



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

Academies are state-funded, independent schools, held accountable by the Department for Education (DfE) by a legally binding Funding Agreement. They are independent of the local authority and receive their funding directly from central government.

Previously, academies have tended to replace schools that had poor results and needed to improve. Under the Academies Act 2010, all schools are now able to become academies.

There is now a drive from the Department for Education for schools to form Multi-Academy Trusts.

Academies are still part of the community and serve children and families in a particular area. They retain the same responsibilities as any maintained school as part of the learning community.

### **What is a Multi-Academy Trust?**

Pioneer will be a multi-academy trust (MAT), which is a group of academy schools who agree to work together, overseen by the Diocese of Chichester, whose purpose is the advancement of education for the public benefit. Trusts also help to support other schools.

### **What does the national educational landscape look like?**

Academies first began under the Labour Government and the current Government has expanded the process.

Roughly 80% of secondary schools, 40% of primary schools and 44% of special schools are academies and this figure is growing.

Any new school will automatically become an academy via the 'free schools' process. Local authorities are not involved in the set-up of new schools as academies, nor are these schools accountable to them.

The Government recognises the value of a self-improving school system in which groups of schools work closely together to continuously improve. With the ongoing reductions in school funding, the cost savings of schools maximising economies of scale together is significant.

In the future, it is likely that every school will be part of a Trust.

### **Why are we considering becoming a MAT?**

The Pioneer Federation is a successful group of schools that has led to improved results for children, financial efficiencies, and strong professional development of staff. We believe that becoming a MAT will further increase these benefits of collaboration.

This is the opportunity to shape, control and future-proof our existing group of schools. As a larger trust of schools, we would have greater control of our school budgets and the ability to procure services as a larger organisation, thereby achieving savings for our schools.

Over the next few years, there is going to continue to be a tightening of budgets, and we need to prepare for cuts to school funding. As a larger Trust, we can secure greater opportunities for financial savings.

We have learned through our federation that collaborative working with other schools can provide improved educational experiences for our own pupils through teaching and learning, an enhanced and engaging curriculum, staff development and opportunities for progression, streamlined services including finance, human resources, legal services, school improvement structures, and governance arrangements.

The Department for Education Regional School's Commissioner, Local Authority and the Diocese of Chichester fully supports our decision to pursue becoming a MAT.

### **Why now?**



We want to shape and secure the best possible future for the children in our schools now, as well as those who will join our schools in the future. The Department for Education states that groups of 10+ schools represent a sustainable model and we have always shared that it would be our aim to grow our group of schools.

**Do staff have a say?**

We have written to staff across our schools to explain why we are consulting on becoming a MAT. Staff will be kept updated throughout the process and will continue to have the opportunity to ask questions and share views.

**Would my child's school change?**

We want to continue to be a great group of schools where every child is valued. We do not intend to change except in ways that we think will improve the schools even further. It is unlikely that the children would see much, if any, change, in their day-to-day school lives.

Whilst they are united behind a core vision and ethos, the schools in the Pioneer Federation are all unique, and this is something that we would want to continue to preserve and celebrate in the future.

**Would the schools and Trust have to change their names?**

No, each school would retain its name and uniform but the Pioneer Federation of schools would now be called Sussex Pioneer Trust.

**Would changes be made to the length of the school day and to term dates?**

No, we would not seek to make changes to the length of the school day or to term or holiday dates. If this was something that we felt in the future could benefit the children we would consult with staff, parents/carers, and the children themselves.

**What would the changes mean for staff?**

Staff would not notice significant changes in their everyday working lives. They already experience and champion the benefits of partnership work and those opportunities would grow. Professional development would further expand and there would be a greater range of opportunities for career progression.

Terms and conditions for existing staff would remain the same and the Sussex Pioneer Trust would become the new employer of schools staff.

**Who makes the final decision on moving to a MAT?**

The Pioneer Federation Governing Body.

**Would other schools join the group and how would the decision be made to do this?**

Any decision on additional schools joining the Trust would be made by the Board of Trustees. We would expect other schools to join as time goes on and any school that joins would be expected to abide by our vision, ethos, and governance structure. They would also be required to contribute to and learn from the other schools in the group.

**Who runs a Trust?**

The Board of Trustees is ultimately accountable for the Trust. The current Executive Headteacher and Heads of Schools would contribute to the leadership of the whole group under the leadership of the Board of Trustees.

We would continue to have a Pioneer Trust governing body, including representation from staff, parents, our parish churches and the local community, as we do now.

**What process has the Board gone through in deciding to consult on becoming a MAT?**

The Pioneer Governing Board voted to confirm that they would proceed with an application to the Department of Education to become a MAT and also to consult with all stakeholders to decide whether it would be beneficial to the Pioneer Schools to become a MAT.



This is not a decision we have come to quickly; rather it is the result of the evolution of everything we have been through as a group of schools. We have undertaken a vast amount of due diligence, and this process will continue.

**What is the planned date for the MAT conversion?**

The proposed date for the merger is 1<sup>st</sup> January 2025.

**Who will be the CEO of the new Trust of schools?**

James Procter will be the CEO.

**Will there be a change to the Pioneer leadership structure?**

The Head of School and Senior Teacher structure will remain whilst we are four schools. As we expand in size this leadership structure is likely to evolve to reflect the number of schools in the MAT. This may include the development of Headteachers and Executive Headteachers for clusters of schools.