

BROOKFIELD HOUSE SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY

PROPOSAL FOR BROOKFIELD HOUSE SCHOOL TO BECOME AN ACADEMY

Consultation Document

Introduction

The Department for Education (DfE) has offered schools in England and Wales the opportunity to join the new academies programme. It says that becoming an academy would “give schools the freedoms and flexibilities to continue to drive up standards”.

Academies are state funded schools independent of Local Authority (LA) control – in other words the funding comes from Central Government straight to the School and the pupils, without first going via the Local Authority. Academies are non-fee paying schools in the same way that Brookfield House School is now.

Having carefully considered the issues, the Governing Body believes that becoming an academy may now be in the best interests of the school, its pupils and the local community. Governors wish to start consulting over whether to become an academy. So that you can find out more about the academies programme, the reasons why the Governing Body are considering a change in status and some of the common concerns about academies, we have developed this Consultation Document. We hope it will help you to formulate your own views on this important issue.

It has been organised under the topics that we think will be the most important factors in helping you to form your opinion. These are:

1. Background
2. Considerations about becoming an academy
3. Information about the academies programme, including:
 - Finance
 - Admissions and Term Dates
 - Governance
 - Building and Emergency Contingency Plans.
4. The Consultation Process

1. Background

The Governing Body’s primary function is to ensure that Brookfield House School delivers the best possible education for its pupils and their families. Governors also take very seriously their responsibility to serve the local community. After much thought and discussion, governors now believe the academies programme may offer a number of significant benefits which could support the school’s drive for continuous improvement. These include:

Moral purpose

Whilst the Governing Body recognises its first responsibility is to provide the best possible education for its own pupils, there is also a strong belief that Brookfield House School has a moral obligation to, wherever possible, further the life chances of children who do not attend our

school. As a successful school, Brookfield House School has the skills, experience and capacity to support others. Becoming an academy would give the school additional resources to continue and extend this work, potentially benefiting more children and their families. By forming an Academy Trust, Brookfield House School would have the potential to develop lasting partnerships with other schools. One such partnership being actively examined at present is a formal partnership with William Morris School.

Autonomy

Becoming an academy would allow our school leaders greater freedom to innovate. For example, freedom from the requirement to follow the National Curriculum, the school would be empowered to develop a dynamic curriculum designed to meet the specific needs of its own pupils.

Greater flexibility to purchase services

As an academy, Brookfield House School would receive resources previously retained by the LA to run its services. Although the school would still need to purchase a number of these services, governors would welcome the capability to achieve best value.

A different relationship with the Local Authority

The Governing Body views the Academies programme as an opportunity to enter into a new and potentially exciting relationship with the LA. However, although independent, the school would seek to work in partnership with the LA.

2. Considerations about becoming an academy

When academies were first set up under the previous government, they were almost always replacements for schools which were deemed to be failing. These original academies had private sponsors including commercial organisations and religious groups that required the closure of an old school, usually the appointment of a new Headteacher, often a series of permanent exclusions of children, and frequently significant capital investment.

The original academies were usually in areas of social deprivation and often opened in controversial circumstances, with job losses and disruption in the community. The outcome was often a better equipped and higher achieving school; but not always. Some of the original academies have struggled, sometimes because of issues with the private sponsor and sometimes because of ongoing social problems. Understandably the trade unions, which school staff belong to, have been very concerned about the set-up of these academies because of the negative impact on many of their members.

Subsequently, new academies have been successful schools which are given the same freedoms as the original academies but do not have the same issues with sponsorship and job losses. However, many people still have a number of concerns. These include:

Potential changes to staff conditions

Generally, unions remain against the programme because they fear the freedoms given to academies could impact on school staff in the longer term. They also worry that if hundreds of schools become academies, there will be less opportunity for collective negotiations to secure the best working conditions and pay scales for school workers. Although academies do have the freedom to adopt their own conditions of work for staff, the Governing Body is committed to maintaining national pay and conditions for all its school workers.

Transport

Many families are dependent at present on transport to enable their children to attend Brookfield House School. Governors have been assured that the current arrangements will be unchanged and the relevant Local Authority will continue to be responsible for ensuring that children are picked up from home in the morning and returned in the afternoon.

Hospital and Home Service

The current arrangements under which Brookfield House School is responsible for the Hospital and Home Service based at Whipps Cross Hospital will also remain unchanged.

Admissions and Term Dates

If Brookfield House School becomes an academy, the local authority would continue to be responsible for admissions. This would mean no change to the current arrangements.

The academy would have the power to set its own term dates if it chose to do so; however, if Brookfield House School became an academy, it is highly unlikely that governors would choose to set term dates which did not match local schools. Should the Governing Body wish to deviate from LA term dates in the future, it would undertake a full consultation process prior to any change.

No change for Brookfield House School

There is no immediate need for the school to become an academy. In the short term, the school would continue to be funded by the LA as at present but would not enjoy the freedoms mentioned above or be able to develop formal partnerships. The Government has made it clear that all schools will be expected to become academies in the years ahead so Brookfield House will anyway have to go through the academy process in the future.

