



The Oak Tree Federation

Proposed Academy Conversion

STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

FEEDBACK REPORT

April 2024

Introduction

This report has been prepared for the Governors of The Oak Tree Federation and describes the consultation process that has taken place on the proposal to convert the schools to academies, joining the Diocese of Chichester Academy Trust (DCAT).

The Executive Headteacher and Chair of Governors of The Oak Tree Federation have led the process, with support from DCAT where appropriate.

Representatives from the schools have made clear the implications of conversion through the production of an information pack including a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document, and at consultation meetings that took place in February 2024.

Various stakeholder groups and organisations were contacted as part of the consultation process and feedback on proposals has been sought in face-to-face meetings and through the use of an online feedback form.

Context and Purpose of Consultation

The Governing Body of The Oak Tree Federation have developed the proposal presented for consultation following a period of significant due diligence and research into academy models and Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) operating within the region.

By invitation, representatives of DCAT met with Governors to discuss DCAT, a MAT formed by the Church of England Diocese of Chichester, which is an option for church and non-church schools in the region who are considering the Academy model.

Governors reviewed information shared by DCAT, scrutinised the offer to schools and implications of joining the MAT, and have considered this against the local, regional and national education landscape before making the decision to pursue academy status and move to consultation with stakeholders.

The consultation has therefore been carried out in accordance with the Academies Act (2010), which states:

Consultation on conversion

- (1) Before a maintained school in England is converted into an Academy, the school's governing body must consult such persons as they think appropriate.*
- (2) The consultation must be on the question of whether the school should be converted into an Academy.*
- (3) The consultation may take place before or after an Academy order, or an application for an Academy order, has been made in respect of the school.*

The purpose of the academy consultation was to engage with the school's stakeholders on why The Oak Tree Federation is considering academy status, what academy status means for the schools, and what will/will not change. Through consultation, stakeholders have had the opportunity to ask questions, make comments on the proposal and share their views. Ultimately, academy conversion is the decision of the Governing Body and as such, the purpose of consultation has not been to seek a mandate from stakeholders, rather to identify if there are any significant objections to the Governing Body's proposal.

The final decision to submit applications to convert to the Department for Education will be made by the Governing Body following scrutiny of this report and the feedback gained through consultation activities.

Consultation Activity

The consultation period commenced on Monday 26th January 2024 and ran for a period of 32 days ending on Friday 29th March 2024. The Academies Act (2010) does not specify a timeframe for consultation, but DfE guidance states:

‘Your governing body must consult formally about your school’s plans to convert to an academy with anyone who they think will have an interest in your school changing its status. This will include staff members and parents, but you should also involve pupils and the wider local community.

The law doesn’t specify how long the consultation should last, but it is important that you can show that interested groups, individuals and organisations have had a reasonable opportunity to respond.’
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/convert-to-an-academy-information-for-schools/3-prepare-for-conversion#consultation>

A timeline of consultation activity undertaken is provided below:

Date	Activity
w/c 26/02/24	Consultation Begins
w/c 26/02/24	Information for staff distributed by email and/or hard copy
	Information for parents/carers distributed by email and/or hard copy
	Information for wider stakeholders (see below) distributed by email
	Online form monitored daily by PM
w/c 11/03/24	Consultation meetings completed with: Staff / Trade Unions at Firle – Monday 11/03/2024, 3:45 Parents/Carers at Firle - Monday 11/03/2024, 6:00pm Parents/Carers at Loughton - Wednesday 13/03/2024, 6:00pm
w/c 29/01/24	Updated FAQs distributed based on consultation feedback/questions to date
29/03/24	Consultation Ends
29/04/24	Consultation report provided to HT, CoG and DCAT

Stakeholders Consulted

Stakeholder Group	Method of Communication
Staff and Trade Unions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information sent directly by email and/or hard copy • Online Feedback form • Information provided in staff room • Consultation meetings held w/c 11/03/24
Parents/carers/ students attending The Oak Tree Federation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information sent directly by email and/or hard copy • Online feedback form • Information sent to the School Councils • Information available on school website • Consultation meetings held w/c 11/03/24
Parents/carers in the area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information available on website • Online feedback form • Social media posts • Information displayed in Reception area of school
Primary, Secondary, AP and special schools and sixth form and FE colleges in the area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation email sent directly by email to settings within a 10-mile radius of The Oak Tree Federation schools • Online feedback form • Information available on website • Social media posts
Local Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation email sent to DCS, Assistant DCS(s) and Heads of Service (if requested)

