

Consultation re Proposal for Reedham Primary and Nursery School to Join Consortium Trust



A working party of governors was set up in September 2023 to consider whether Reedham Primary and Nursery School should become full members of Consortium Trust, having become associate members in September 2023. The working party presented the following proposal to the full governing board on the 4th of March and the full governing board are now keen to consult with stakeholders from both within the school and the wider community as part of the academisation process.

Proposal:

The Governing Body of Reedham Primary and Nursery School considers that it is in the best interests of the school and the children to convert to academy status and to join Consortium Trust, and hereby resolves to pursue conversion.

This briefing paper is to inform you about the working party proposal and to gather your views on it. A consultation period will run from Monday 11th March to Friday 19th April to share information and seek views from our community including parents and staff. The views of the Local Authority and wider stakeholders are also being sought.

About the School

Reedham Primary and Nursery School is a small school and nursery set in Reedham, a Broadland village that sits on the River Yare. The village is geographically confined, with the only means of crossing the river being a chain ferry that runs between set hours and closes during particularly inclement weather or very high tides.

The school first opened in 1871, since when it has been expanded and modified. From February this year, there have been 71 pupils aged 4-11 on roll in the primary school, with space for 80. The Nursery has space for twelve children at each of the morning, lunchtime and afternoon sessions. There are currently 13 children on roll attending sessions across the week. Both pupils from the main school and Nursery can also access a breakfast club running from 8:00 and after school club sessions running until 5:00pm.

The school is arranged into four mixed aged classes; Squirrel class (EYFS age 2 – 4 years), Heron class (YR, Y1 & Y2 – age 4 – 7 years), Owl class (Y3 & Y4 – 7 – 9 years) and Otter class (Y5 & Y6, age 9 -11 years). Classes are taught by qualified teachers, who are aided by learning assistants, who work across the classes supporting groups of children.

The EYFS classes have well-equipped inside and outside areas, which support continuous provision. Each classroom is equipped with Chromebooks (almost one per child), computers and iPads for pupil use, in addition to interactive boards to aid teaching and learning.

The grounds have been developed in recent years, with a trim trail, a tyre play area, a new outdoor classroom and off site school field. The school is one of only two in Norfolk to have a swimming pool on site. This heated swimming pool is enjoyed by all pupils, who have swimming lessons in it during the summer term. Many other areas of the school have been improved recently as part of the ongoing maintenance and enhancement schedule, for example, the bright and well-stocked library, the creation of an extra intervention room as well as new toilets for the children to use.

The School was last inspected by OFSTED in July 2019 when it was judged to be 'good'. A copy of the report can be found here: [Ofsted-Report-25th-June-2019-10087413-Reedham-Primary-School-120844-Final-PDF.pdf](https://www.ofsted.gov.uk/data-reports/Ofsted-Report-25th-June-2019-10087413-Reedham-Primary-School-120844-Final-PDF.pdf)

Background to Proposal

While very proud of the school and its provision for pupils, governors are aware that the small roll means there would be merit in working with other schools in order to share expertise, best practice and some back office functions and to ensure the school's ongoing viability. To that end, governors have been exploring different options to try and achieve this for some time. We have been very careful to proactively look at a range of partnership, federation and academy options as a structural solution that was the right fit for the school and ensure its long-term viability.

In the autumn of 2023, we took the opportunity to consider academisation through an associate membership option. This allowed the school to work with an academy trust without joining as full members, enabling us to further explore the pros and cons of joining a trust before making any permanent commitment to it.

Pros and Cons of Joining an Academy Trust

Pros	Cons
The school would be able to share subject specialist expertise and best practice.	The school would lose some of its autonomy.
Members of staff would be able to share the load of leading subjects.	The school may have to share a headteacher in the future, although there would always be a senior member of staff on site at Reedham.
There would be economies of scale in purchasing and in sharing back office support that the school currently has to buy in from other external bodies.	The school would not be able to choose its own suppliers, although the school is so small that many of its services currently continue to be bought from the Local Authority.

