

23 September 2010

Dear Parent/Carer

Application for Academy Status at Queens Park Lower School

Please find attached to this letter the community consultation regarding our school's application to become an Academy.

You will know that the coalition Government has given 'Outstanding' schools first approval to become an Academy – taking the school out of the control of the Local Authority by establishing an Academy Trust. At QPLS we believe this is an important step for us as it will allow us to develop and grow, building on the excellence we have already demonstrated.

It is important that all members of the community have opportunity to give us their views on this and hence the consultation. We have designed the consultation as a series of questions and answers as we hope this will make the process clear and transparent. If you would like the consultation translated please do not hesitate to let us know. The consultation has been sent to all parents/carers of children registered at the school; to other local schools in the West Bedford area; to community leaders at the Church, the Mosque and the Gurdwara and to the Neighbourhood Centre. A copy of the consultation is also on our website.

We hope you find the information helpful and we look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

Fred Birkett
Chair of Governors

APPLICATION FOR ACADEMY STATUS AT

QUEENS PARK LOWER SCHOOL

1. Introduction

The Governors of Queens Park Lower School (QPLS) are embarking on an application process that, if successful, will mean that the School achieves academy status.

Important to this process is for us to consult with key local stakeholders within the community. Clearly both parents and School staff are important stakeholders, as are other community members (eg other schools) and we would like to hear your views.

Below is a question and answer document that may help to answer some of the questions you may have about academy status. Naturally, there will also be other questions that are not covered below, and details of how to contact us are on page 7.

2. What are academies?

Academies are publicly funded independent schools that provide a first-class education.

Academies can benefit from greater freedoms to help innovate and raise standards. These freedoms include:

- more local control over the School's budget
- ability to utilise the budget more effectively
- ability to set pay and conditions for staff
- freedom from following the National Curriculum.

3. Why does the Governing Body want to achieve academy status?

QPLS is an outstanding School - a judgement confirmed by OFSTED. The Governing Body's main purpose is to ensure that we maintain the very high standards of education and development for the children within the School.

We believe that academy status will enable the School to have increased self-determination to spend our money more effectively, attract, and invest in, the best staff and continue to innovate within the curriculum for the benefit of the children in our care.

4. General

- a) I am interested in learning more about academy status, where can I find out more?

The Department for Education website has the most up-to-date information available on how to become an academy.

The teaching unions, the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) and the National Union of Teachers (NUT) all have guidance documents on academy status.

b) What will the responsibilities of the governing body be?

The individual members of the governing body will be responsible for establishing the Academy Trust. The Academy Trust (a charitable company limited by guarantee) will then enter into a funding agreement with the Secretary of State for the running of the academy. The Academy Trust will have members (those who set up the Academy Trust) who are responsible for appointing the governors (also known as directors or trustees) to the governing body of the Academy Trust. It is the governing body that manages the academy on behalf of the members of the Academy Trust. 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.

It will be for the members of the governing body of the school to decide and agree, in discussion with the Secretary of State, who among them would wish to be members of the Academy Trust, and which of them would wish to be governors of the Academy Trust (note that it is possible to be both a member and governor).

c) What is the role of the Academy Trust?

An Academy Trust is a charitable company responsible for the running of the academy and has control over the land and other assets. It has a strategic role in running the academy, but delegates day-to-day management of the school to the governors.

d) As an academy, will QPLS still work with the local authority?

Academies are independent schools which are not maintained by the local authority. QPLS is currently maintained by the Local Authority. However, being at the centre of your community, QPLS will continue to work with the Local Authority, other schools and local partners.

e) Academies used to have outside organisations sponsoring them - is that still the case?

Not where an 'outstanding' school is converting to academy status.

QPLS's governing body will establish the Academy Trust. Although academies can work with any external organisation this is not the intention of the QPLS governing body.

5. Requirements

a) Which schools can apply to become academies?

Only schools that have been rated 'outstanding' overall in their most recent Ofsted inspection are eligible to convert to academies at this time.

b) When can QPLS open as an academy?

We expect that the process could take a minimum of three months so the School could become an Academy from January 2011.

c) Is it expected that QPLS will support another school to raise attainment?

Academies will be expected to sign up in principle to support another school to raise attainment. However, QPLS already does this as a National Support School (NSS) and would expect to continue to do so.

d) Academies currently have at least one specialism in a curriculum area - will that still be the case for QPLS?

This will not be the case for primary schools although secondary schools converting to an academy will be required to have an emphasis in one or more subject areas.

e) Do these new academies still have to set up an endowment trust and seek contributions from others?

No. There is no requirement for outstanding schools converting to academy status to have an external sponsor, and no contributions are expected. Every new academy does have to have an Academy Trust, but the governors can set this up themselves.

6. Decision to become an academy

a) Does QPLS need agreement from the local authority?

QPLS has been in contact with the LA, although there is no requirement to do so. Once the Secretary of State has confirmed that QPLS will become an academy, he will direct the local authority to cease to maintain it.

b) Does QPLS have to hold a consultation with parents?

In converting to an academy, QPLS Governors feel it is important to explain this intention with parents and other members of the community to ensure there is understanding of the change proposed.

c) Does QPLS have to hold a consultation with staff?

The Governors, as current employers of school staff, have arranged a TUPE consultation with all staff (teaching and non teaching) and the unions as part of the staff transfer process.

d) I don't want QPLS to become an academy or I would like to know more. What can I do?

Please contact the Governing Body using the sheet at the back of this document

7. Process

Length of time to convert to an academy

The process is expected to take three months, but it may take longer if there are complicated issues. The QPLS Governing Body is in the process of assessing all the potential issues that could arise in becoming an academy. Once important stakeholder consultation processes are completed, and we have clarified all outstanding issues, having taken the appropriate legal advice, we will then seek to complete the conversion process.

8. Support funding

a) What funding will be available to help schools become academies?

Schools may incur costs, such as obtaining legal advice on the documents necessary for setting up the academy, advice on the process for transferring staff, and new signage and stationery. As a contribution to these costs, the DfE will pay a flat-rate grant of £25,000 to the school's bank account.

b) What if the cost of the conversion process is more than £25,000?

The DfE believe that it is fair that schools which intend to acquire academy status should devote some of their own resources to the process. This gives them an incentive to keep costs to the necessary minimum over and above the DfE support and also minimises the impact on the education budget for all schools.

c) What happens if the school does not spend the whole £25,000? Does the unspent balance have to be returned?

No. The balance can be spent by the academy as part of its overall income.

- d) **Can the school make a later claim for additional support if it finds, well into the conversion process, that costs are much higher than initially expected, for example if there are legal difficulties?**

Yes, although the school will be expected so far as possible to have absorbed the extra costs itself, and any late claim will be assessed in the light of that.

9. Admissions

What are the admission requirements for schools converting to become academies?

Outstanding schools converting to become an academy will be able to retain the admission criteria they currently use. These arrangements and related processes should at all times comply with the School Admissions Code.

When a school becomes an academy, the Academy Trust will become the admission authority. This will involve periodic consultation, and regularly publishing the academy's admission arrangements.

10. Staffing

Can the QPLS alter teachers' pay and conditions?

When QPLS converts from being a community school to an academy, staff will transfer under the same employment terms and conditions. Immediate changes to the staff structure and operation of the school are not anticipated. However, the Academy Trust may consult with staff and their union representatives on changes to terms and conditions in the future.

11. Land

How will academy status impact upon QPLS land?

QPLS will take control of the land from the Local Authority. QPLS will continue to develop its environment for the benefit of our children and our staff. QPLS will continue to work closely with other schools in the locality to ensure the best provision is available.

Accompanying letter: