

**Sarratt CE Primary School
Multi-Academy Trust (MAT)
consultation evening with parents
Monday 10 July 2017**

“Laying the foundations for our children to be confident, respectful and to achieve their full potential”

SUMMARY: The Board of Governors has voted unanimously in favour of Sarratt School converting to Academy status and forming a Multi-Academy Trust with Christ Church School in Chorleywood. We sought the views of parents and carers at a consultation evening this week, which resulted in an overwhelming majority voting in favour of this proposal. This document summarises the main points discussed during meeting, and the questions raised.

Why is Sarratt School looking to change? We agreed a vision for the school last year (shown above), and we believe that to truly achieve it, we need the following key ingredients:

- **Ambition:** A small school with big aspirations and ideas
- **Resources:** Enough money to be sustainable
- **Efficiency:** Good systems in place to spend that money wisely
- **Investment in the Future:** A forward-looking strategy that protects us against future hurdles
- **Performance monitoring:** To flag up problem areas and ensure good progress is made for all pupils across the school.
- **Stability:** Of pupil numbers, teachers and leadership.
- **Growth:** We can't stand still. We need to build on our strengths and move onwards and upwards.

Don't we already have those elements? No, not all of them. We think we will be able to do better on all these fronts in an alliance with another really great school. In particular, we will be able to offer a better education to our children if we create such a partnership.

And we need to save money too - budget cuts and increased costs mean that, while we've managed to balance our books for now, that position is going to be almost impossible to sustain in as little as 2 or 3 years' time. This drain on resources has a knock-on effect on everything that we do.

If we want to fulfil our promise to create an environment where our children achieve their full potential, then we're going to have to come up with a more efficient way of working that promotes growth and helps us to achieve educational excellence.

Why are we looking to team up with other schools? We believe that by teaming up with the right partners we can improve both our educational outcomes and reduce costs. This will ultimately provide a richer and more rewarding environment for everyone to work in.

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How do we do that?	We already do this on an informal basis, via collaborations with local primary schools on ad hoc issues. But we believe a formal partnership, such as a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) provides even greater added value, and creates educational allies with schools who have a vested interest in our bid to succeed.
Are we the only school looking to change?	Absolutely not. The educational landscape is changing radically, as a result of reduced budgets and increased costs. So schools across the UK are currently contemplating the same move. Small, single-form entry primary schools such as ours are particularly vulnerable to the increased financial pressure – schools the size of ours can no longer afford the full leadership structure we have always had. But there is safety in numbers, so joining the right MAT is a good way to secure the school's future.
What is a MAT?	It's a formal grouping of Academies. A school must first convert into an Academy if it wants to be part of a MAT.
What is an Academy?	It's an independent school, funded directly from central Government, rather than the local authority, and it's overseen by a charitable body called an academy trust.
What's a MAT's Governing Structure?	At the top you have the Trust Members, followed by the Executive Board, and then the Local Governing Boards of each member school.
What are the main benefits of joining a MAT?	<p>These fall into the following key categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support: A MAT provides a vital support network which allows you to share best practice, expertise, facilities and even teachers.• Freedom: Cutting the ties from the local authority also gives you greater freedom to tailor your provision.• Recruitment: There's more scope to plan ahead and develop and train your own newly qualified teachers in a MAT, making recruitment easier and less reactive.• Retention: Increased opportunities for career development and promotion within a MAT means staff retention should be improved.• Savings: We can find more efficient ways of working within a MAT, such as sharing back-office costs, and leadership.
What does shared leadership mean?	It typically means creating an Executive Head role in the MAT, which is accountable for the performance of member schools. Each of these schools would then have their own Head of School.

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What's the benefit of swapping a Headteacher for a Head of School and Executive Head?

Switching to an Executive Head and Head of School model effectively means dividing up the traditional Headteacher role into:

- 1) unique, school-specific functions that should be carried out on-site and in person. These include accountability for the academic achievement of the pupils, responsibility for maintaining the school's ethos, directing teaching staff, and being the point of contact for parents. These could be carried out by a Head of School – who is free from some of the back office and business aspects of the traditional Headteacher's role, and is able to focus more on driving academic excellence through improving quality of teaching.
- 2) shared, back-office and business functions that can be undertaken across a number of schools simultaneously, on or off-site. These would typically be carried out by an Executive Head, who is also responsible for implementing the strategy of the MAT.

