

Why do Governors believe Peak Edge is the right Trust for Ecclesall Primary School?

- Peak Edge Academy Trust is based in Sheffield, working with schools who are all within at least 30 minutes of another Peak Edge school and often less. The school leaders are known to each other and the schools are all in a good position to share their strengths and experiences facing similar challenges.
- Peak Edge Academy Trust is made up of primary schools. Our Governing Body has identified that working in close partnership with other schools with a focused expertise around primary school practice, teaching approaches, curriculum decisions, community relations, areas for improvement etc is the right choice for Ecclesall.
- Peak Edge Trust has ten primary schools in it now and this may increase to c 15 schools.

This means it is big enough to remain independent and financially secure, but small enough for schools to be known and to work in meaningful partnership. The existing schools in Peak Edge Trust are Abbey Lane Primary School, Bradfield Dungworth Primary School, Dobcroft Infant School, Grenoside Community Primary School, Loxley Primary School, Nook Lane Junior School, Oughtibridge Primary School, Stannington Infant School, Stocksbridge Nursery Infant School and Wharnccliffe Side Primary School. A small number of other schools, close to Ecclesall, are also in the process of consultation with their stakeholders regarding joining Peak Edge.

- Peak Edge was established in 2019, clustered around an original group of primary schools in the West of Sheffield. The original values of that group have sustained since then and are evident in the Trust's ongoing everyday practice. These values are Trust, Collaboration, Ambition, Responsibility and Innovation and align well with the Ecclesall priorities and practices.
- The schools in Peak Edge retain their own Governing Bodies (known as a Local Governing Board in academies). Each LGB has the same number of committees and retains strategic oversight for their school, much as they do now.
- The schools in Peak Edge Trust retain their individual identities and community-focus. This was a priority for our Governors when making the decision to join a MAT.
- Every school in Peak Edge has its own Headteacher and each school decides its own leadership and staffing structure. The Headteachers in Peak Edge work closely together and participate in a Headteacher Board which plays a significant role in strategic direction of the Trust. This makes it different from many other Trusts.
- The central team in Peak Edge is comparatively small, meaning that more of each schools' budget can be spent on staffing and resources for their pupils.
- Joining Peak Edge would not mean a change to our uniform, our school name, our logo or our senior leadership team.

What is an Academy?

An academy is a state-funded school that is independent of the local authority and is required to follow the same regulations and serve its community in the same way as other state-funded schools.

An academy is established by a formal funding agreement (or contract) agreed between the school's Governing Board and the Department for Education (DfE).

What is the Government's Academies programme?

The UK Government's Academies programme is an educational reform initiative that allows schools in England to operate independently of local authority control. Introduced by the Labour government in the early 2000s and significantly expanded by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government in 2010, the programme aims to improve educational standards, increase school autonomy, and provide more choice for parents.

Any school that is performing well (as assessed by DfE) may apply to become an academy.

Would the character of Ecclesall Primary School change?

There would be no changes to the school's name or logos, and the school would not need to use the word academy. Whether or not Ecclesall Primary School becomes an academy it would continue to operate as an inclusive school, at the heart of our local community, providing high quality education for local children of all abilities and maintaining our high profile in the local community, working with other schools and community groups. Since we are looking to join Peak Edge Trust, the values and ethos of the Trust are in line with our own and so a local approach would allow us to maintain our community focussed approach while enhancing our provision through closer working partnership with the other Academies.

How will Academy status impact on admissions?

If Ecclesall Primary School becomes an academy there would be no changes to the school's admissions criteria – the same pupils would come to Ecclesall Primary School as would come if it were not an academy. Each academy manages its own admissions process and must abide by the Admissions Code and participate in the coordination of place planning with the local authority. An academy cannot introduce selection unless it is already part of its admissions criteria.

Will Academy status have an impact on inclusion?

The responsibilities of an academy towards students with special needs would remain the same as for a LA maintained school. If Ecclesall Primary School becomes an academy its commitment to all students including those with special education needs

would continue; the specialist SEND facilities at Ecclesall Primary School and its inclusive nature defines the school.

Will Academy status have an impact on exclusions?

As an academy, Ecclesall Primary School would have to follow the law and guidance on exclusions in the same way it does now; but it would not have to consult the local authority before deciding to exclude a pupil and could arrange its own independent appeals panel.

How will Academy status affect funding?

Academies should receive the same level of per-pupil funding as a maintained school, but have greater freedom in how the budget is used. If Ecclesall Primary School becomes an academy it would receive an additional grant equal to the sum of money currently 'top sliced' from the education budget by the local authority to provide services to the school. As an academy it could choose to buy some or all of these services from the local authority; or it could choose to provide or buy in some of these services from elsewhere, and to vary the detail of the services based on the school's needs. The school may be able to secure better value for money and free up money to use for the school's own priorities. The reality is that all schools, regardless of whether they are academies or not, face real-term reductions in funding in the coming years. The additional money that Ecclesall Primary School would receive as an academy would help to offset this reduction and could help to preserve the curriculum and services that Ecclesall Primary School provides for its children, and safeguard jobs.

