



Prior's Mill C of E Primary School  
Clifton Avenue  
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☎ 01642 650426

✉ office@priorsmill.org.uk

🌐 www.priorsmill.org.uk

*The smallest of all seeds becomes the largest of the garden plants*

10<sup>th</sup> October 2022

Dear Parents/Carers,

### **Consultation to convert to Academy status and join Melrose Learning Trust**

Our Governing Body has been carefully reviewing its options to become an academy and it has decided to consult with parents, carers, staff and other stakeholders, on whether our school should become an academy and join Melrose Learning Trust.

Melrose Learning Trust (<https://melroselearningtrust.org.uk>) currently consists of Wynyard CE Primary School in Wynyard, Esh CE Primary School in Durham, St Mary's CE Primary School in Darlington and High Coniscliffe CE Primary School in Darlington.

Melrose Learning Trust has a similar 'family feel' to us which is something we value and their vision and values are very similar to ours too. They keep the children at the centre of all decisions and are very keen to work with us to extend opportunities, work in partnership, share excellent practice and develop all staff whilst also securing cost and resource efficiencies as part of a Multi-Academy Trust.

We are therefore commencing formal consultation today, Monday 10th October 2022, for a period of **three school term weeks**. Consultation will therefore end at 3pm on Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> November 2022 (due to October half-term).

### **What is an Academy?**

Academies are state schools, funded directly from central government, no longer under the control of the Local Authority. Academy status gives schools more freedom to be innovative and creative with the curriculum, timetabling, staffing and governance. The school will still be a Church of England School under the authority of the Diocese of Durham and Newcastle and its religious designation will not change.

All academies continue to be inspected by Ofsted and comply with the same rules as other schools on special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), exclusions and admissions. Church Schools will continue to be inspected under the Statutory Inspection for Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) framework.

There are now thousands of academies in the country, including many schools that have converted in the Diocese of Durham and Newcastle and in the local authority.

An academy is part of a charitable trust (the MAT) run by a board of trustees. Trusts and their academies are rightly expected to work with and support other schools, including vulnerable schools. Should you wish to know more about the Government's policy, the Department for



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Education has its own academies bookmark on <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/convert-to-an-academy-information-for-schools>

### **What is a Multi Academy Trust (MAT)?**

A Multi Academy Trust is a charitable company and is responsible for overseeing the running of a number of schools. It has three layers of governance: the Members; the Directors; and the Local Governing Bodies.

A MAT is formed when its articles (legal document) are approved by the DfE and it is registered at Companies House as a company. The Church of England has specific articles approved by the central church and the DfE for the creation of Church MATs. A Church School can only convert into a MAT that uses these articles. MATs are made up of a number of academy schools – some are just primary school MATs, others will have secondary schools in them and some will include Special Schools too. It is usual for MATs to have periods of growth, when a number of schools might join and then some period of consolidation. There isn't a set number of schools that makes a MAT. In the Church MATs in the Diocese it is most usual for converting schools to keep their own name; if the school wants to change its name it can do. The partnership established between all schools in the MAT ensures that the schools can share skills and best practice and make optimum use of resources ensuring best value for money for each school.

In many ways the children will not notice any immediate difference, they will be in the same uniform, in the same classrooms with the same teaching staff. However, in time the children will perhaps notice changes and improvements in the way that they learn for example and have greater links with each school within the Trust.

### **About Melrose Learning Trust**

Melrose Learning Trust are committed to providing children with high achievement, confidence and enrichment, developed through excellent teaching, stimulating curriculums and strong moral values.

As a Trust, their aim is for all of their schools to maintain their own unique identity whilst working together to ensure the educational potential of each child is maximised and their wellbeing is fundamental to everything they do.

We are encouraged by the vision for the MAT and the strong emphasis already placed on collaborative working. We feel the MAT vision, ethos and values will align well with our own school vision and values.

Find out more - <https://melroselearningtrust.org.uk>



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### **What will be the main benefits for schools within Melrose Learning Trust?**

- Access to top quality staff, including a Trust leadership team who will be sharply focused on securing excellence.
- Moderation of standards across the partnership of schools to ensure the highest quality provision
- Greater control over finances and the money due to schools.
- Educational benefits for students as a result of additional freedoms available to academies in terms of the curriculum we offer, and how we prioritise resources.
- The opportunity to work in close and formalised partnership with other schools and share expertise and services that will benefit all of our students and staff.
- Sharing resources and expertise, allows us to target funding towards improving front line teaching and learning.
- Develop our own solutions collaboratively.

### **What additional responsibilities will Academy status bring?**

- Currently the Local Authority employs our staff – going forward the Multi Academy Trust would be the employer rather than the LA.
- The Academy Trust would be responsible for admissions rather than the LA (although the Local Authority would still co-ordinate and ensure the Trust adopts clear and fair admission arrangements in line with the admissions law and the School Admissions Code).
- The Academy Trust would enter into a 125-year lease for the land, usually owned by the Local Authority. We already have responsibility for the cost of maintaining the land and buildings.

### **Will any changes to the school be made as a result of conversion?**

We do not intend to make any changes to the day-to-day work of the school following conversion, other than to adjust the governance arrangements and accountability that comes with working within a Multi Academy Trust and to bring closer working practices between the schools in the Trust. More information on the process and the answers to many of the questions you may have can be found in the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) document attached to/included with this letter.

### **How do I learn more, and how do I respond to the consultation?**

At this stage we are not committing the school to conversion to academy status or to joining Melrose Learning Trust. We are consulting with everyone associated with our school before governors meet again to make a final decision.

The Governing Body would very much like to hear your opinion. As well as providing the FAQs we will be holding consultation drop-ins on the evenings of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2022 at 5pm to receive any comments and or questions you may have regarding the process.



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If you wish to respond in writing to the consultation, we ask that you let us have your views by emailing the attached feedback template to [office@priorsmill.org.uk](mailto:office@priorsmill.org.uk) by **3pm on Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> November 2022**. Please include your name and contact details.

Whilst we do not anticipate responding to each and every communication, we will provide answers to questions via the FAQs and we welcome your views. Please be assured your views will be taken into consideration by our Governing Body when they meet to make a final decision.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> November 2022, the FAQs document will be updated and shared on our website to reflect any questions that are pertinent to our wider community.

Following the closure of the formal consultation period the Governing Body will meet to consider how to proceed and the outcome of the consultation process will be shared with you as soon as practicable following the meeting.

Yours sincerely,

K J Huddart  
Acting Headteacher

Kevin F Cooper  
Chair of Governors