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26th May 2017

Academy Status – What could it mean for Granville Sports College?

As you may be aware, the government is encouraging all schools to become an academy or part of a multi-academy trust. The current position is that the government wants every school to become an academy by 2022. Legislation has now been passed which could require schools that have not been judged good or outstanding by Ofsted to become an academy.

Additionally, there are severe financial cuts proposed to schools in the near future. The local government faces many cuts and many services traditionally provided by the Local Authority are either being reduced or have been completely phased out. As a school, we have to face these challenges head on and have to consider whether converting to an academy would be in our best interests.

With this in mind, the Governing Board at Granville have been proactive in exploring whether joining an academy trust would be of benefit to our pupils.

What is an Academy?

An academy is a government funded school that is independent of the Local Authority. In terms of the day to day functioning, an academy will not be noticeably different to a Local Authority maintained school. Responsibility for funding the school, monitoring performance and any capital projects will fall to central government rather than to local government.

Becoming an academy does not mean that the character, nature or ethos of Granville would need to change at all. In fact, academy status gives schools greater freedoms in terms of finance and the curriculum that they may wish to offer.

If the decision is made to transfer to become an academy, the school and Governing Body will join what is known as an academy trust, which in reality, is a charitable company.

No one can make any money from the company. The company is limited by guarantee. It does not pay dividends and makes no profit. It is, however, a legal entity and will mean that the school is able to enter into contracts, employ staff and be recognised as a legal body.

Funding of Academies

Funding comes directly to academy trusts, and not through the local authority, as is the case currently. This increase of direct funding to the school is clearly something that could benefit us greatly, although we would have to buy back services as we required them.

As provision from the Local Authority recedes, alternative providers may have to be sought and the additional funding that academy status brings will be essential to enable the school to buy those same services.

As a school, we have also received a significant capital allowance from the Local Authority for building projects, renovation, maintenance and general upkeep. This has been greatly reduced over the last 5-6 years. As an academy, we will have access to other forms of capital funding.

The Curriculum

Academies do not have to follow the national curriculum. However, this is unlikely to have any impact on the way that educational provision is delivered at Granville. All schools have to provide a balanced curriculum and will be judged against national standards, which are primarily based on the national curriculum. Schools also already have significant power to make curriculum decisions in the best interests of their pupils, so it is unlikely that the curriculum freedoms will make any significant impact to what we offer our pupils.

Length of School Terms and School Days

The Department of Education allows academies to vary the length of the school term and the school days. At the present time, there is no plan to do that. The school is aware that parents have made arrangements for childcare, and often have work arrangements to fit around the school day and school terms. Parents and pupils at other local schools would not appreciate Granville taking an arbitrary decision to change the school holiday dates as it would have an impact on siblings.

As a Local Authority school, subject to consultation and discussion, the school could already seek to change the length of the school day if we wished to do so.

Staff Pay and Conditions

Academy trusts have the ability to set their own pay and conditions for staff. We do not propose any changes to the current arrangements. The current pay and conditions for teaching staff and non-teaching staff within school are determined by national agreements.

All staff would transfer to the new academy under the TUPE provisions and this would mean no change to their terms and conditions. Also, the school has an excellent track record of working closely with teachers' unions, professional associations and unions who act on behalf of the support staff. Maintaining these good relations is vital for the overall health of the school and ensuring that education is delivered in the best possible way to the children.

Throughout the consultation period and beyond, whatever the outcome, the Senior Management Team and Governing Body of Granville want to ensure that the harmonious relationships that we are so proud of remain.

Admissions

The Local Authority still has an obligation to make sure that there is a place for every child who lives in the local area of a school. If we become an academy, we would still want the school to be at the heart of our local community. The academy could change its admissions criteria, but only after a period of consultation

and almost a two year leading period. Parents would still apply to the Local Authority, which would ensure absolute fairness when determining pupil places.

An Academy Trust

The Academy Trust would be managed by members of the Trust Board. A local Governing Body would be appointed to do pretty much as it does at the present time, but overall, responsibility would be with the Trust. The Trust is also the employer for staff at the school and would have a lease from the Local Authority for the land and buildings for 125 years.

Relationships with other schools

We value our relationships with neighbouring schools, schools that we are linked with and with the wider community. As an academy, we would like those links to continue and even to strengthen as we work together in the interests of local pupils' education.

The Current Position

Everyone at Granville Sports College is proud of our achievements to date. We have shown from our Ofsted Report in 2015 that we are on a journey of improvement and we very much want that to continue.

We are fortunate to have supportive parents, great pupils and a dedicated staff team. We all work together with the same ultimate goal, to provide the best education for the children who attend the school, to keep the school firmly rooted at the heart of the community and to work together as a team so that going forward into the future. Granville Sports College continues to provide a great educational start for all of our pupils.

The de Ferrers Trust

As Governors and Senior Leadership Team, we believe that it is important to provide our pupils with the very best opportunities going forward. We are certain that being part of The de Ferrers Trust will help us to achieve that goal.

Over the past twelve months, the Governing Board have met with representatives from several academy trusts. It was important to us that if we are to join a trust, they should believe in and uphold the same ethos and values as Granville. We know that The de Ferrers Trust shares the same principles that children, no matter what their background, should be supported to achieve their potential in a safe and nurturing environment.

Of course, in the press you will have heard about successful multi-academy trusts and those that have not brought about the desired improvement. Research has shown that the most successful trusts are those where local collaboration is possible. As you may already be aware, The Pingle School, a neighbouring secondary school has recently joined The de Ferrers Trust. The de Ferrers Academy is approximately 25 minutes away. This makes true collaboration possible with the two secondary schools and is one of the key reasons Governors feel that this is a positive way to continue Granville's journey of improvement.

Close geographical collaboration means that is not only possible to share expertise across schools in the Trust, but also enables us to share physical resources, which with the looming cuts to schools' budgets, is a key consideration.

In Summary

Granville's Senior Management Team and the Governing Board have seriously considered the prospects of converting to an academy. We are united in wanting to ensure that the ethos of the school and self-governance for the school is protected. We also want to secure a positive future for the school. The pace of change in education is very swift at the present time. We have taken the time to consider what is best for our pupils and our school. We believe that we have to respond positively to these proposed changes and have to ensure that we are not left behind. However, we must not rush into any decision and we need to take on board the views of those involved.

The school's Governors believe that now is the time to widen the debate and to seek the views of the community and parents. As the consultation progresses, it is very important that all parents can, if they wish, make their views known.

In all circumstances, we feel that conversion will be in the school's best interests, but we must emphasise that no decision has yet been made and all responses to this consultation will be given full consideration before the Governing Body make a final decision whether or not to proceed.

This consultation will run from Friday 26th May to Monday 3rd July 2017. We will be holding a consultation meeting in school on Monday 12th June at 5.30pm.

The Governors will then meet to consider the outcome and take account of all views expressed. The decision will be made public on the school website and pupils will have letters as soon as possible after that date.

Please send your written response to this proposal by Friday 30th June or by email to info@granville.derbyshire.sch.uk. Please feel free to add your name or to keep the response anonymous.

Thank you for taking the time to read all of the documentation and any responses will be welcomed. Your views really do count.