**Academy Consultation - Questions raised by parents**

Changes / Impact for the children

What impact will this have on my child’s education? (I chose Blake due to its non-academy status). Will this mean any changes for our children during their time at school? How / What changes affect pupil’s directly?

The Governors have looked carefully at the question of impact on all members of the school community. There will be no day to day differences for the children or the staff at the school. There will be some changes for governors and the school leaders, the majority of differences will be for the finance and admin team of the school.

Whilst there will be no changes in terms of your child’s daily experience at The Blake School, we anticipate that the children will benefit from the increased level of support and opportunities for professional development offered to the school and its staff by the Diocese. Please see the document on the website entitled “Changes Following Conversion” for a more detailed response.

Will non- qualified teachers be employed by the school to teach my child?

No. Both ODST and the governors have clearly stated that should the school become an academy, only qualified teachers will be employed as class teachers.

The Curriculum

What will this mean with regard to the curriculum? Will this impact on the overall curriculum and standards of the school?

Governors are excited about the increased access to the ODSTs developing a team of consultants and school support services that they will have should the school convert. ODST are committed to the professional development of school staff and to school improvement, they have clearly stated that they want their schools to be places of outstanding education.

Should the school become an academy the Governors will remain responsible for identifying areas of school improvement and for working alongside the school staff to agree how to address any areas of weakness and best share skills and expertise across the school.

Will the adherence to the curriculum stay the same, or does it allow more freedom e.g. are we still obliged to carry out SATs?

Whilst academies do have more freedoms than schools that remain under Local Authority Control there are at present no plans to change the curriculum at The Blake School. The school staff have been working hard over the past 18 months to develop the school curriculum to ensure not simply compliance with the new national curriculum but also an exciting and challenging curriculum that is in line with the schools ethos and values.

ODST are committed to ensuring that the school delivers a broad and balanced curriculum that is both “rich and creative” and will offer support to the school to ensure that they do so. ODST has also confirmed that they are in favour of local schools (whatever their status) working together to develop the curriculum. The Blake School staff will continue to work with other local schools to share ideas and best practice.

The school has robust assessment procedures in place for all children to ensure that they are appropriately challenged and supported in order to achieve their best. In addition to this detailed monitoring, the school will continue to carry out SATs in Years 2 and 6.

How does it (conversion) enable the school to withstand educational changes?

The Governors, looking ahead to possible educational changes, feel that the school will be best supported if they chose to be an academy with ODST.

Whilst it is impossible to accurately predict what changes may face schools over the coming years there will almost certainly be funding cuts and a continuing reduction of services offered by the Local Authority.

Oxfordshire County Council is encouraging all of its schools to seriously consider academy conversion. “In 2012 the County Council expressed a view, which it still holds, that it would wish to encourage Governing Bodies and School Leadership Teams to consider how they might become an academy as part of a larger group of schools. This is to ensure that schools are not isolated and can be mutually supportive of each other in raising attainment standards” (Letter to all non-academy schools from the Academies team at OCC dated 30th October 2014) As at 30th October 2014 74% Secondary, 20% Primary and 33% Special schools across Oxfordshire have already converted to academies, with others currently following the conversion process.

The governors believe that conversion with ODST offers the school support to raise standards and that being part of a larger group of schools will protect the school from changes that it may be harder to withstand as a locally maintained school. Perhaps more significantly though, the governors feel that conversion with ODST will ensure that the schools distinctive Christian ethos is not simply protected but also continues to develop in order that children at the school can grow and mature as individuals alongside accessing an outstanding academic education. ODSTs commitment to excellence in education in schools that are diverse, inclusive, open and welcoming and which are also rewarding places for staff to work is very much in line with The Blake School’s vision.

The Local Picture

Which other schools will be part of the academy status?

There are at present six schools (across Oxfordshire and Berkshire) that are part of the Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust. None of the local Witney Partnership of Schools are currently part of ODST but The Batt School has just announced that it is consulting with parents and stakeholders regarding conversion as part of ODST, their consultation period ends on Friday 12th December.

Locally The Henry Box School and Our Lady of Lourdes are already academies and Wood Green has recently completed their consultation period regarding conversion. The Governing Bodies of a number of the primary schools across the Witney partnership are exploring academy conversion but to date with the exception of The Batt, no others have notified parents of their intention to formally consult on conversion.