

Dear Parent/Carer,

We are writing to inform and ask for your opinions about what is undoubtedly one of the most important decisions we will make on behalf of Meadow View Primary School. We would like to seek your views on the decision that would see Meadow View Primary School become part of James Montgomery Academy Trust.

Over the past two years governors and senior leaders from our school have undertaken an extensive exercise looking at whether we should become part of an academy trust, and if so which one. After much research, many meetings and lots of debate we have reached the conclusion that we think the pupils and staff would significantly benefit from being part of James Montgomery Academy Trust.

We would like to take this opportunity to explain why we have reached this decision.

### **Why have we made this decision now?**

We were prompted by a number of factors to consider joining James Montgomery Academy Trust at this time.

A key factor in our decision has been the benefits we have seen of increased collaborative work with other schools. We believe becoming part of James Montgomery Academy Trust will increase that collaboration and give our school access to a significant increase in support and innovation that will greatly strengthen our school.

In the last two years we have also learnt a great deal about what it means to be part of a Multi-Academy Trust. In the academies we have visited and talked to it's not the frightening 'you will all wear the same uniform, you will all teach the same way, we will sell off your land because making money is more important than your pupils achievements' scenario that is sometimes portrayed in the media. We have spoken to local Multi-Academy Trusts who only have local schools in their Trust, who allow schools to retain their identity, leadership structures and values, and focus on what's best for their pupils. What we have seen from them is the great value that becoming part of a Trust and working in these stronger partnerships has brought to their school and pupils.

Additionally, when the current Government came into power in 2016 their policy was for all schools to be forced to become academies. Whilst they have since rescinded that policy there are still many conditions under which a school is required to become an academy. One of the more significant of these conditions is if a local authority has a large majority of pupils who are in academy schools rather than local authority schools, all of the local authority schools will be required to become academies. Rotherham has reached 75% and rising and as a governing body we are clear that we want to 'take our destiny in our own hands' and make a decision about which Multi-Academy Trust is right for our school to join, rather than have the decision made for us.

It is fair to say, the combination of these factors have changed the viewpoint of both Governors and senior leaders, most of whom had previously been sceptical about becoming an academy.

### **What is an academy?**

Academies are independent, state-funded schools, which receive their funding directly from central government, rather than through a local authority (Council). The day-to-day running of the school is with the head teacher, but they are overseen by individual charitable bodies called academy trusts and may be part of an academy chain, known as a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT). These trusts provide advice, support, expertise and a strategic overview. They have more freedom than other schools to innovate, share best practice, seek additional funding and reduce costs by sharing services.

### **Weren't academies all about improving failing schools?**

They were once. The policy, which originated under a previous government, aimed to improve struggling schools, primarily in deprived areas. However, it has changed radically to embrace all types of schools – successful or otherwise. All schools – primary as well as secondary – have been invited to convert to academy status and Outstanding and Good category schools are leading the way by becoming sponsored academies for other schools.

### **What is the future of “academisation”?**

Following the announcement of a forced academisation plan, under which all schools in England would have to convert to academies by 2022, the plans were revised so that conversion was not compulsory, however Ministers say the “goal” of academising all schools remains. In line with this local authorities continue to reduce their staff teams and therefore the expertise, services and support available to schools.

### **What are the benefits of academy status?**

The government argues academies drive up standards by putting more power in the hands of head teachers over pay, length of the school day and term times. They have more freedom to innovate and can opt out of the National Curriculum. It says they have been shown to improve twice as fast as other state schools.

### **How have you reached the decision that James Montgomery Academy Trust would be the best Trust for our school to join?**

We have undergone an extensive exercise to reach this decision, the rigorous nature of which has been commended by the DfE.

The initial exercise we undertook was to decide whether we wanted Meadow View Primary School to become an academy and if so which MAT we might wish to join. The Governors undertook significant research into the consideration and a paper detailing that research was then shared with the rest of the governing body. We then received external presentations on academisation.

From this initial exercise we identified and concluded that our school could benefit from academising as long as we considered the following:

- That the government is favouring the Multi Academy Trust (MAT) model so it would make sense for us to look for one of these
- We would benefit from joining an established MAT who are able to provide immediate benefits of support to the school.
- To continue our partnerships with our learning community schools.
- We would like to join a MAT that allowed us to keep our identity.
- We would prefer a local partnership with schools.
- We would like a MAT that allows us to keep our own leadership and governance.
- We would like to join a MAT where the driving force/ethos is collaboration and improvement, not money.
- We want to join a MAT that recognises and values the strengths that Meadow View Primary School would bring and sees us as an equal partner.

We set these as our criteria and undertook an exercise to identify Trusts that matched our wish-list. This narrowed our selection down and we received presentations and paperwork from them. From this we were able to identify that James Montgomery Academy Trust would be our preferred Trust. We felt that they were the Trust that shared the most of our values.