As Head of School is a lower grade role than Headteacher, and the Executive Head cost is shared among MAT member schools, there are financial benefits to switching to this model.

What are the main risks of joining a MAT?

You rightly asked us to make these clearer. The main risks fall into the following two categories:

- **Ethos:** One of the main concerns when joining a MAT is that our school might have to water down its own ethos and core values, and adopt those agreed by the MAT's Trust. We believe that by forming a MAT in partnership with Christ Church, we can play a greater role in influencing and shaping the terms of the alliance. We have already secured an agreement that the constitution of the MAT will ensure we will maintain our own Sarratt School ethos, admissions policy, uniform and name, for example.
- **Control:** Undoubtedly, joining a MAT means relinquishing some control. Once you are part of a group of schools, there has to be an overall board that has the final decision on what happens across the MAT. A school agreeing to join an existing MAT would have to agree to abide by those decisions. However, by forming the MAT jointly with Christ Church, we would ensure that we were on those boards, and have more sway than schools which join later. We have already agreed with Christ Church that every school would also maintain its own local Governing Board, and would be responsible for managing its own budget, and recruiting staff bellow senior leadership level.

Are there different types of MAT available?

Yes. We looked at each of these options in turn:

- Herts for Learning (HfL) MAT
- Diocese of St Albans MAT
- Mixed Primary and Secondary MAT

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- Primary only MAT

What criteria did you use to judge them?

We assessed each option in relation to the following criteria:

- Raising educational outcomes
- Preserving our ethos
- Sense of local school community
- Sharing facilities
- Impact on second school entry
- Financial savings
- Consistency with CoE rules

What are the CoE rules?

As a CoE school, we can only join a 'Church-majority' MAT. This meant that we were automatically forced to rule out joining the HfL MAT, and MATs with non-church schools, such as our local secondary school, St Clement Danes. (There are occasional exceptions to this, which we explored thoroughly, and found that they would not apply to us).

Was St Clement Danes a strong contender, otherwise?

Yes, in particular as their plan held out the possibility of automatic admission for primary schools in its MAT. However, (1) our research suggested it was at best disputed whether such an approach by Clement Danes would be legal, and (2) the Governing Board was clear that the educational advantages would be greater from us joining with another great primary school rather than a secondary school, where the educational issues, skills and techniques are different.

What about the St Albans Diocese MAT?

The St Albans Diocese MAT was considered both too big, and spread over too large a geographical area, to meet some of our core criteria, listed above.

Why have you specifically targeted Christ Church?

Mostly, because it is a great school that we think will be a good fit with Sarratt. It is already an academy, it's an Ofsted-rated Outstanding school in the local community, it would fit the Diocese criteria of a majority church membership and it wants to form a MAT with us.

What's next?

We'll continue consulting, and keep working with Christ Church on the detail, and regularly report back to our stakeholders, including parents, on our progress.

PARENTS ALSO ASKED THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

Q: What are the leadership plans for the school in 2017-18?

A: Mr Smith and Mrs O'Hare will continue as co-Headteachers for the next academic year. This model of leadership has worked successfully for the previous 6 months. In view of the proposals to convert to an academy within a MAT, the Governing Board felt that it was best to ensure a stable leadership now rather than to seek to recruit a new Headteacher for September.

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Q: *What is the timescale for joining a MAT?*

A: We aim to complete the process for conversion and joining a MAT by July 2018, assuming continuing support for the proposal from the consultation now in progress. The GB will need to complete due diligence and legal arrangements together with Christ Church and obtain all the necessary permissions from the Diocese of St Albans and Department for Education.

Q: *Will Sarratt have a Headteacher if it joins a MAT?*

A: We expect the MAT to have a single Executive headteacher; accountable for the performance of all the member schools. Each school within the MAT will then have its own Headteacher or Head of School. The MAT will allow individual schools to determine their operational leadership structures dependent on need and available resources. Our initial planning is based on Sarratt having a Head of School, which we think is right for us, and will allow us to make a significant cost saving which we can plough back into the education of our children.

