



## Proposal for St Wilfrid's Church of England Primary School to join the Hurst Education Trust

**Frequently Asked Questions:** The questions below are grouped into topics.

### Multi-Academy Trusts

- **Why become an academy by joining a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT)?**

The Government stated in April 2021 that it would like all schools to be part of a strong multi-academy trust (MAT). To join a MAT a school must convert to academy status and the governing body is expected to review its position on this this every year. An exciting opportunity exists for us to join the Hurst Education Trust (HET), which is a multi-academy trust - and we are giving this serious consideration.

- **What exactly is academy status?**

In a nutshell, academy status means that funding for the school comes directly from the Government whilst the Local Authority (West Sussex County Council) retains its statutory responsibilities for safeguarding and special educational needs. Academy status provides schools with slightly more freedom than maintained (Local Authority) schools, although academies are still subject to inspection by Ofsted.

- **Why is St Wilfrid's planning to join a MAT rather than becoming a stand-alone Academy Trust which would maintain its independence?**

The Department for Education no longer supports the establishment of stand-alone academies so this route to becoming an academy is now closed to us. Being part of a MAT means that we would be able to take advantage of the wider benefits of being part of a group of schools.

- **How long would the school be committed for? Could the school change these arrangements at a later date?**

Conversion to academy status is currently permanent. That is why the governors have been undertaking detailed due diligence to satisfy themselves that this is the right way forward for the school. It is particularly important to us that we are proposing to join a diocesan academy trust, serving church schools within the Diocese of Chichester. The Government has recently announced its vision for every school to be part of a family of schools in a strong multi academy trust. Governors are making this proposal because we think it is the right way forward for our school. Whilst it is not yet clear how other local schools will respond to the Government's announcement, we want to be able to move forward in a way we

have chosen, not to be constrained by choices others have made. We hope that parents will share this view – but we are committed to considering carefully all views that we receive as part of this consultation.

## **Hurst Education Trust**

- **Why is Hurstpierpoint College setting up the Hurst Education Trust?**

In short, because it believes it is the right thing to do. The College has been enormously successful in recent years. It has doubled the number of pupils to nearly 1,300 in a fifteen-year period, is financially secure and has been recognised as an outstanding education provider in the area. It has invested heavily in campus development and has a wide range of academic, sports and arts facilities that through the Trust can be used by local schools. Whilst many independent schools are fixated on outright academic performance, important though that is, Hurstpierpoint College ensures that every child achieves their potential and can become the best they can be. This ethos is far more closely aligned with the inclusive nature of maintained education, making it a well-matched partner for an Education Trust for maintained schools. The senior staff of the Trust will be provided to the Trust at nil cost and the back-office facilities (for example, HR, Health & Safety, IT support and many more) will be provided at no more than 'at cost', ensuring possible savings and certainly no additional costs upon joining. The College also recognises that the Hurst Education Trust will strongly benefit its own pupils and staff and provide personal growth and development opportunities for all.

- **How many schools is the Trust seeking to recruit; is there a limit? Why St Wilfrid's?**

The Trust is committed to creating a model for schools local to the College, broadly within a 15-minute drive. This will, naturally, limit the number of schools that will join the Trust. The proposed geographical area is not only for practical purposes (including the ability to transport pupils to the Hurstpierpoint College campus) but is also intended to ensure that the Trust retains a family feel in its work with schools. St Wilfrid's shares the Trust vision and values that all children should achieve their full potential. This will continue to be achieved through high quality teaching and by delivering a broad and balanced curriculum. The shared vision is in line with the Church of England's vision for education.

- **Will the schools joining continue to have a governing body for each school?**

The Trust expects all schools to have a local governing body (LGB) and that this is made up of a mixture of people from different backgrounds who can offer a good balance of skills. It will continue to have staff, parent, Church and community members. The Trust have no plan to alter the composition of the governing body.

- **What guarantees are there that the Trust won't change in the future?**

The Trust's articles of association establish it as a charity with a focus on providing education. It is established in partnership with the Diocese of Chichester, and therefore shares their principles in the provision of education and support for the communities it serves. The Diocese of Chichester is the majority

partner in the Hurst Education Trust and any substantial changes will require consent of the Diocese. Its Trustees, who are experienced education professionals and business leaders, sustain those principles and provide robust challenge to the leaders. The Trust is also held to account by the Government, through the Department of Education and the Regional Schools Commissioner, focused on ensuring that it continues to make high quality provision for children.

- **Will there be pressure for change at the school to reflect different ways of working?**

Each school remains individual within the Trust; the Trust will not operate a 'one size fits all' approach to its schools, which will each be different in their specific context. This has been a key area of investigation for the governors and leadership of the school.

- **Is joining this Trust in partnership with Hurstpierpoint College a back door to St Wilfrid's becoming an independent school?**

Absolutely not. St Wilfrid's will remain a Church of England school, funded by the government, within the Diocese of Chichester.

## Our children

- **What difference will the children be aware of, if any, during the transition and moving forward?**

We do not expect children to notice any practical differences whilst in school during the conversion process, or once the school has converted. After conversion, there will be an increased use of the Hurstpierpoint College facilities, and they will occasionally see Hurst colleagues in school, working in partnership with leaders. There will be some shared activity – including, for example, sport and arts - with children from other schools within the Trust. Otherwise, the changes are behind the scenes, for example with opportunities for staff to share and enhance good practice with other schools in the Trust and the College. Support services offered by the college will free up more school leadership time so there will be greater capacity to focus on the children's learning.