Pros	Cons
The school could access the greater level of capital funding available to the Trust, although this would be dependent upon the case made and the priorities for the Trust.	The school would have to make a case for a share of the Trust's capital funding allocation.
The school would work to the Trust's policies rather than developing its own, thus allowing teaching staff to concentrate on teaching.	The school would have to work to the Trust's policies rather than being able to develop its own.
The current funding system penalises schools with relatively fewer pupils. Joining the Trust would help to ensure the school's ongoing financial viability.	In the very unlikely event that the Trust may not be financially viable in the future or may not be able to manage future challenges, member schools would be transferred to another Trust. This is unlikely because Trusts have to have annual inspections which include scrutiny of their financial position and ongoing viability.
It is better for governors to be able to choose the Trust or partnering solution that they feel works best for Reedham, rather than not taking any action and having membership of a Trust chosen for them at some point in the future.	The Trust's values and objectives may not be aligned with the school's and those for which parents selected the school.
Trusts are able to employ staff, part of whose remit is to ensure the Trust is aware of all potential grant funding and to make bids for this.	Some grants will have to be shared amongst all the schools in the Trust.
Staff benefits such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a staff wellbeing forum • greater access to training and CPD • staff dinners and 'thank you' events. 	Staff may feel more divorced from the decision-making process.
Consortium Trust allows schools to join as associate members for a year in order to be able to find out as much as possible about the Trust before any decision is made about formally joining it.	

Frequently asked questions about joining a Multi Academy Trust

Q1. Why are the governors considering conversion to Academy status?

A1. The organisation of schools in England will change rapidly in the next few years. The expectation of the government is that all schools will work together and support one another within academy trusts. The Department for Education expects academy trusts and Teaching School Hubs to be the

providers of school improvement and development support. Local Authority support for schools is diminishing as the government moves funding for education away from local council control. This shift in funding patterns reduces the scope for non-academy schools to apply for additional funding and support to enhance the educational experience of the pupils. In future, support for school improvement will come mainly from academy trusts.

Q2. What is a multi-academy trust (MAT)?

A2. Multi Academy trusts are charities that have responsibility for running a number of academy schools. They cannot, as charities, be run for financial profit and any surplus must be reinvested in the trust.

By working in partnership with each other, the schools within a trust can share staff, curriculum expertise and effective teaching practices, and work together to deliver the best outcomes for pupils.

While other types of school partnerships can be effective, the key difference with academy trusts is that there is shared accountability for standards across the trust; all schools within the trust support each other and the trust is accountable for them all.

A board of trustees answer to the trust's members. The trust members are made up of independent individuals responsible for the strategic supervision of the academies (schools) within the trust. Their role is to ensure that the trust upholds its aims and values whilst assessing the performance of each individual academy and reporting back to the Secretary of State.

Q3. How can I find out more about the Trust you have been working with?

A3. Governors chose to work with Consortium Trust – the reasons for that being set out below. More information can be found about Consortium Trust and the schools that are already members of it here [Consortium Trust - Key Information](#)

Q4. Who will make decisions about the school once it joins the academy trust?

A4. Some decisions will continue to be made locally, policies and procedures will be developed by the Trust and strategic direction will be led by the Members.

Q5. Will my child be taught by different teachers?

A5. Consortium Trust has agreed not to change any staffing until there is natural movement of staff within the school.

Q6. What changes will my child notice?

A6. It is unlikely that your child will notice any changes at all, particularly to start with. There may be opportunities, through sharing facilities and expertise, for your children to visit other schools within the Trust or to take part in new activities that being a member of the Trust will allow the school to offer.

- Q7. Will I have to buy my child a new uniform? - Will the school's name or logo change?
- A7. There are no plans to change the logo or uniform. Each school within the trust retains its own identity.
- Q8. Will the school name be changed?
- A8. The name will remain the same.
- Q9. Will money raised by the PTA be absorbed by the academy trust?
- A9. Any money raised by the PTA for the benefit of the children at Reedham Primary and Nursery School will remain under the control of the PTA. The PTA is a separate organisation – a charity in its own right.
- Q10. Will the school make or lose money by joining an academy trust?
- A10. The school will be allocated the same level of funding but some of this will be retained by the Trust in order to finance central services. Through economies of scale, more money should be available to the school to be spent on teaching and learning rather than being spent on buying in other statutory services, for example, buildings maintenance services, HR and financial advice.
- Q11. Will there be any changes to staff terms and conditions?
- A11. Staff will be TUPE transferred to the Trust. TUPE stands for the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) and this preserves employees' terms and conditions of service when an undertaking is transferred to a new employer. The Trust has agreed that no staffing changes will be made until there is natural movement of staff eg through resignations or the requirement for additional staff.
- Q12. Will the school still have a governing body?
- A12. The school will have a Locality Committee that is similar to a governing body, in that it still has a monitoring role and offers both support and challenge to school staff. The Committee is comprised of both community and parent representatives.
- Q13. What would parent involvement look like?
- A13. The Locality Committee will have parent representatives and parents will be able to contact school staff as they do now. The Trust also has a Parent Parliament comprising parent representatives from member schools who meet regularly with Trust representatives. This provides a way in which parents can directly engage with the Trust. More information can be found here [download.asp \(consortiumtrust.org\)](https://www.consortiumtrust.org/download.asp).