Q: *Which schools will be members of the MAT? What is the optimal number of schools in a MAT?*

A: Christ Church is already a Single Academy Trust and it would convert to a MAT. The MAT would be developed with partner schools from the local area to create a family of primary schools serving their local community. Sarratt would be joining as a founder member and would therefore be in a strong position to influence the development of the MAT. We do not see the MAT growing to a huge size – it will always be a local partnership!

Q: *We are proud of Sarratt School, its vision and ethos. How can we be sure Sarratt would not be the poor relation in a MAT?*

A: Sarratt is a strong school with a good Ofsted rating, improving trends in educational outcomes, supportive parents and a prized location. Our intention is to enter a MAT to work in partnership as equals with Christ Church, both in the development of the MAT and in the delivery of the best education possible, whilst maintaining the distinctive ethos of Sarratt School. In its discussions with Christ Church to date, the GB believes that Christ Church has a similar attitude of working in partnership with Sarratt.

Q: *Will there be changes to the curriculum if we enter a MAT?*

A: Academies have more freedom than maintained schools and are not required to follow the National Curriculum. However, they are required to follow a broad and balanced curriculum, are subject to oversight by Regional Schools Commissioners and to inspection by Ofsted. If Sarratt became an academy within a MAT, we would be able to influence any changes to the curriculum which would benefit pupils. The academy structure also facilitates more input to the curriculum from teaching staff.

Q: *Will we be forced to employ unqualified teachers?*

A: Academies (and independent schools generally) are permitted to employ teachers with specialist skills even if they do not have qualified teacher status. In the proposed MAT, it is expected that local governing bodies would be responsible for recruitment of staff and it would be for Sarratt to decide on the qualifications of staff employed. We know that Christ Church is committed to training and developing teachers, so we are not too concerned on this point.

Q: *What would be the governance structure of the MAT?*

A: Local governing bodies for each school would have delegated powers to be responsible for teaching and learning, recruitment of staff and the local budget. An

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Executive Board of the MAT would ensure the strategic direction of the MAT overall and be responsible for financial oversight. Whilst the decision to join a MAT involves ceding some sovereignty, the Governors at Sarratt believes it is in the school's best interests to be a member of a MAT which is local and in which we can be influential from the outset. It is expected that Sarratt would be represented on the Executive Board by individuals with appropriate skills.

Q: There have been some instances of academies failing due to malpractice and financial mismanagement. Since local authorities do not have oversight of academies, what are the risks Sarratt would end up in a "bad" academy?

A: To address risks associated with any change in Sarratt's status, we will of course conduct due diligence on any prospective partners as they will on us. Our preference is for a locally-led, primary-only MAT in which we can be influential, both when it is set up and as it develops. We expect that the MAT will continue to purchase certain educational services from Herts for Learning in the same way that Sarratt does now. The local authority also remains responsible for ensuring that the needs of vulnerable children/special needs in academies are met. Ofsted will continue to inspect academies and the individual schools within them. Finally, the Regional Schools Commissioner is responsible for intervening when an academy is underperforming or when governance in an academy is inadequate.

Q: Will the school stay on the Sarratt site?

A: Yes. It is part of our sustainability aim. Our physical resources are a key strength.

Q: What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats identified by the GB working party?

- **Strengths** - Ofsted rating, improving performance, small village school, parent support, strong governance, well behaved children, church connection, nursery on-site
- **Weaknesses** - pupil numbers relatively low, funding follows pupils, long term sustainability, relatively high mobility
- **Opportunities** - secure sustainability of Sarratt School, partner with other schools, share resources, improve career opportunity for staff, recruit and retain staff, first-mover advantage of being in at set up of MAT
- **Threats** - lower pupil numbers threaten sustainability due to funding, other schools move before us and limit our options.

Q: How much independent decision making will Sarratt School retain if it joins a MAT?

A: The Local Governing Board will monitor and guide local provision. It will also control its own budget and day to day decisions made locally. Sarratt will seek representation on Member/Executive boards.