



# HIGHWORTH WARNEFORD SCHOOL

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Dear Parents/Carers

## Joining The Park Academies Trust

I am writing to pass on the exciting news that the Governing Body of Highworth Warneford School has decided to enter into discussions with The Park Academies Trust (TPAT), with the intention of joining their Multi Academy Trust by the start of the next academic year, September 2023.

You may be aware that there are lots of different ways that schools are structured in England. In most parts of the country, the majority of secondary schools are now academies, as Warneford has been for a number of years. Some of these are “standalone” but, increasingly, academies are joining together to ensure the best possible opportunities and experiences for their students.

The school’s Governors and Senior Leadership Team have carefully considered the various MAT options available to us. They feel that TPAT is the perfect choice for several reasons:

- We would be welcomed as an equal and valued partner in an already strong family of schools, with a very similar ethos to our own;
- They have an excellent track record of support and school development;
- They have a passion for inclusion, which will ensure we can continue to offer high-quality education to all students, regardless of ability, aptitude or income; and
- They will allow us to continue to offer a broad and balanced curriculum which is not compromised by excessive focus on external accountability.

TPAT currently consists of the following schools: Abbey Park School, Lydiard Park Academy, Red Oaks Primary School, Orchid Vale Primary School and Bridlewood Primary School. You will note that they are all Swindon-based – this is one of the key factors that led to our choice, as this is a MAT that knows the local context very well, which we felt was very important. It will also make it much easier to collaborate and share ideas and resources.

Other issues that played a part in our considerations include the social and economic factors that are impacting on our school’s income and the ability to manage budgets while austerity measures are still hitting the public sector. Being in a MAT will provide sensible protection and allow us to look at economies of scale, which will enable limited funds to be spent on the things that most benefit the children.

A key feature of the process of joining a MAT is that Governors offer all parent and carers an opportunity to comment on this proposal, ask questions and express their views and opinions. The first stage of consultation begins with this letter. To pre-empt some of the more obvious queries, I have set out a few *Questions and Answers* as an appendix to this letter.

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I have also included instructions about how you can send in further questions for written response. If enough parents/carers wish to attend a consultation meeting, we will very happily do this. This would involve the school's Governors and Senior Leadership Team along with senior representatives from TPAT – again there are instructions about how you can request a face-to-face meeting at the end of this letter.

Although this is hopefully the start of an exciting era, it is very important to note that we are looking at a sensible evolution rather than any revolution. I am very proud to be the Headteacher of such a great school and I would not be writing to you in such positive terms if I thought this was anything other than the right thing to do for your children and the future of Highworth Warneford School.

Yours faithfully



Andy Steele

Headteacher

On behalf of the Governing Body of Highworth Warneford School

## Appendix 1 – Some Questions and Answers

### Will Highworth Warneford School definitely become part of a Multi Academy Trust?

The Governing Body will submit an application to become part of a Multi Academy Trust and are working towards a conversion on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2023. However, the school is not obligated to become part of a Multi Academy Trust until the contract between the Governing Body and the Department for Education (DfE), known as the Funding Agreement, is signed.

**The Governing Body will not sign the Funding Agreement until parents, carers and staff have had the opportunity to comment on the proposals.**

Any comments or representations made about the proposals will be considered by the Governing Body before a decision is taken to sign the Funding Agreement. Details of how to provide comments and representations are set out at the end of this letter.

The Governing Body will not sign the Funding Agreement unless they are content that conversion would be in the best interests of the students and our school, taking account of all of the legal and practical ramifications this may bring.

### What is a Multi Academy Trust (MAT)?

A Multi Academy Trust is a charitable company which is responsible for running two or more academies. The Trust has a master funding agreement with the Department for Education but with separate funding for each individual Academy based on the usual budget formula.

The MAT is the single employer for staff in all its schools. The MAT may include primary, secondary and special schools. There are three levels of governance within a MAT: Members, Trustees and Local Advisory Boards. The Board of Trustees has ultimate responsibility for the performance of each academy and for setting the strategic direction of the MAT; it typically delegates the day-to-day running of each academy to a Local Advisory Board through a 'scheme of delegation' agreement.