What happens to the land and buildings?

If Ecclesall Primary School becomes an academy the land and buildings currently used by the school would continue to be available to it under the current arrangements and would transfer to the academy trust on a long lease.

Will Academy status affect staff pay and conditions?

If a school becomes an academy, then the academy trust becomes the employer of the staff, not the local authority. All current staff would transfer to the academy under TUPE (The Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations), retaining current pay and conditions. Although the academy trust would have freedom to determine staff pay and conditions, Peak Edge Trust is committed to maintaining the current, nationally agreed pay and conditions for teaching staff and the Sheffield City Council conditions for support staff whilst these arrangements continue to exist. These would apply to both existing staff and new appointments. Teachers would remain in the Teachers' Pension Scheme and support staff would remain in the Local Government Pension Scheme as they are now; the employers' contributions would be maintained by the academy.

Who runs an Academy Trust?

An Academy Trust is a charitable company responsible for the running of the Academies and has control over the land and other assets. It has a strategic role in running the Academies, but delegates management of the schools to the Governors.

When the trust is established, the signatories to the memorandum are the first members of the trust (usually there will be between three and five members). The role of members is significant, as they act as the guardians of the governance of the trust. They are responsible for agreeing the trust's first articles of association and approving any future changes. They are usually able to appoint a number of the Trustees, which are sometimes also called Directors.

The board of Trustees is the accountable body of the trust, and is responsible for the conduct and standards of all the schools within it. The board must fulfil the following three core governance functions, as described in the Governance Handbook:

- Ensure clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction;
- Hold the executive to account for the educational performance of the schools and their pupils, and the performance management of staff;
- Oversee the financial performance of the trust and make sure its money is well spent.

What will the responsibilities of the Governing Board be?

It is the Local Governing Board that manages the Academy on behalf of the Academy Trust. The key responsibilities are to:

- ensure the quality of educational provision;
- challenge and monitor the performance of the Academy;
- manage the Academy Trust's finances and property;
- employ staff.

What are the rules around membership of an Academy Trust, including the selection process?

The existing Governing Board agrees to join the Academy Trust. The Academy Trust then appoints a Local Governing Board, in most cases this is comprised of most, if not all, of the Governors from the School's Governing Board. The Board of Trustees is skills based (and has a Headteacher Board as a sub-committee) which is overseen by the Trust Members.

Which MAT is the Governing Body communicating with and what to date, has been the extent of the conversations had?

Peak Edge Trust.

The conversations we've had to date have been around ensuring the ethos of the Trust match that of Ecclesall primary school, and understanding many of the questions parents are asking us now. How would this impact on staff? Would we be required to change the school name / uniform. What autonomy would the school retain, how can we ensure we remain a community focussed school etc. We've also been working to understand the costs and benefits of joining this particular trust. We hope that these conversations will help us answer questions parents have, including the questions below.

Why does the Governing Body believe that this is the right MAT to explore joining?

A shared ethos of supporting successful schools and continuous improvement in all aspects of the schools in Peak Edge Trust. Schools in Peak Edge are well placed to help support one another and the Trust values autonomy and support. Peak Edge is focussed on primary schools.

If the Governing Body decides not to join this MAT, will it explore joining another? If so, which one?

Whilst we wouldn't rule out joining another MAT in the future, our work to date did not identify any other MATs which we felt would benefit the school. We would only join a MAT (this one or another one) if and when we felt it was in the best interest of the children at the school. At the current time we have not identified an alternative MAT.

Do the current SMT intend to remain part of Ecclesall Primary School post-transfer?

Yes. We feel the school is high performing and well run and we are not seeking to make changes to the staff via this process. None of the schools currently in the MAT have changed their leadership teams on joining the MAT. The MAT has a very low staff turnover rate.

What curriculum areas does the MAT which the Governing Body is thinking of joining focus on? Do they value creative subjects and is there room for these in their teaching?

The MAT focuses on all curriculum areas (as do most schools). We feel that collaborating with other similar schools gives us the chance to share expertise, particularly in areas such as creative subjects which are often led by a single teacher within a school. Collaborating with other subject leads in other schools can help develop those subjects.

What assurances can you give that there will be no negative repercussions on the quality of education that our children currently receive through Ecclesall Primary School? (I do appreciate that this question may be difficult

to answer at this stage given that you have explained that you have yet to do your due diligence).

As noted this is a difficult question to answer - because it is so wide ranging. At high level, the governing body are committed to ensuring all pupils get the best quality of education that is possible. If we felt that this proposal threatened that, we would simply not have voted as we did. Peak Edge will not dictate how the school delivers education, for example we would not be required to follow certain schemes for teaching phonics or maths etc. Peak Edge also delegates lots of functions currently carried out by the governing body back to the school governing body. The MAT will not require us to alter the school uniform, change the school name, change the way we engage with parents, seek to alter teachers' contracts, change the leadership team etc.