This decision was supported unanimously by all Governors and, even though they don't formally get a vote, the approval of the leadership team.

### **Who are already part of the James Montgomery Academy Trust?**

The North hub comprises of

- Brampton Ellis Primary School
- Brampton Cortonwood Infant School
- Hooton Pagnell Primary School
- Mexborough St Johns Primary School
- Wath Central Primary School
- Wath C of E Primary School
- Wath Victoria Primary School

With a further 7 currently in the conversion process to form the South hub;

- Anston Hillcrest Primary School
- Harthill Primary School
- Kiveton Park Meadows Junior School
- Kiveton Park Infant School
- Laughton J & I School
- Thurcroft Infant School
- Wales Primary School

**James Montgomery Academy Trust** is a Multi Academy Trust, which is a Sponsor Academy Trust, containing a National Support School and a Teaching School.

Partnership working is at the heart of the James Montgomery Academy Trust approach and they are dedicated to collaborating across and beyond the Trust. They recognise the importance of relationships with others and the benefits these bring to improving the outcomes for children, staff and the communities they serve.

James Montgomery Academy Trust offers collaboration, not prescription. They offer choice, not decisions made for their schools. They believe excellence is about diversity, not conformity and that one size does not fit all.

Each academy within the partnership is expected to constantly seek to improve on its' previous best. All the Trust Academies are at the heart of the community they serve, offering the very best education, support and care, and an environment of aspiration, underpinned by the highest expectations.

When you visit a James Montgomery Academy Trust School you will notice these core principles:

- The highest standards of behaviour and conduct
- Highly effective and innovative teaching and learning
- A fully inclusive approach where all children are equally important
- A climate of mutual respect between the children, staff and community
- Positive relationships
- High aspirations for all involved in the school and a 'can-do' attitude
- A wide range of enrichment opportunities for all to get involved in
- A celebration of all the cultures and faiths represented in the school
- An organisation where there are no excuses for underachievement

James Montgomery Academy Trust is committed to supporting parents to be completely engaged with their child's education, and pride themselves on their collaboration and communication with parents.

For more information visit [www.jmat.org.uk](http://www.jmat.org.uk)

### **Aren't the current schools in the James Montgomery Academy Trust in very different areas to our schools?**

Whilst we recognise that all schools differ in many ways, we believe those differences can be a benefit to our school, as we all learn from each other's strengths and different experiences. They have aspirations for their children that fit very firmly with our aspirations for our children. We all want children who are supported to learn, who are nurtured and enabled through their schooling to be the very best they can be and to be able to achieve their full potential.

### **How would our school benefit from becoming part of the James Montgomery Academy Trust?**

The greatest benefit would be the collaboration and ability to access the support, experience, challenge and advice from the Trust and academies within it. James Montgomery Academy Trust has significant school improvement expertise and is led by a National Leader of Education.

Pupils will benefit directly from a number of shared resources and opportunities. As well as classroom based these include robotics and events and competitive sports that take place between the schools and Trust wide pupil awards.

The Trust offers a range of core services – finance, health and safety, Safeguarding, HR and payroll, which would take the pressure off the school to deliver these elements independently and free up senior leaders to focus on delivering improved teaching and learning and thus better outcomes for our pupils.

Our staff and leaders will benefit from the professional development and networking opportunities offered by the Trust, which in turn allows our children to benefit from improved teaching. There are already research and innovation groups, moderation and standards meetings and a number of people who have knowledge and experience in a particular specialism.

James Montgomery Academy Trust summarises the benefits of joining them as “Working together in deep partnership, freeing resources to make your money go further, reducing administrative burdens whilst ensuring compliance, investing in on-going professional development at all levels, connecting the whole of the learning community together, building system capacity and respecting individuality.”

### **What changes would I see?**

The changes that our parents/carers and pupils will see in the immediate future would be minimal. There will be no changes to name, uniforms, or staffing. Meadow View Primary School will very much remain Meadow View Primary School, we are just widening the school’s access to networks of colleagues, school improvement expertise and some beneficial shared ‘back-office’ resources.

### **Have you sought any external viewpoints?**

Throughout our decision making process we have been in discussion with Rotherham Local Authority and the Regional Schools Commissioner, who are both very much in support of our proposal to join the James Montgomery Academy Trust.

### **What happens now?**

This letter marks the start of an information sharing and opinion gathering, through which we will gain the views of our parents/carers, pupils and staff. After this the governing body will look to discuss, respond to and shape the future arrangements in the best interest of our school.

### **How do I have my say?**

Having read the details of why we have reached this decision, we now invite you to participate in our consultation to give your opinion. You will be able to contribute your opinion in one of the following ways:

- Attend one of the consultation meetings we are holding at school on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> November at 3.30pm.
- Write a letter to the school by Friday 16<sup>th</sup> November 2018 marked for the attention of the Chair of Governors.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,



Broydon Vickerage  
Chair of Governors



Karen Smith  
Head Teacher