each individual school as well as the local communities that support them.

There are also risks in not becoming a MAT. In the future it is possible that any school could be influenced to join a larger pre-established MAT chain that may have less local focus than our schools individually. Creating a MAT ourselves and playing a key role in establishing its vision, values and working practices allows us the best opportunity to sustain our successful local schools.

10. How will the trust support school improvement between the schools?

This question has been answered in the rationale attached to the consultation letter. In summary, we believe that our schools are located closely enough to support enhanced leadership, shared curriculum expertise, improved professional development and economies of scale across a number of areas. We believe that quality of education and the range of opportunities for our students will be increased because of this change.

It is important to remember that our schools are not competing over the same catchment area for students or staffing. They are also not competing over the same investment funding in their respective boroughs from the Local Authority. The leadership and governors in both schools face similar opportunities and challenges as non-selective schools in a highly selective county.

These factors means that both schools would be entering this proposed MAT from a position of mutual trust and respect with strong existing relationships between senior leaders that are not compromised through local pressures.

11. How will admissions to the school be affected?

The proposed MAT has no intentions to change the current admissions arrangements for our schools.

12. Will there be job losses?

No. In fact we intend on preserving all existing roles. Over the longer term we may consider reviewing structures when opportunities occur through natural wastage or promotion.

13. Does becoming part of a MAT change the relationship with other schools?

No. Each Academy within the MAT will continue to collaborate and share best practice and expertise with all other local schools and the wider community.

14. Will Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) responsibilities change?

No. Responsibilities as part of a MAT in relation to SEND will be the same as they are now. A child with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) can still nominate an Academy as their school of choice.

