



FERN HILL PRIMARY SCHOOL

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Headteacher: Mr A. Scott

2nd March 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

Further to the letter you have received from Susan Dean, Chair of Fern Hill Governing Body and Graham Willett, Chair of Kingston Educational Trust, I wanted to share with you some more detail regarding the proposal for Fern Hill to convert to academy status and join the Kingston Educational Trust.

What is an academy?

An academy is a school which is independent of Local Authority control but which is still publicly funded and inspected by Ofsted. A multi-academy trust (MAT) is simply an academy trust which operates more than one school.

What does converting to an academy involve?

The first step will be for Fern Hill to lodge an application with the Department for Education to convert to an Academy. If our application is approved, we will be able to begin the necessary legal process.

As part of the process, and before making a final decision on whether to proceed with the conversion, the Governing Body has a duty to seek and consider the views of relevant stakeholders. We will formally consult with parents, staff, pupils and other stakeholders before meeting again to consider the output from those discussions and to decide whether to go ahead and sign a Funding Agreement with the Department for Education. Until this point no irrevocable commitment to convert has been made and we are able to withdraw from the process at any time.

How will parents be consulted?

It is our strong preference to engage with our community face to face and for that reason we plan to undertake the consultation process later this academic year when we hope to be able to hold sessions at the school to provide families with the opportunity to raise questions with members of the school's Governing Body and the Senior Leadership Team. You will appreciate, however, that we may have to adapt our approach in the event that government restrictions continue to preclude us from doing this.

More will follow on the formal consultation process over the coming weeks. In the meantime, I have attached a document below which attempts to answer some of the questions you might have at this stage.

Fern Hill is an outstanding school where we are passionate about developing the whole child and instilling an enduring love of learning. We will only proceed with the transition to Academy status if, following consultation, we are satisfied that doing so will have a positive impact on our commitment to achieving the very best for our families and staff.

We are passionate about developing the whole child and instilling an enduring love of learning

Inspiration

Collaboration

Empathy

Excellence



I look forward to hearing your comments and views in due course.

Yours faithfully,



Mr A. Scott
Headteacher

Frequently Asked Questions

What is an academy and what is a multi-academy trust?

An academy is an independent 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. Academies are funded directly by the Government and are not part of/controlled by the Local Authority.

A multi- academy trust (MAT) is simply an academy trust that operates more than one school.

As of October 2018 across England, two-thirds of all state-funded secondary schools and one-third of all state-funded primary schools operated as academies.

FAMILIES

How will the children benefit?

If Fern Hill converts to academy status and joins KET, the children will still be taught in the same classrooms by the same teaching staff as now and they will probably not notice any immediate difference. The school will continue to strive for an outstanding education for all our children.

However, in time the children may notice changes and improvements in the way that they learn, not least as a result of new training and professional development opportunities available to teaching staff to help them to innovate and improve the children's education. In particular, the children will benefit from the sharing of excellent and innovative practice in teaching and learning between the schools. We also believe that they will have wider opportunities to learn new skills and experience new activities.

Will conversion alter Fern Hill's existing ethos and values?

No, Fern Hill will retain its values and ethos. The Senior Leadership Team will remain unchanged and will still be responsible for driving the culture of the school. We have chosen to join KET because we believe there is a very strong cultural fit between the two and we would not have considered joining a MAT where we did not believe that Fern Hill's ethos would continue to thrive.

Will Fern Hill have to change its name, logo or uniform?

No, there are no plans to change Fern Hill's name, uniform or logo.

Will admissions to the school be affected?

There are currently no plans to change the admission arrangements - the application process for parents and carers will remain the same.

Academies are their own admissions authority and are in charge of deciding their admissions arrangements. Like maintained schools, academies are required to comply with the Admissions and Admission Appeals Codes of Practice. Academies are also required to participate in the Local Authority's coordination of admissions processes and Fair Access Protocol. The Local Authority will continue to have responsibility for making sure there are sufficient school places locally and to coordinate the admissions process for all schools.

Will Fern Hill still follow the national curriculum?