Other than financial regulations, there will be no need to change any of the current school policies although they will continue, as always, to be reviewed regularly.

3. Information about the Academies Programme

Finance

What would happen if Brookfield House School were to become an academy?

Academies are funded by the DfE through the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA). If Brookfield House School were to become an Academy, the YPLA would provide it with a General Allocation Grant (GAG) made up of two components:

- core funding which is exactly the same as the school would have received from the LA using its funding formula
- Local Authority Central Spend Equivalent Grant (LACSEG) which would be Brookfield House School's share of the money, based on pupil numbers, which the LA currently retains and spends centrally on those services that the academy would become responsible for.

Using the DfE calculator, the school has calculated that it would receive an additional £55,000 each year in LACSEG funding if it becomes an academy. Although this is a substantial amount of money, it should not be the only factor considered when making the judgement on whether or not Brookfield House School should convert.

If Brookfield House School becomes an academy, the Governing Body would undertake to ensure that the terms and conditions for all existing staff remain at least as good as those for staff in equivalent posts in schools which are still bound by national and local agreements. Also, the school buildings and equipment would be owned by a special type of charity called a trust.

Governance

Governance is about how the school operates and ensures a good quality of education for all its pupils, including those with special needs.

What would happen if Brookfield House School becomes an academy?

The Governing Body would be responsible for establishing an Academy Trust. The Academy Trust (a charitable company limited by guarantee) would then enter into a funding agreement with the Secretary of State for the running of the academy. The Academy Trust and its Governors would have a strategic role in running the academy.

The key responsibilities are to:

- ensure the quality of educational provision
- challenge and monitor the performance of the academy
- manage the Academy Trust's finances and property
- employ staff.

Academy governing bodies become the direct employers of staff, have direct health and safety responsibilities and are responsible for ensuring that the school undergoes an external financial audit. As the Academy Trust is a charitable company, the Governors would also be directors and charitable Trustees, and would therefore need to comply with obligations under company and charity law.

Brookfield House School is proposing that the existing governors will become the Academy governing body.

Building and Emergency Contingency Plans

What effects would Brookfield House School becoming an academy have on the building?

The Academy Trust would enter into a lease agreement with the freeholder, the LA; this agreement is for 125 years.

What if something happens to the building if we become an Academy?

If the academy building suffers damage which means that part or all of it cannot be used as a school, the LA would be required to provide facilities for the children to continue their education. This is the same requirement that the LA currently has because its duty is to provide for the children and not the Academy Trust.

Would there be a specific insurance grant to cover for emergencies?

Academies are required to cover insurance at specified minimum levels of cover. They are also eligible to seek an Earmarked Annual Grant from the YPLA (Young People's Learning Agency) for emergencies, in the same way that an LA can pay a maintained school a contingency payment.

By becoming an Academy, would Brookfield House School's building be more or less likely to be upgraded?

In the same way that LAs have a capital building programme, so there will be an academies building programme. If Brookfield House School's need for capital investment was prioritised and met agreed criteria, it could be earmarked for investment. However, becoming an academy would not guarantee capital investment.

4. The Consultation Process

The consultation process, agreed by the Governing Body, has been designed to gather as wide a range of views as possible. It is important you have your say, as your views will influence:

- the Governing Body's decision as to whether or not Brookfield House School becomes an academy
- how the academy will be set up should the decision be taken to convert.

Who we will consult with?

The Governing Body will seek the views of:

- Pupils
- Parents/carers
- Staff and their trade union representatives
- NHS staff at the school
- Local schools
- The Local Authority
- Local councillors
- Local community groups
- Any other interested parties

Equality Impact Assessment

Governors have a duty to consider any possible impact of its plans on protected minority groups. If you have any views that you think governors should consider regarding particular groups of people who may be affected by the conversion please include this in your response.

How can I share my views?

Governors are happy to receive comments in any form. Emails should be addressed to governors@brookfieldhouse.waltham.sch.uk

Letters should be marked "Private and Confidential - Academy Proposal" and handed in (or posted) to the school office, so they can be passed to Governors. All correspondence will be acknowledged (unless, of course, it is anonymous).

In addition, an Academy Consultation Meeting for parents will be held at the school on Thursday 23rd February 2012 at 7pm. This will provide an opportunity to:

- hear why the Governing Body took the decision to initiate the academy conversion process
- ask questions and/or raise concerns
- share your views on the proposal.

During this period, governors also plan to hold meetings with staff and their union representatives.

Consultation documentation and links to useful websites will be posted on the school website www.brookfield-house.waltham.co.uk

If you need any help in translating or understanding this document, then please contact the office where we will make arrangements to help you (telephone 020 8527 2464)

Timetable

The consultation period begins immediately and will last until Friday 9th March 2012 ending at 12 noon.

The Governing Body will reconvene on Monday 19th March 2012 to make a decision on whether to continue with the process to become an academy. A Consultation Summary Document will be released following the meeting, summarising the outcome of the consultations.

If the decision is taken to proceed, Brookfield House School is likely to become an academy on 1st August 2012 in readiness for the start of the Autumn Term in September.