- **Will conversion to the Trust have an effect on the class sizes? Who will make decisions on class structures?**

How we organise the school depends on the number of children admitted in each age group. Converting to academy status within the Hurst Education Trust will not be a reason for changing class sizes. The leadership of the school retains the responsibility for allocating classes and structuring the school in the way it sees fit to do, as it does now.

- **Academies can determine their own term times; will Hurst Education Trust schools do this? Or would we be following the usual term structure?**

It is important to ensure that our term dates match those of local schools and we will therefore continue with the same arrangements as we have now. This avoids the situation where parents send their children to more than one local school with differing term-times.

## School curriculum

- **Will the school have the opportunity to be flexible in what the school is teaching so as to ensure the children are learning what the teachers/ the school feel suits the needs of the pupils?**

One of the benefits we see in converting to academy status is the flexibility it offers in the way in which we deliver the curriculum. Whilst academies do not need to follow the national curriculum, most do (and we would). The Hurst Education Trust is committed to ensuring that every child achieves their own potential and we welcome the chance to tailor what we do to children's needs, whilst ensuring that they continue to achieve well. Academies continue to be inspected by Ofsted and report outcomes in the same way as all other schools.

## Staff

- **Will all the current staff continue at the school with the change?**

All staff have the right to transfer to the Hurst Education Trust and to have their terms and conditions protected in that transfer. Conversion will not lead directly to any staff changes or changes to terms and conditions, pay and benefits.

- **Would staff be expected to work over more than one school? Or the College?**

There are no transfers between schools or the College, other than for professional development of staff who may seek opportunities to work in a different context.

- **Academies are not legally obliged to employ qualified teachers. Would the school take advantage of this in order to reduce staff costs?**

We consider it fundamentally important that children are taught by qualified teachers who have been fully trained for their role. Hurstpierpoint College makes a practice of only appointing qualified teachers, or those who are employed on Hurst's teacher training programme in partnership with Sussex University, as will Hurst Education Trust.

- **When staff contracts transfer to the Hurst Education Trust do staff retain current benefits including pension and continuous service. Would that also be the case on progression to a new role once in Hurst Education Trust?**

All staff transfer on existing terms and conditions and that continuous service is protected under TUPE<sup>1</sup>. Staff remain in their current pension scheme with no change to benefits. On moving to a new role staff would migrate to an updated Hurst Education Trust contract (rather than a West Sussex County Council contract), on national terms and conditions and recognising full continuity of service, including for sick pay and other benefits. The Trust also recognises full continuity of service on the same basis for all staff who join the Trust.

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<sup>1</sup> Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment

- **How will Continuing Professional Development (CPD) be organised for staff? Can schools identify and purchase their own?**

All staff, both teaching and support, will have access to CPD sourced by the Trust, the College and at individual school level. As a local Trust, the ability to bring staff together to provide CPD sessions becomes straightforward. Beyond a core Trust offer, schools are free to pursue their own provision although it is hoped that schools within the Trust work together to identify shared opportunities as much as possible.

## Funding

- **Will we have the same level of funding which we currently have or will this be increased/decreased? Is there a restriction on how it's spent?**

Revenue funding for academies is calculated in exactly the same way as for maintained schools, based largely on pupil numbers. The Hurst Education Trust will make a charge (3% of core funding) to provide services for its schools, replacing services which schools currently purchase from West Sussex County Council and other providers. A review conducted with the school has indicated that there are expected to be some financial savings to the school associated with academy status which can be redirected back into the classroom for the direct benefit of the pupils. Furthermore, the way in which Hurst Education Trust is structured allows the membership cost to be significantly lower than for most Trusts (usually between 5% and 7% for primary academies). All other funds remain in school and each school has autonomy in deciding how the budget allocated is spent, though the Trust will act as a critical friend, exploring options with the school. As a small Trust, the Hurst Education Trust is also able to bid for capital funding on behalf of its schools if needed.

## Other issues

- **Are all ties relinquished with West Sussex County Council?**

The relationship with West Sussex County Council changes. The County Council will no longer be accountable for the school but remains responsible for safeguarding and for children with special educational needs and disabilities. The County Council continues to own playing field land and will lease it to the Trust for a period of 125 years; other land is held by Church trustees for the purpose of the school. The Trust owns no land of its own and therefore it has no ability to dispose of any school land.

- **When would St Wilfrid's be looking to join the academy trust?**

Following consultation, should the school continue with the proposal, the intention would be for the school to join the Hurst Education Trust towards the end of the Summer term. This will allow time to properly consult with parents, carers, staff and our wider community.

- **Are there any perceived negatives to the change?**

We believe there are a wide range of significant benefits. We would not be exploring this opportunity if we did not believe it would substantially enhance the quality of education. As governors and senior leaders, we believe that the Hurst Education Trust offers many additional advantages and more so than other Trusts that we have considered.

A potential disadvantage of joining a trust could be a lack of autonomy at school level. However, this differs on a trust-by-trust basis, as each trust operates differently. The governing body and senior leaders have explored this very carefully with Hurst Education Trust. If the school was to join the Trust, we would be working together in partnership and collaboratively - so a very constructive, mutually beneficial working relationship. Our school would retain its own unique identity (which includes retaining the school's name, uniform, our St Wilfrid's vision, values and ethos together with setting the curriculum). Our school would continue to have a governing body with representation from staff, parents, our parish churches and the local community, as we have now. Currently, once a school becomes an academy, it cannot convert back to be a local authority run school. For St Wilfrid's, we believe the benefits of becoming an academy far outweigh remaining as a voluntary aided local authority school.