Academies do not have to adhere to the national curriculum but they are still required to provide a "broad and balanced curriculum" and children still have to take part in national tests, such as SATs and Phonics Screening. Fern Hill is not currently considering deviating from the National Curriculum.

Will term dates change?

Academies can set their own term times but there is no plan to change the existing dates. Fern Hill's Senior Leadership Team will remain responsible for taking decisions around the timing of INSET days and will continue to take those decisions based on the best interests of our families and staff.

Will Fern Hill's responsibilities in relation to SEND change?

No, our responsibilities as an academy in relation to Special Educational Needs & Disability (SEND) will be just the same as they are now.

How will the transition affect pupils?

Pupils will not be affected by the transition period involved in joining the MAT. Governors, Trustees and the Senior Leadership Team will work together to ensure this transition is as seamless as possible. Once the transition period is over, Fern Hill will continue running as normal and we are confident that any changes the pupils notice will be positive ones.

How will the transition affect parents?

Parents will not be affected; however, they may start to see and hear more information about KET.

Will my child's pupil premium be affected?

Pupil premium payments (and other pupil specific funding) will remain with those pupils and will be spent on enhancing and assisting their learning.

Can a child with an Education, Health and Care Plan nominate an academy as their school of choice?

Yes, Fern Hill will retain the admissions criteria that we currently use.

Are academies still subject to the Ofsted inspection regime?

Yes, academies are inspected in the same way as maintained schools. Each school will continue to be inspected individually. The performance of all schools will continue to be monitored and if there are signs of deterioration, or other factors likely to cause concern, these could trigger an inspection.

STAFF

What will be the impact on Fern Hill staff?

Currently, all staff are employed by The Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames. After conversion, all staff will be employed by Kingston Educational Trust (KET). Staff are legally protected to transfer under the same employment terms and conditions, including pensions. Staff will be provided further information on how they are affected.

We believe that being part of the academy trust will provide greater opportunities for career progression and development and we have already seen the benefits of working together on a range of projects.

Will staff transfer directly to KET?

All staff employed by the governing board on the date of transfer will automatically be transferred to KET as the new employer.

Will staff members' pay and conditions change?

Staff members will be covered by the Transfer of Undertaking (Protection of Employment) regulations 2006 (TUPE). This means employees and their terms of service are legally protected when the academy joins an academy trust.

Will pensions be protected?

Yes, as part of the TUPE, staff members' pensions will be protected during their transfer to the academy trust.

Will anything change for staff members?

Staff members will be offered more opportunities to visit colleagues in other settings to share practices and collaborate. They will be given improved development and better networking opportunities.

By joining an academy trust, staff members' chances of career progression and work opportunities may be enhanced. Teachers will be employed by the trust, so could move into a senior role at another school in the trust without changing employer.

Would staff members be required to work at different academies?

Staff usually remain in their own academy; however, opportunities to work, train and develop elsewhere may arise from time to time.

Would the Senior Leadership Team stay the same?

Yes, it is the governance structure through which the Senior Leadership Team is accountable that will change.

FINANCIAL**Will Fern Hill get more or less money as an academy?**

Academies receive the same amount of per-pupil funding as they would receive from the Local Authority as a maintained school. The difference is that the whole of the school budget would go direct to the Trust from central Government, rather than via the Local Authority. This will allow the Trust to control the whole of its spending by allocating budgets to each of the two schools.

The Trust will retain some of the budget in order to provide services to each of the two schools, similar to how the Local Authority funds its core services.

Would there be a change to Fern Hill's current suppliers, e.g. cleaning?

There is no requirement for Fern Hill to change its existing suppliers and it is likely that at the point of transition we will retain our existing contracts with external suppliers by simply transferring them to the Trust.

Over time, it is likely that KET will review those contracts, alongside those between TKA and its external suppliers, to identify whether it is possible to achieve greater efficiencies through increased buying power and joint commissioning of services such as school equipment and cleaning for example.

How much does conversion cost?

During the conversion process, the school will be eligible for a grant of £25,000 from the Department for Education. While the costs of conversion can vary, we believe that this grant should cover those costs.