

Questions and Answers regarding Academy conversion (Discussed during the open consultation evening on 17th November and raised on the feedback sheets)

Has the governing body thought about federating with other local schools, rather than Academy conversion?

- The Governors have looked both at federation and also at developing other more formal relationships with local schools. The Blake School currently works well with the partnership schools, sharing expertise and knowledge at governor, teacher and management levels.
- The Governors concluded that federation was not an appropriate way forward for The Blake School and did not offer the opportunities for sustained school improvement and the protection of the school's unique ethos and values that is offered through conversion with ODST.

What other options have the Governors considered?

- There were discussions regarding a Multi-academy Trust that involved all the Witney schools but this was ruled out as some schools are already Academies and it was felt that such a Trust would risk being very insular.
- The Governors considered being a stand-alone Academy and concluded that it wasn't appropriate for a school of our size. The time and expertise that would be needed to run a stand-alone Academy would come at a considerable cost.
- Other models including some of the partnership schools were considered but it was felt that ODST offers the best fit because it protects the ethos of this school. ODST has church values but is open to all; it gives a wider context to the school and ensures that the identity of the school is protected.

As an Aided School, could you join a MAT of local partnership schools?

The Blake school has always been part of the discussions with the other partnership schools when considering possible MAT proposals. Any MAT that The Blake wished to join would have to agree to a significant proportion of Directors being appointed by the Diocese. Discussions with other partnership schools indicated that should they decide to set up a MAT they would not wish to have a majority of Diocesan appointed Directors.

Will other schools in the Trust (who need support) water down The Blake's "Good" Ofsted grade?

Every school within ODST has a unique relationship with the Trust. The relationship is set out within each school's Scheme of Delegation. In joining ODST, The Blake does not have any responsibility for the improvement of other schools within the Trust. ODST provides each of the schools within the Trust with the level of support that is appropriate to them and that will enable them to move forward on their school improvement journey.

Will teachers be seconded to where the need may lie elsewhere in ODST?

Teachers could be seconded in exactly the same way as they can currently be seconded within Oxfordshire County Council maintained schools. ODST has however made it clear that teachers will only be seconded if they wish to be so and no secondments will take place without the full agreement of the teachers concerned.

What is the onus on financial performance?

As they do at present, Governors will continue to determine how the budget is spent should the school become an Academy. As a maintained school the governors must provide the Local Authority with a three year balanced budget plan and are further required to show sound financial monitoring and value for

money. In this respect there will be no change should the school decide to convert to an Academy with ODST.

What financial obligations exist?

- ODST must publish annual accounts.
- The Academy will be required to provide quarterly statements of accounts to the Trust, in the same way in which it currently provides them to the Local Authority.
- The Academy can spend its budget as it sees fit, if it does not spend all of its allocation it can save for a future year. If there is an overspend the academy will be required to pay it back, there is no credit facility.

Does ODST have a five-year vision, particularly with regard to the number of schools in the size of the trust?

ODST is still relatively new; at present ODST have confirmed that they will pause and review their position when there are 20 schools as part of the Trust.

How can we be assured that ODST has the capacity to support in excess of 17 schools? Is there any danger that ODST expands too quickly to be able to support the schools in the trust. What is the capacity of ODST to deliver services to schools, including school improvement services?

ODST currently has the capacity to deliver services to the schools already in the Trust; they are at present recruiting to a number of roles in order to expand their services. ODST have said that they will stop increasing in size (in terms of number of schools) when they reach 20 in order to consolidate their services. The Governors are confident that ODST can provide the services that they are committed to providing for the 5% top slice, other services will be bought in from OCC and other service providers, as they are at present. In future should additional services be offered by ODST the governors will consider them on a case by case basis looking in particular at value for money, but also at whether the service meets the needs of the Academy.

Is there any possibility of The Blake School exiting the Trust, or is the decision forever?

There is not, at present, any legal process by which schools can stop being an Academy and revert to being an LA maintained school.

How much of the school's total allocation of funding will ODST want to retain centrally to provide their services for schools?

ODST will retain 5% of the school's funding allocation and in return will provide some central services -

- Human Resources
- Finance
- Building maintenance and Insurances
- Shared procurement of services
- School Improvement
- Relationships with other schools and academies
- Inspection support and challenge

The Governors have looked at the costs of buying in the services not provided by ODST and concluded that there will be no significant financial difference (either positively or negatively) whether or not the school chooses to convert

What is the overall governance structure being proposed for the role of the governors at The Blake and the Directors of ODST?

- All Academies within ODST are governed by a single board of Directors. The Directors of ODST are accountable to the Secretary of State for the performance of the Academies within the Trust. The

Directors have a broad range of experience and are drawn from across the Diocese, they are chaired by an outstanding headteacher.

- Each school within ODST retains a Local Governing Body (LGB), the structure of which will not vary significantly from the structure that is already in place at The Blake. The LGB will have wide ranging delegated powers relating to the day to day management of the Academy, which will mirror the devolved powers that governors currently have as a maintained school.

What are the risks involved with conversion to an Academy with ODST?

- There are risks for The Blake School, whatever decision the Governors make. Staying as an LA maintained school also carries a real risk.
- The Blake School Governors want to go on serving the children and for it to be the best that it can be, not just for the children currently in the school but also for the children that are to come. Governors are looking to make a decision that makes it most likely that the children that will attend this school in 20 years will still have access to an excellent education in this place.
- In this instance the Governors feel that they are recommending change, in order to stay the same. The Governors are not making a decision that is seen the best of a bad lot, they see it as a positive choice, in favour of a relationship that has the potential to raise standards and protect the unique ethos of this school.
- Being part of a MAT offers the school protection from a maverick headteacher or governors; it offers some protection for the school.
- There is a high level of trust between ODST and The Blake School. Even as a maintained school there is a strong relationship with the Diocese, conversion as an Academy will allow this relationship to be built on and developed.
- The Blake School is not a faith school, we are about serving our local community really well, it is inclusive and that is unusual in our society.
- We know what the agenda of the Diocese is and it has been modelled for hundreds of years, providing first class education for all that time. The ethics that underpin the organisation are ethics with which The Blake School is comfortable.