Q14. Is there any evidence to support the benefits of joining a MAT?

A 14. Research was carried out in November 2021 by IFF Research with the aim of provided an understanding of the views and experiences of schools that have joined academy trusts or become standalone academies and maintained schools that had not chosen to do so yet. The results of this research can be found here: [Schools' views on the perceived benefits and obstacles to joining a multi-academy trust \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

The key, relevant findings were that:

- 82% of primary schools reported that the overall impact of joining a multi-academy trust (MAT) had been positive.
- 92% of primary schools felt that the positive impact met or exceeded their expectations.
- Among recent converters 4% of primary schools were negative about the overall impact of converting.

Why Consortium Trust?

Consortium Trust started out specialising in small, rural schools in East Anglia and this remains its core aim, although it is now sustainably expanding to include different sorts of provision.

Having looked at what the Consortium Trust had to offer and having visited and spoken to staff and parents at other schools that had already joined it, governors felt the Trust was a good match for Reedham Primary and Nursery School. The Trust understands the distinct nature of small, rural schools while being able to provide expertise, oversight, guidance and economies of scale.

As part of a group of schools, there are financial opportunities, including improved contracts for services (maintenance, catering, supplies etc). These economies of scale also extend to the provision of back office systems and services, such as accounting and management information. In general, a larger group of schools will be more resilient than a single school and better able to manage the sort of risks and uncertainties that have been seen in the last few years. Governors are particularly aware that the number on roll at the school is due to fall considerably in the near future and becoming part of a Trust will help support the school through the challenges this will bring.

A further impetus for considering joining the Trust was the dip in academic results seen in the summer term. While results for the past few years before this have been good, governors felt that being able to share expertise with other specialists, and sharing the load of leading subjects within the school, would support staff in ensuring teaching and learning were as effective as possible and allow pupils to achieve their full potential.

Due diligence

Since September 2023 a working party of governors has met regularly with an advisor from the local authority. The working party has also met with the CEO of Consortium in order to ask questions to gain a better understanding of the Trust, to

agree meetings with stakeholders and to support the governors' due diligence process. Other activity that has been undertaken to understand more about the Trust and how it works includes:

- Governors visiting other Trust schools and speaking to staff and parents there
- Holding a shared assembly with another Trust School
- The Interim Headteacher visiting the Trust's HQ and spending the day with headteachers from schools within the trust, exchanging good practice and taking part in a science moderation. The Chair of Governors has also visited the HQ to meet office staff and to get a better understanding of how the Trust operates.
- Governors carrying out desktop research about the Trust and other schools within it, including looking at their OFSTED inspection results, allowing the working party to discuss these with the Trust's CEO.
- The governing board scrutinising the Trust's accounts.
- Governors meeting with representatives from the Trust with responsibility for Finance, HR and Facilities and Compliance and asking them questions about these areas, including what parent and governor involvement in the school would look like if the school joined the Trust and what changes pupils would notice.
- School staff being given the opportunity to speak individually with the Head of People at the Trust.

Representatives from the Trust have also visited the school to carry out some of their due diligence.

Consultation

The governing board believes that becoming a full member of Consortium Trust will enable us to continue to improve the opportunities we provide for our pupils and support the school in its future development.

Governors are now keen to consult with stakeholders from both within the school and the wider community as part of the academisation process.

The consultation period will start on the 11th of March and close on the 19th of April.

If you would like to take part in this consultation or wish governors to be made aware of your views, please complete the form that can be found by scanning the QR code below. Hard copies of the form are available from the school office if you would prefer to respond in this way.

When the consultation period is complete the governors will consider all responses and act in the best interests of the school and pupils when making any final decisions about the academy conversion application.