### What are the benefits of being part of a Multi-Academy Trust?

In the Governors' opinion the benefits include:

- **Being part of a MAT enables closer collaboration**  
Groups of like-minded educationalists can work together on projects and delivery of teaching.
- **As part of one organization, resources can be shared very easily**  
Equipment and knowledge that one school would not be able to afford can be provided by a larger organisation.
- **Being part of a larger MAT enables more funding to be accessed**  
Some Government funding can only be accessed by larger trusts. Trusts also have resources to bid for grants.

These are in addition to the benefits of already being an Academy:

- **Academies are independent of local authority control**  
This means that academies have more freedom about how they conduct themselves.
- **Academies have more freedom over the curriculum taught**  
This means that academies may choose not to teach parts of the National Curriculum.
- **Academies can set their own pay and conditions of service for their staff**  
Academies have the freedom to alter the pay and conditions of their staff (subject to normal employment law protections for staff) so can provide staff with better pay and conditions.
- **Academies have more freedom to undertake innovative projects**  
Academies are companies and so have more freedom to undertake innovative projects, such as setting up and utilising trading subsidiaries.

## **Are there any disadvantages to becoming part of a Multi Academy Trust?**

Theoretically, there can be frictions between individual schools and the over-arching Multi Academy Trust in terms of finances, outcomes and where responsibilities ultimately lie. However, TPAT aims to be inclusive and transparent in all areas. Each school's headteacher is fully aware of priorities across the trust as well as in their own school.

## **Will the admissions arrangements change?**

No. Parents/Carers have the same freedom of choice as they do now. Being part of a MAT does not mean children have to automatically go to another school within the Trust if a place is unavailable at their first choice of school.

## **How will staff be affected?**

Highworth Warneford School Governing Body values the strong working relationship it has with all of the school's staff. Staff have been made aware of this proposal and we will also be holding a formal consultation with them. If the school joins a Multi Academy Trust, all staff currently employed by the school will automatically transfer to the MAT on their current pay and conditions. Although a MAT has freedom to amend those pay and conditions in the future, the TPAT Board does not intend to take such a step and in any event, any change to pay and conditions would need to be consulted upon with unions and would be positive in nature, to ensure the best teachers and other staff are recruited and retained.

Employment rights would be protected by TUPE, Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) regulations 2006 as amended by The Collective Redundancies and Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (Amendment) Regulations 2014. This means that the current employment rights of all staff would transfer to the Trust under the same terms and conditions of employment. Pension rights and continuity of service record would be preserved.

## **Will Highworth Warneford School change?**

Highworth Warneford School will keep its culture, ethos and branding. There will be no change of uniform as a result of this switch. The school will add the TPAT logo on signage, headed paper and other marketing material.

Although academies do have the power to vary their curriculums and the length of the school day, it is not intended to take any such steps at this stage. In any case, we would engage with stakeholders before making any such changes in the future.

For the students, it will be 'teaching as usual' and very unlikely that they will see any significant change in their day-to-day school lives. However, they will ultimately benefit from the advantages of collaboration between the schools.

## **How can I find out more?**

If you want to find out more about The Park Academies Trust then there is information on their website:

<https://www.theparkacademiestrust.com/>

### **Further questions?**

If you have any questions you would like to ask, then please email the school using the following address: [MATquestions@warnefordschool.org](mailto:MATquestions@warnefordschool.org)

We will endeavour to respond within 5 working days. Please state if you **do not** wish us to publish your question and answer on our website – we will of course not include your name regardless.

### **Request to attend a face-to-face meeting**

If you would like the school to organise a Consultation Meeting for Parents/Carers, where you will be able to speak directly to Governors and Senior Leaders from both Warneford and TPAT, then please use this [online form](#).

There is no specific number of parents needed to trigger a meeting, but we will aim to do what is reasonable.

### **How can I make a formal representation?**

All formal representations must be in writing and addressed to Malcolm Holbrook, Chair of Governors, c/o the address at the top of this letter.

The closing date for representations is **Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> June 2023**.