



4th March 2016

Dear Parents/Carers,

Should Spring Brook School become an Academy?

You may already be aware that the Government is encouraging all schools to acquire Academy status, which gives schools additional autonomy and provides greater freedom from Local Authority (LA) decision-making. As a Special School, the Governing Body and staff of Spring Brook School are already able to make many of our own decisions that enable us to provide a high quality educational experience for all our young people, and we also have good working relationships with many departments within the LA who provide us with essential services. As an Academy, the government suggests Spring Brook School would have even greater freedom and funds to allow us to continue to improve and develop.

Given the potential advantages of Academy Status, the Governing Body met in February 2016 and unanimously decided to register an interest in becoming a sponsored Academy, part of the New Bridge Multi-Academy Trust and to formally begin the consultation process that could lead to Spring Brook School achieving Academy status. Parents, young people and all other stakeholders are now being actively encouraged to give their views and we have set out a comprehensive process that enables everyone to join in the debate.

This booklet aims to put academies into context.

How to give us your views:

It is important to us that your views are taken fully into account. You can feedback your comments in a number of ways.

- Email directly to suzanne.smith@springbrook.oldham.sch.uk
- Complete the section at the end of this booklet and return to school with your child.
- Come to the **Parents Consultation Evening on 9th March at 5.30pm or the drop in session on 14th March at 4.30pm** to feedback verbally.
- Post your feedback form into one of the post boxes located in the reception area at either of the School sites.
- Telephone the school office and request a call back to discuss further.

In the meantime, senior staff and Governors will continue to discuss the process with schools that have already converted and consider the advantages and disadvantages before any final decision is taken. We will update the School website as more information becomes available.

Rebeckah Hollingsworth

Rebeckah Hollingsworth
Headteacher

Margaret Ramsbottom

Margaret Ramsbottom
Chair of Governors

What is an Academy?

1. Academies are publicly funded schools, independent of the local authority, held accountable through a legally binding funding agreement with the Department for Education (DfE).
2. Staff are employed by the academy trust. Academies have more control over curriculum design and staff pay and conditions.
3. There are three different routes to becoming an Academy:
 - a) Sponsored Academies: previously underperforming schools which were taken out of LA control and given by the DfE to an academy sponsor in order to provide support in improving pupil achievement and attainment.
 - b) Converter academies: high-performing schools which have opted out of LA oversight.
 - c) Free schools: new schools set up as Academies.

Spring Brook School would apply to be a sponsored Academy, part of the New Bridge Multi-Academy Trust.

Historical Context

The first Academies were set up by the Labour Government in September 2000. The government of the day saw them as 'engines of social mobility and social justice'. Academies were created in areas of social deprivation and where educational aspirations were low and outcomes were poor; their purpose was to raise aspirations and drive up standards. The original Academies were funded in part by sponsors who were expected to take a major role in the Academy's governance. Academies were expected to 'collaborate closely with the LA and with other schools in the area'

Sponsor money and money from central Government was used to provide new buildings. Originally Academies were required to provide 'a broad and balanced education. In 2007 the requirement changed and new Academies were required to follow National Curriculum Programmes of study in English, Mathematics and ICT.

Academies and Academies Bill

The bill that has now passed through Parliament contains provisions that will alter the nature of Academies and make it possible, ultimately, for all maintained schools to become Academies. Academies will no longer be sited only in areas of high social deprivation. Outstanding schools and good schools with outstanding features are now being actively encouraged to convert.

There is an expectation that all Academies will work in partnership with an underperforming school with the objective of helping to raise standards in that school.

How does being an Academy differ from being a Community Special School?

	Community Special School	Academy
The school/academy trust own the School's land and buildings	No	Yes
The school/academy has employer responsibilities	No	Yes
The school/academy is subject to LA control	Yes	No
The school/academy has the right, in consultation with staff, to determine its own policies including policies in relation to employment	No	Yes
The school/academy is bound to honour national agreements re working conditions, pay, hours etc.	Yes	No
The school/academy acts as its own admissions authority and has control over its own admissions arrangements	No	No
The school/academy must follow the National Curriculum	Yes	No (1)
The school/academy can set its own term dates and hours	No	Yes
The school/academy receives all the funding that central government allocates to it	No (2)	Yes
The school/academy is able to keep any surplus balances it holds	No (3)	Yes
The school/academy has charitable status	No	Yes

- 1) With the exception of English, Maths and ICT.
- 2) The LA currently receives approximately 10% of this money.
- 3) Balances are subject to 'claw back' above a certain limit.

