



Why are we proposing to become an academy and join a multi-academy trust?

It is the intention of the Department of Education that all schools should belong to a “family of schools” by 2030. The other political parties are in broad agreement with this policy.

At present around 80% of schools in Britain are academies and 20% are maintained schools under LA control. On the Wirral only 4 of the 20 secondary schools are LA maintained schools. This means that the LA capacity to support and challenge its schools has been considerably diminished.

Meanwhile, some multi-academy trusts have flourished by building networks of collaboration. In recent years the central government has been directing much of its capital investment into multi-academy trusts which means that many of the children who attend maintained schools have not been given access to the same resources.

As leaders and governors we want our school to be able to collaborate with other schools and colleges and to be supported and challenged by other school leaders. We want our teachers to receive the very best support to develop their teaching. We want our children to have access to the very best resources and facilities.

We feel that we owe it to our students to be bold and ambitious in our plans for the future and membership of a multi-academy trust will enable this.

Why are we proposing this now?

South Wirral is currently in a strong position to plan for the future. Our last Ofsted report was very positive. The school has been oversubscribed for the last 3 years. School finances are healthy and improving. This means that the school is able to make a careful and informed plan for the future. It means that we can be bold and ambitious in our plans.

In 2020 the school took advantage of a Department of Education initiative called the “Trust Partnership” to work closely with, and learn about, a multi-academy trust. This initiative has been called a “try before you buy” approach. We researched every multi-academy trust within a 40 minute car journey of our school. In doing this we established the following criteria for decision making.

- Our chosen family of schools should share our commitment to promoting social justice
- The quality of education must be improved further by collaboration and the professional development of staff.
- We must preserve our ethos as a community and child-centred school.
- Financial stability must be guaranteed and investment increased
- Staff pay, conditions and welfare must be protected
- We should place ourselves within a principled and robust framework for accountability

We selected The Challenge Academy Trust (TCAT) because it meets all of these demanding criteria.

Over the past 18 months we have worked directly with the Trust to improve our school.

This has consisted of

- Support from Trust leaders with school improvement
- Visits to Trust schools for our middle and senior leaders
- Membership of professional development networks for staff
- Opportunities for students such as the Warrington Youth Rowing project and the visit to Warrington Wolves stadium.

The support that we received was reflected in our recent Ofsted report. Our experiences have shown us the principles and values of the Trust are lived out in practice. It has been a wholly positive experience for the school. We would now like to consult with staff, parents and the local community on joining TCAT.

A decision to join will only be considered once a full consultation process has taken place with staff, parents and the community

Why do we want to join The Challenge Academy Trust?

1. Ethical leadership

This is important to us all. We have had the opportunity to work closely with TCAT for the last 18 months. We feel we understand them well, “warts and all”. All the school leaders that we have met have credibility and seem to be ethical leaders. We have not heard any criticisms of the trust from any other schools or organisations or trade unions.

2. Earned autonomy and intelligent accountability

TCAT’s motto is to “serve, challenge and empower”. We have seen this motto lived out over the last 18 months. The Trust gives its schools autonomy within a clear framework of accountability. Autonomy is earned by achieving a good Ofsted and by balancing the books. The Trust leaves school evaluation up to its schools (using a “scorecard” linked to the Ofsted framework) but conducts a biannual peer review of its schools to check that leadership evaluations are accurate. Our leaders would have the opportunity to participate in peer reviews of other schools. This would ensure that our school is securely and sustainably good, while striving to be outstanding.

3. Capacity to challenge and support for further school improvement

TCAT has already helped us to become a better school. Its input has had considerable impact, not least in helping us to the good Ofsted judgement. Our experiences have been entirely positive and rewarding. It has felt like a genuine collaboration. TCAT offers us expertise from primary schools, secondary schools and a Sixth Form College.

4. Professional Development opportunities for all staff.

Over the last 18 months we have enjoyed participating in a genuinely collaborative professional development environment. Many years ago the LA provided this but there are only 4 maintained schools on the Wirral so the potential for collaboration is limited..

For school leaders there are specific development programmes and the opportunity to peer review other schools. For teachers and support staff there are professional development “Hubs”. For support staff, membership offers significant opportunities for our support staff – for professional development and career development. By developing our staff we will ensure a good quality of education for the children of the future.

5. A stable and secure future

Membership offers considerable advantages in managing finance and operations. It will give the school access to increased capital funding. We can see how that has already taken place in TCAT schools.. For example, they are currently investing in LED and Heat Pump technology which will reduce running costs significantly. It will also allow us to achieve better value in purchasing resources through bulk ordering.

These are 5 compelling reasons why we think this proposal is the right one for our school.

During the consultation process there will be many points of detail to explore, but we feel that now is the right time to begin this formal consultation process. We offer our thoughts on this issue for your consideration.

Mr Goodwin

Mr Richard Barker

Headteacher

Chair of Governors