

Proposal that St John's CE Academy join SaGE (St George's CE Academy), Darlington

- **What benefit is there to the two Trusts in merging?**

Directors have studied the medium term financial situation and believe being part of MAT in partnership with other schools is the right move, this will ensure longer term sustainability of the schools. We also believe increased partnership working and greater shared buying power will benefit both of our schools whilst allowing each to retain their own unique ethos within our own community. Both schools are Church of England schools and are close enough to benefit from shared networks and forums and systems as well as building on existing strong working relationships.

- **What autonomy will there be for St John's board of directors and will there be any representation from St John's on the Trust board**

Currently each school has a Trust board of directors. This structure would change and there would be one Trust board across the MAT with academy councils local to each school. These academy councils would operate under a scheme of delegation which has been shared with directors and will be discussed as part of this proposal. This document clearly sets out the powers which the academy council will have and a large amount of autonomy and decision making remains at that level (as it does now). Certain decision making has to be at board level to comply with the academies financial handbook, employment law obligations and education law but academy councils will be very much focussed on their own school with continued input of elected parents and staff focussing on monitoring standards within their school, finances within school, school specific policies, community links, ethos and staffing below the Head Teacher. The Trust board is made up of skilled individuals and would comprise of some existing directors from the SaGe Trust board but there will also be some directors currently on St John's Trust board who will be invited to sit on the SaGe Trust board should this proposal be approved. It is important to remember that the Trust board will be responsible for both schools and must not be biased towards any particular school in a Trust, they will have strategic oversight for the educational success, ethos and finances of whole Trust with the academy councils working at school level to support this oversight.

- **What will the leadership structure be in the SaGe Trust if St John's joins?**

SaGe is an existing Trust with its own leadership structure. Mrs Gleeson is Principal and it is proposed that she would remain as accounting officer for the Trust but that Miss Large would remain as Head Teacher at St John's, working in partnership with Mrs Gleeson. Each Trust currently has its own Chief Finance Officer and there would only need to be one person with this responsibility and we are in discussion about who this should be. Any proposed change to structures would all be looked at carefully in full discussion with staff and trade unions in compliance with employment law. However, it is important to note that there will still be a need for a business manager in each school and each of the current CFOs will continue to be required to carry out their business manager role along with current back office staff so we do not envisage that there will be any job losses in this area, simply a potential shift in responsibilities by agreement with staff.

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- **Financial implications - how financially secure is the MAT, what happens if one of the schools in the MAT gets into financial difficulty**

Each Trust is currently financially secure and has its own reserve which is ring fenced to that school. Budget setting is always carried out well in advance so that any changes which need to be made can be implemented in good time to seek to achieve a balanced budget for each school. Budget monitoring is carried out 6 times a year by the Trust board, and they receive monthly update reports. Budgets are also monitored at school level by academy councils. If a school in the MAT is projecting an in year deficit we would work with the school to look at cost savings and if appropriate may permit an in year deficit provided there was a financial recovery plan and the central reserve could allow this. This could result in financial delegation being limited under the scheme of delegation if this was not an agreed position so that directors have even more oversight of the position.

- **How will catering work in the MAT?**

Each school will continue with its own catering provision as currently.

- **How will finance, HR and premises work in the MAT?**

These areas are all currently supported by Avec in both schools so this should mean that to combine resources and obtain advice and support in these areas will be relatively straightforward and potentially able to be streamlined as a result of the change.

- **What are plans for future growth and what will the impact of this be (geographical region, how big, does that mean we avoid another merger)?**

The Trust has no immediate plans to grow any further but would always be open to discussions with other local schools if they wished to formalise partnership working for the benefit of all pupils. Each opportunity would be considered fully and a similar consultation exercise would be undertaken before any decisions were made.

- **What happens if a school in the MAT has a dip in standards?**

The purpose of a Trust is to provide educational support and increased capacity. The oversight of the Executive Principal would mean that the trust would be likely to know about possible problems at an early stage and prevent this becoming significant through interventions and increased support. However, if this happened we would draw on existing capacity in the trust and where necessary external consultants.

- **Does Ofsted consider each school on an individual basis or inspect the MAT as a whole?**

Ofsted considers each school on an individual basis currently but they would look at the MAT board as the accountable body for any individual school. It is likely MATs

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are soon going to be inspected as a whole too but we don't know how this would look at this stage.

- **Will staff be required to work at both sites?**

Staff who currently have a defined place of work in their contract could not be asked to work elsewhere without agreement. For new staff who join after any change it may be that their place of work covers the MAT as a whole as part of their job role.

- **Will admissions arrangements change?**

Each school would remain responsible for setting the admissions arrangements for their school, with oversight from the Directors. The Local Authority would continue to co-ordinate the application process for admissions.

It should be stressed however, that the admissions criteria must have regard to the national Admissions Code of Practice.

- **What will happen to the uniform?**

We don't propose to make any changes to the current school uniforms for either school.

- **Will the name of the school change?**

We do not intend to change the name of either school and we are strongly committed to retaining the identity of each school within the Multi Academy Trust.

- **Will the times of the school day and holidays change?**

We have no plans to change the times of the school day or the terms dates. Any future changes would be subject to extensive consultation with parents and carers.

- **What happens next, what is the timescale of any change?**

Directors will need to consider all of the feedback and outcome of this consultation process and then meet to discuss whether they wish to proceed. If they do then we need to apply for permission to the Regional Schools Commissioner (part of the Department for Education) to go ahead and if that is granted lawyers will need to carry out the legal work involved in dissolving St John's CE Academy Trust so the school and staff can transfer into the SaGe Trust. Staff and parents will be updated at each stage and staff from St John's will be part of a separate consultation process under the TUPE regulations which is more specific and will give them a further opportunity to ask questions and understand how, if at all, their role will be affected. The earliest this is likely to be able to be implemented is February 2020 but this could take longer depending on the views of staff, directors and parents and any legal issues which may arise.