Online Consultation Feedback

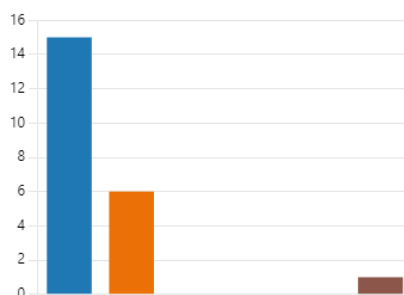
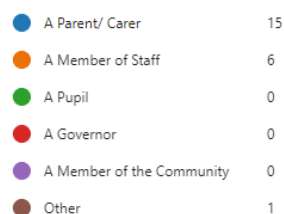
The response rate to the online feedback form was good with 22 responses received. Questions received via the online consultation form showed a high level of understanding by stakeholders.

A total of 22 responses were submitted using the online feedback form:

Question 1: I am:

1. I am

[More Details](#)



Question 2: Comments / Questions

NB: All comments /questions have been copied exactly as they were provided.

	I am	Comments / Questions	Communication Method
1	A Member of Staff;	None	Online form
2	A Parent/ Carer;	It is not clear 'why' you would want to pursue/evaluate an academy and what gaps you are looking to address.	Online form
3	A Parent/ Carer;	What does it mean in terms of the attainment record of pupils? do we suddenly have to push our children to be academic or high achieving? Is there any extra testing? will it mean a sudden influx of new students? does it come with any extra funding? what does it mean to children who have EHCP's if anything?	Online form
4	A Parent/ Carer;	If this is what you feel is best for the school you have my full support.	Online form
5	A Parent/ Carer;	1) Will that mean that children follow a religious bases at Laughton? 2) How will this impact SENs provisions in terms of EHCP funding and inclusion? 3) As a parent will I be advise if an unqualified teacher is teaching my child? 4) What would we lose at school if this becomes a reality, it must come with Cons? 5) Would staffing remain as is today? (Outside of personal decisions)	Online form

		6) How would a change like this impact my child day to day? 7) What are the reasons the school has looked at this option?	
6	A Parent/ Carer;	I think joining DCAT will ensure the sustainability of Firle school and be very exciting! I hope that joining an academy trust will mean that Firle will become better for the children & staff, in terms of teacher training, support, access to other funding streams, governance and marketing to improve numbers. I think this is a fantastic opportunity for Firle & Laughton.	Online form
7	A Parent/ Carer;	What would this mean for the schools when it comes to the day to day running? For example will the new behaviour policy need to change again? As this will mean the school essentially becomes a business will there be less funding for spending on the children's learning? Will an academy status mean that more unqualified teachers and support staff are employed? Will the religious overtones of the academy be pushed more than currently? Will there be a management restructure?	Online form
8	A Parent/ Carer;	No this totally cannot happen Please no!	Online form
9	A Parent/ Carer;	If this is of no financial advantage to the school then why do it? There is no mention of how this would practically advantage the school?	Online form
10	A Parent/ Carer;	Will the Trust be able to divert the LA money 'assigned' to Laughton to another school if there is a specific need and therefore is there a future potential reduction in our school funds or are we guaranteed a minimum per year? Will the Trust potentially detract focus from the East Sussex village nature of both schools, it is important that both feel part of the community they are based in and I feel that this is not 'celebrated' enough. It is important to protect the rural and village aspects of the school and I am concerned that the Trust may not appreciate or value this in the same way, being based outside of the area.	Online form
11	A Member of Staff;	In the letter it says that during transition, there will be extra work for the office staff. Will this involve working extra hours? Will we have a new website?	Online form
12	A Parent/ Carer;	Will there be any guarantee that pupils will always be able to play on the green field behind Laughton School? It is a priceless asset, allowing youngsters to let off steam at the end of the school day. Also, is there any risk that the two schools could be merged on to just one site, or that they could lose their discrete identities?	Online form
13	A Member of Staff;	We have an Oak Tree staff email and google drive as all curriculum and proformas for monitoring are Oak Tree, along with expectations. This also includes most of our policies. How will this be impacted if we join DCAT? What is the security of the staffing structure currently in	Online form