What would be the likely benefits to Spring Brook School of becoming an Academy?

There could be increased access to financial resources as a converting Academy. However, the Government has made it very clear that no school should directly benefit financially as a result of conversion. It could be argued that as an Academy the organisation would have greater financial freedom to agree how its resources are spent.

The Department for Education has said that each school that converts to Academy status will receive £25,000 towards the cost of doing so.

As an Academy, Spring Brook School would be free to determine how any additional money was spent, e.g. reducing class sizes, developing new courses, employing more staff or improving our buildings. All of these issues impact on the teaching and learning within the school.

The school could save money towards a specific objective (e.g. improving English and ICT facilities) without worrying that it would be clawed back by the LA.

We understand that by becoming an Academy we will be able to apply directly to the DfE for capital funding. It has been confirmed that we cannot be any worse off if we convert to an Academy and will have at least seven years' notice of any change in funding agreements.

What might be the risks associated with becoming an Academy?

We would not know what the exact budget for Spring Brook would be until we are closer to converting. Members of the Leadership Team and Governors will have to devote a huge amount of time between now and the date we convert to ensure it happens successfully. This may require other staff to pick up supporting duties during the interim period.

What form of relationship will exist between the LA and new academies?

This is for individual academies to determine – there is no statutory requirement for any formal relationship between LAs and academies beyond LA statutory duties such as SEN statementing, admissions co-ordination and provision of home-to-school transport. However, LA's are expected to play a key strategic role locally and there will be advantages to partnership working, for example planning 14-19 provision or sharing good practice locally.

We could negotiate to buy back services currently provided by the Local Authority in much the same way as we buy them back now. The Academy Trust would have to ensure that areas such as Legal Services, Insurance, Staff Training (especially in relation to Child Protection and educational visits) and Disaster Recovery were in place.

What might be the risks associated with not converting to an Academy School?

If Spring Brook School decided not to become an Academy, we might find that the cost of LA services would increase while the scope of those services diminished as a result of the Authority itself experiencing a reduction in income caused by Government cuts and other schools becoming Academies. This could then reduce the amount available for the LA to dispense to other schools.

It is sometimes difficult for the LA to clearly explain how all the current education budget, coming into Oldham, is used. Spring Brook School in line with many other community schools, could expect a reduced budget over the next few years. Whilst we do not believe that taking on Academy status will avoid the need to be prudent we believe the effects could be greatly reduced.

If Spring Brook were to become an Academy, what would change?

New Bridge Multi-Academy Trust has a very successful tradition and has an enviable reputation both nationally and in the local community.

There is no obligation for a school to change its name or conversely to keep its existing name. This is a decision for the school. Many do choose to include the word Academy in their title keeping broadly the same name but replacing “school” with “academy”. Some schools have not included the word Academy at all. Uniform, badges, colours etc can also remain the same or be changed as the school decides. It is the governors’ intention that the school should continue to be called “Spring Brook” and retain the same uniform requirements.

To ensure excellence as we move forward, the school, the New bridge Multi Academy Trust, the Local Authority and the NW Regional Schools Commission have proposed a challenging and innovative re-organisation that includes :

- Key Stage 1 children joining the present cohort at Hollinwood Academy to develop a new and unique Key Stage 1 assessment centre.
- Key Stage 2 and 3 middle school, based within the existing Spring Brook site.
- Key Stage 4 and 5 alternative provision free school, based in the town centre and offering a practical, vocational curriculum offer and extending the numbers and age range as required.

Academies have a duty to provide a free education. If Spring Brook were to become an Academy, education would continue to be free with the same voluntary contribution arrangements applying to trips and visits as at present. However, we could use some of the extra funds to ensure that our enrichment programmes can continue to grow, even during the difficult financial times ahead.

Pupil admissions to Spring Brook School will not change as the local authority will maintain the admissions responsibilities they currently have and parents will continue to be supported through this with the help of the local authority statementing officers. There would be no expectation that our Admissions Policy would change as we already work closely with the LA on this.

For our young people, students and young adults

By becoming an Academy we would be better placed to protect our curriculum and our teachers from future cuts, along with the extra-curricular activities that form such a fundamental part of what we offer at Spring Brook School. It is highly likely that pupils would move to a different learning environment and, at Key Stage 4, access a vocational curriculum offer. In the long term, future young people may also benefit from new capital funding and new facilities.

