

East Stour Primary School

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Head Teacher: Mrs E Law

Wednesday 13th October 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

You may well be aware that there is a significant ambition from Government to have all schools across the UK join academy trusts in the future. As a result of this, our Governing Body and senior leaders have spent a considerable amount of time, over several years, exploring the opportunities for our school to join an established Multi Academy Trust (MAT).

As a school which wants to decide its own future, we feel it's important we are approaching the academisation agenda proactively. Therefore, we have considered many options and investigated a range of possibilities over a number of years. The Governing Body of the school and the leadership team put high importance on the relationships with our families and community and for that reason, we wanted to involve you in the conversation as soon as possible. Therefore, we want to let you know we have decided to consult with you about joining an Academy Trust that operates across Kent.

The Trust, which are interested in joining is called 'EKC Schools Trust'. Currently, it operates four highly successful primary schools which are located across Kent. As a Multi Academy Trust it is unique in this area, as its sister organisation – EKC Group – runs six further education colleges locally, one of which is Ashford College. This offers the pupils within the Trust access to genuinely inspirational learning opportunities in environments which no other primary school would have access to. The Trust also has an ethos which chimes with our own; it is committed to serving its locality and enhancing the social and economic prosperity of that community. That means that EKC Schools Trust seeks to ensure its schools are firmly embedded within their communities, rather than imposing centralised brands or ways of working. Unlike many other Trusts, its schools retain a tremendous amount of autonomy, with Governors and senior leaders empowered to continue delivering a great education for your child or children, but with less of the administrative challenges we face.

We believe that EKC Schools Trust is the right Multi Academy Trust for our school and would like all of you to also get the opportunity to find out more about this Trust. Therefore, we will be working in partnership with all parents and carers and other members of our school's community to undergo a **full consultation** into academisation and joining EKC Schools Trust.

The consultation period will run for six full weeks, from 18th October to 26th November. We have deliberately chosen as long a consultation period as possible, to give everyone a chance to ask questions and gather information to help decide if this is the right step for our school. We hope to engage as many stakeholders as possible and will therefore be holding a series of open meetings, both during the school day and evenings. Additionally, parents/carers will have the opportunity to

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voice their questions and views via an online survey, as well as being able to book 1-1 meetings with myself, and any member of SLT and our Chair of Governors, Mrs Della Skilton. In the interests of openness and transparency, we will keep you regularly informed throughout the consultation period via our school website.

We will send home full details of how the consultation will run on 18th October. In the meantime, I would encourage you to find out more about the EKC Group by visiting their website (<https://www.ekcgroup.ac.uk/ekc-schools-trust>), and the websites of the other Primary Schools who belong to the Trust:

- Briary Primary School: <https://www.briary.kent.sch.uk/>
- Queenborough Primary School: <http://www.queenborough.kent.sch.uk/>
- Holywell Primary School: <https://www.holywell.kent.sch.uk/>
- Bysing Wood Primary School: <https://www.bysing-wood.kent.sch.uk/>

I have also included a 'Frequently Asked Questions' at the end of this letter, which I hope will be a helpful starting point.

Yours sincerely,



Emma Law
Headteacher

FAQs Parents

1) What is a Multi Academy Trust?

A Multi Academy Trust (MAT) is what is normally formed when a number of schools join together as a single Trust (in this case EKC Schools Trust) with a Board of Directors answerable to the Trust's members. The Trust becomes independent of Local Authority (in this case Kent County Council) control, with all staff becoming employed by the Trust, and all assets transferred to the Trust.

The Trust is the legal entity and it has one set of Articles that govern all the academies (each school) within it. The Trust has a Master Funding Agreement with the Secretary of State and each academy also has a Supplemental Funding Agreement. Each of the academies in the Trust has its own Local Board that deals with local issues.

The Trust would be accountable for all its academies within its MAT. However, before anything is signed, the Trust would work with schools to agree those matters that will be handled centrally and those that will remain the responsibility of the individual academy's Local Boards. This agreement is called the Scheme of Delegation.

2) Are other schools also creating MATs?

There have been a number of MATs created across the UK since the opportunity was first opened up and there is a push to ensure that more schools become academies in the future. This is because it enables schools to develop a more flexible curriculum that is able to serve the needs of the community better, work in partnership with other schools to develop best practice, and create a more efficient service delivery for schools within the MAT. Academisation brings a number of benefits to pupils, which is why so many schools are choosing to take this route. There are a number of very successful Multi Academy Trusts of primary schools across Kent who have gained significantly from working together.