		<p>place?</p> <p>What changes will we need for our websites , is this an additional cost or part of the top slice?</p> <p>Are members of DCAT key holders and can they enter the school unannounced?</p>	
14	A Member of Staff;	<p>Will you confirm that our terms of our contract will not be changed at all? e.g. pay including maternity pay.</p> <p>How are pay increases calculated? Is it in line with LA/National Pay Scales?</p> <p>Is there a chance that we would be expected to move between schools within the academy?</p> <p>How does the pension scheme work?</p> <p>What will happen to the Y3/4 conference group as it is EIP/Alliance funded?</p> <p>Will we still be given opportunities to network (training/moderation) with other local schools in our current alliance/area?</p>	Online form
15	A Member of Staff;	<p>How does being part of an Academy affect the pension we pay into as part of East Sussex county council?</p>	Online form
16	A Parent/ Carer;	<p>I felt the info the school sent out was really useful and addressed lots of the questions I might've had. As I work in a school myself I guess I have some insight into the funding challenges schools (wrongly) face, which of course, is not a reflection of how hard everyone works or how brilliant they are, so I understand how vital ensuring the stability is, especially for smaller schools, and how at risk we can be if numbers of pupils fluctuate.</p> <p>My main concern was how the staff, at all levels, felt about their job security and well being if this change to academy status takes place?</p> <p>I also would add that I feel the diocese academy trust (not sure its official name), being a not-for-profit enterprise, would be by far preferable to a profit making academy run as a business. And I would hope would allow Firle to maintain its unique character as a truly nurturing school that celebrates the individuality of each and every pupil.</p>	Online form
17	A Member of Staff;	<p>How will payslips work - will they still be on Epay?</p> <p>Do we still get paid at the end of the month?</p>	Online form
18	A Parent/ Carer;	<p>Why continue as we are? Why not have one school with a bus service? Surely this would be a more appealing/cost effective prospect to the academy trust? One building to service, pupil numbers up. Firle is geographically unfortunate with limited affordable housing (in recent years made worse). In what ever format an unviable school remains so. The continuation of the federation is naive and begs the question of the current executives management abilities and the objectivity of the current governance as a whole.</p>	Online form
19	A Parent/ Carer;	<p>Overall we think this sounds very positive for the school and we particularly welcome the opportunity it will give for the teachers to have greater freedom from the national</p>	Online form

		<p>curriculum. A few questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the slides mention freedom from Ofsted for three years, will the school still be inspected this year as anticipated and who will be overseeing the provision from an independent perspective if Ofsted are not involved? - you have said that the school will not be required to include more religious practices and learnings if it joins DCAT but the majority of schools are religious and we have been surprised at the level of teaching around religion for a secular school. We chose a non-religious school very specifically and would not want this to increase, if anything we wish it would reduce. What assurances can you give that the school will not be influenced to introduce religious practices and more tuition around this, especially as the DCAT mission is to help every child achieve their 'God-given' potential - what happens if this does not work out as a benefit for the school? Is there an option to back track and return to the LA or move onto a different academy trust? - when would this be effective from? 	
20	A Parent/ Carer;	<p>Thank you for all the thought that has gone into this process so far. The thing I felt wasn't explained very well was the reason why we are joining an academy at all. Given the federation model has been working so well, why change and join an academy at all?</p> <p>Will the schools be penalised for not joining an academy? And will imperatives change with the likely change of government this year, in which case would it not be advisable to put this process on hold until then?</p> <p>Thank you</p>	Online form
21	A Parent/ Carer;	<p>Will there be any change to the amount of weighting given to academic achievement? We very much love that Firle seems to have the "whole child" in mind without over prioritising academic progress over wellbeing and we wouldn't want this to change.</p> <p>Will there be any change to the amount of funding available for ancillary staff and SEN support? Our hope is that if there were a change, it would be in the direction of more, not less.</p>	Online form
22	Laughton Parish Council;	The Parish Council wishes to support Laughton Community Primary School, however clarification on any affects on the current arrangements with Pelham Field would be welcomed.	Online form

Whilst this period of consultation is regarding the proposal for the schools of The Oak Tree Federation to become academies, inevitably staff sought answers to questions via the online form relating to potential implications for terms and conditions of employment, Pay conditions and Pensions.

The key themes of questions asked by Parents and Carers were around the advantages of joining DCAT and why the move is being considered now, changes in funding arrangements and changes in curriculum (specifically regarding Laughton and Religious teaching) and changes to the school day and the possible impact on children with EHCPs.

Next Steps

The governors of The Oak Tree Federation will meet to discuss the outcomes of the stakeholder consultation and consider whether there has been any significant objection(s) to moving forward with the proposal to convert to academies status joining DCAT. For clarity, 'significant objection' in this context can be defined as any information or feedback that causes governors to question their original decision to pursue academy status. This is most likely to be any information that comes to light, or that hasn't previously been considered, that may mean the decision will have a negative impact on the school, staff, students and community.

The decision of governors should be shared with stakeholders as soon as possible and it is recommended that a copy of this report is published on the school website.