For Staff

When a school becomes an Academy, all staff are legally protected and entitled to transfer under the same employment terms and conditions (this includes pensions). TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employees) negotiations would take place and staff would transfer from the existing Spring Brook School to the Multi-Academy Trust and would continue to receive a salary level in accordance with their contractual arrangements.

Any new Academy could change the terms and conditions for its new employees but would need to be mindful of potential tensions and conflicts arising from this. It would be in an Academy’s interest to observe good practice in relation to employment issues. Any Academy that paid less than the going rate or deviated significantly and negatively from accepted working conditions and practices would struggle to recruit well qualified staff.

For Parents

There would be very little change for parents if Spring Brook School status was to change. Whether the School remains a Community Special School or becomes an Academy, we hope that parents will continue to play an active role in our school community.

Whilst in theory an Academy has the freedom to set its own term dates and hours, in practice, we recognise the difficulties that parents experience if term dates differ. It would not be in any new Academy's interests to make very different arrangements to those which exist in other local schools.

For Governors

If the School were to become an Academy, the current Governing Body would be dissolved on the date that the School becomes an Academy. It is expected that all the School's existing Governors would become members of the New Academy Governing Body.

The present Governing Body already has representatives drawn from staff, parents, the LA and the local community.

The new Governing Body would then manage the Academy and its responsibility would be to:

- Ensure the quality of education provision.
- Challenge and monitor the performance of the Academy.
- Employ staff.

Deadlines

The Governors will meet in April 2016 to formally discuss all of the feedback from the consultation process and then decide whether or not to convert. Governors will take a vote on this decision at the full Governing Body meeting in May 2016. Once this vote takes place, the process of converting to Academy status can begin but it must be borne in mind that this can take between three and four months. If the decision is made to progress, there is a possibility that Spring Brook would become an Academy on 1st July 2016.

First and foremost Governors will make their decision based on what is in the best interests of our young people and our families.

At any point up to signing a funding agreement with the Secretary of State the School can withdraw and decide to remain as a Community Special School.

Consultation Process

Consultation Process

November 2015	Representatives from the Governing Body and SLT met with the LA to discuss the strategic direction for Spring Brook School
November 2015	Representatives from the Governing Body and SLT took advice from the NW Regional Skills Commission. RSCs are responsible for approving and monitoring academies and free schools in their area on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education. Their main responsibilities include deciding on the development of new academies and approving changes to open academies including changes to multi-academy trust arrangements. We also consulted with Principals of other special school Academies

about converting to Academy status.

December 2016	Representatives from the Governing Body and SLT met with the LA to discuss the Heron Street site.
January 2016	Visits to Spring Brook School from potential Multi-Academy sponsors. Discussions with Representatives from the Governing Body and SLT.
February 2016	The LA met with the full Governing Body to discuss implications for Spring Brook School if they were to become an Academy. Governing Body met and agreed to register an interest with the DfE (Department for Education) to convert to an Academy and begin the process of consultation with all interested parties.
February 2016	The Headteacher and Principal from The New Bridge Multi-Academy Trust had further discussions with the LA and the NW RSC.
29 th February 2016	Initial Consultation Meeting with Staff.
2nd March 2016	Application submitted for an alternative provision Free School (14-19).
4 th March 2016	Information sent out to all stakeholders; Parents, Staff, Professional Associations & Trade Unions, MP's, Local Authority Departments, Oldham Councillors, Oldham Youth Council, Connexions, Health Team, HR Department, Governors section, Catering and School Meals, Schools Finance Team.
7 th March 2016	Information uploaded to the school website.
9 th March 2016	Pupil Council Meeting: 12.45 – 1.45pm at Lower School.
9 th March 2016	Pupil Council Meeting: 2pm – 3pm at Upper School.
9 th March 2016	Staff Consultation Meeting at Upper School: 3.30pm – 4.30pm
9 th March 2016	Parents Consultation Evening at Upper School: 5.30-6.30pm.
14 th March 2016	Staff Consultation Meeting at Lower School: 3.30pm – 4.30pm.
14 th March 2016	Parent Drop in Session: 4.30 – 5.30pm at Lower School.
17 th March 2016	Staff drop in session at Lower School: 3.30pm – 4.30pm.
31st March 2016	Deadline for feedback from all stakeholders.
23 rd May 2016	Governing Body to meet to make final decision.

24th May 2016

Letters to all stakeholders informing them of the outcome of the consultation process.

1st July 2016

Spring Brook School to become an Academy (if this decision is made).