MATs have for several years now been the government's preferred vehicle for school improvement, and they have sought to encourage more academies to be part of larger organisations. There have been many recent announcements setting out that by 2025, the Government want to see far more schools residing in strong families than do today, and are actively looking at how they can make that happen.

3) Why are we looking to join a MAT?

We believe that joining the EKC Schools Trust is the right move for our school, its pupils and the wider community which we serve. It will offer us a range of benefits, such as:

- We have always ensured our school can meet the needs of our local community, rather than simply serving the Local Authority. However, being an academy gives the school even greater freedoms and independence to ensure we are delivering what our families and children need.
- Giving us the scale to ensure services across the school are delivered at a better cost allowing us to spend more of our budget on your child's education – from finance and resources, to capital, HR and marketing. This allows our school to concentrate even more of our efforts and energies on ensuring your child or children are getting the best education possible.
- Enabling us to have a network of peer schools which is wider than our current one, and allowing us to grow more collaborative partnerships with a wider group of local and countywide groups. We have always been keen to learn from others and share our strengths and this approach will enable us to further develop our partnerships with like-minded schools and their leaders.
- Improved recruitment and retention of high quality staff members. Becoming a member of a Trust enables significant progression opportunities for staff, which helps us to retain our best employees, and also develop future leaders. As part of a Trust we will also have access to enhanced continuing professional development for staff, giving everyone the opportunity to further develop themselves.

4) Which schools are currently part of the EKC Schools Trust MAT and are any others looking to join?

There are four schools that are currently part of the EKC Schools Trust. These are Briary Primary School, Bysing Wood Primary School, Holywell Primary School and Queenborough Primary School. There are two schools currently looking to join, which are East Stour Primary School and Palm Bay Primary School.

5) Why have we chosen the EKC Schools Trust?

As a well-established MAT, EKC Schools Trust has shown that it can provide a fantastic range of improvement opportunities and additional services for its existing four schools. Alongside that, the EKC Schools Trust is a partnership organisation with the EKC Group. The Trust has been created to enable schools like ours to take advantage of fantastic educational enrichment activities for all of our pupils. As Governors we have identified that being part of the EKC Schools Trust will really benefit our children and families whilst allowing us to maintain everything special and unique about our school. These are some of the benefits:

- Access for our children to amazing facilities, trips, and learning opportunities within the Group's further education colleges. This could include woodwork, music, art, computing, design, media and many more. We will be able to take our curriculum plans and deliver enrichment activities using the colleges' facilities to benefit your children during their time at our school. We are extremely proud of our curriculum but we do not currently have access to specialist resources and facilities to bring the learning to life in the way that joining this Trust will enable us to do.
- Similarly, EKC specialist staff and students will be able to come to our school to offer workshops for the children and teach them about how their learning in primary school can lead to a great career in the future.
- Alongside the financial benefits we will accrue from joining a Trust which has a partnership with such a large organisation creating economies of scale, there are also benefits from us procuring our core services from a 'not for profit' organisation. This will save us money that can be spent on staffing, resources and education.
- The ethos and values of the Trust fit with our beliefs. Unlike many Trusts, EKC Schools Trust firmly believes in the distinctiveness and individuality of schools and the communities they serve. The CEO of the Trust understands our school and the way we work and the agreement between the school and the Trust will mean our Headteacher and the Governing Body will continue to make all the key decisions about the education of your children and how our school operates.

6) Who are the EKC Group?

The EKC Group are a large, successful organisation that provide Further Education across East and South Kent. They consist of six colleges, a large apprenticeship team and community learning teams, a digital education team, and also run a range of commercial services including three nurseries, a sports centre, a four-star hotel and a restaurant. You can find out more about them and the education they offer at www.ekcgroup.ac.uk

7) Will there be changes to our school?

EKC Schools Trust is clear that its vision is for schools to retain their sense of place and their local community identities, so there wouldn't be any costly branding changes, or uniform changes. The changes will be centred around our school having even greater opportunities for the children and enriching the curriculum further. The recruitment of staff will remain the responsibility of the school's leaders and the day to day running of the school, the curriculum, the holiday dates, the times of the school day and all of the decisions that affect you and your children will be completely at the discretion of the Headteacher and Governing Body.

8) When is this proposed to happen?

Subject to the outcome of the consultation, the proposal is to join EKC Schools Trust from 1 April 2021.