Dear Parent / Carer,

**Re: Academy Conversion Consultation**

The Department of Education has offered schools in England and Wales the opportunity to join the Academies programme. In the White Paper ‘Education Excellence Everywhere’ published on 17 March 2016, Nicky Morgan the Education Secretary, announced that all schools will be academies by 2022.

Prior to this announcement the governors of Bearwood Primary and Nursery School have been considering the options for our school, given the educational landscape and climate.

At a full governing body meeting on 15th March 2016 Governors therefore took the unanimous decision to initiate the consultation process regarding the acquisition of academy status in order to benefit from some of the academy freedoms.

It is proposed that Bearwood Primary and Nursery School join a new Multi-Academy Trust, The Hillary Trust, in Poole under the Hamwic Trust. The Hamwic Trust currently has three other Multi-Academy Trusts, the Jefferys Education Trust, the Edwin Jones Trust and the Ridings Trust. In total there are 13 existing schools across the Trusts.

At the same time that our school is considering this, both Hamworthy Park Juniors and Twin Sails Infant and Nursery are currently in conversion and Springdale First School have submitted their application to join The Hillary Trust.

The Hamwic Trust believe in creating academic excellence through community engagement and support the creation of locally based MATs to benefit pupils and families within their local communities. We already have an established relationship with the Hamwic Trust and receive school improvement support from Christine Bulmer, Hamwic Standards Officer and the team have carried out regular visits, school reviews and training. To find out more information about Hamwic, please visit [www.hamwic.org](http://www.hamwic.org).

To support parents / carers in developing their knowledge and understanding of what is involved in becoming an academy we have prepared this letter and attached information which is also available on the school website.

There are many reasons why the Governing Body has decided to consider this proposal and this consultation document has been prepared which attempts to explain the reasons clearly.
What is an academy?

Academies are publicly funded independent schools who receive their funding directly from the Department for Education and are free from local authority control. These schools can take advantage of a range of ‘freedoms’ which have the potential to improve provision and raise standards.

The position so far

Under the new academies programme there have been 5170 (March 2016) schools which have converted.

We have prepared a consultation document which explains our reasons for believing that converting to an academy may be in the best interests of the school, along with a collection of Frequently Asked Questions regarding academy status. These documents can be found on the school website.

In addition there will be two drop in sessions on Thursday 14th July between 12.00 and 1.00 and later at 5.30-6.30pm at the school for opportunities to raise any further questions.

Yours sincerely

Laura Bennett  Ann Harris
Head Teacher   Chair of Governors
CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

Why should Bearwood Primary and Nursery School become an Academy?

The Governing Body’s primary function is to ensure that both schools deliver the best possible education for its pupils and families. It is also part of the school vision that working within the local community enhances the education for the children both within the school and in other schools locally. With these key aims in mind it may be the case that becoming an academy could offer significant benefits which could support the school’s drive for continuous improvement.

The Department of Education offers academy schools a new range of freedoms which enable them to become more innovative and responsive to learners’ needs:

Greater autonomy to purchase services and support for the school

Academies receive funding directly from the Education Funding Agency that, as maintained schools, is held by the Local Authority to run services for schools. Academies are then free to look elsewhere for services which provide an improved and more efficient service and offer better value for money.

1. Curriculum freedoms

Academies are free to innovate and develop a curriculum which meets the specific needs of the pupils in the school.

In our experience, our staff and governors are proud of the dynamic and creative curriculum that delivers high standards and motivates and excites the children. In the future we wish to continue to develop in ways that suit our pupils' needs and not to be required to introduce a new 'one size fits all' curriculum which the government is currently devising. Instead the school would be able to select aspects of the new curriculum which it feels most suits the needs of its pupils.

2. Developing partnerships

Academies are free to develop closer links with other partners such as other local schools. Expertise in one school can be shared with other schools to the benefit of the community of schools and their pupils. Schools converting to academy status together can take advantage of sharing services and resources, using money to benefit pupils across a number of schools, shared CPD and developing lasting partnerships. There are a number of joint roles working across the schools including an Education Improvement Officer, Family Support Workers and Finance and Business Specialists.

For the children and staff of our schools there will be greater opportunities for developing partnerships with colleagues other schools within the Hamwic Trust.

There is much more to do in the future, and much of this work can be sustained and extended by schools accessing the academy freedoms collectively.
FAQs

Will the curriculum stay the same?

The curriculum in core subjects – English, Maths and Science – will follow the national curriculum. As an academy there are curriculum freedoms to teach other subjects e.g. languages.

Can the term dates be changed?

Academies can change term dates, however the school does not plan to do this and will remain with Poole Local Authority term dates.

Will the uniform change?

No

Will the current Governing Body remain as governors once conversion happens?

Yes, governors can transfer as they are and will become the schools Local Governing Body. The categories of governors changes although there are still requirements according to the Memorandum of Articles. Schools within the Trust have different models of governance.

If there is a change in management in the Trust, would the vision be changed – could the academy conversion be reversed?

The DfE require seven years notice for an academy to leave a Trust. This is also against current government political view. In terms of governance, the new Trust will be governed by a Board of Directors which will have representation from all schools in the Trust and the Hamwic Trust. The community ethos is written through the Trust documentation to ensure that it cannot be changed. Representatives from the other Multi-Academy Trusts within Hamwic will sit on the Governance and Ethos Committee to ensure consistency.

Will there be more money available upon conversion?

Not directly. The LA currently receives school funding from the DfE for the school. A certain amount is top sliced to provide services. Academy funding comes directly to the school from the EFA. A percentage is then paid to Hamwic to cover the central costs (currently 5.5%). This is the same for all schools within the Trust. If there is a surplus at the end of the year (above the Trust’s Reserves Policy) then this is distributed back to schools. The central charge of 5.5% is normally significantly lower than the LA top slice. The Trust is also able to achieve economies of scale for certain purchases through efficient procurement.

Will Pupil Premium/Special Needs funding money stay the same?

Yes schools will still receive this.

- How does the CPD the school currently receives differ from what Hamwic are offering?
- Will the curriculum stay the same?
- Will the school still be inspected by Ofsted?
- In order to get to good/outstanding, will there be additional pressure on teachers and consequently pupils?
- Statistically academies have more exclusions than maintained schools
How does the support on offer from Hamwic differ from what is offered as a maintained school?

The Local Authority does not have the resources any more to provide the support and CPD opportunities to the school. Joining Hamwic will enable the CPD between schools and staff will have the opportunity to visit good and outstanding schools and observe and share good practice.

Will the school still have Ofsted inspections?

Yes all schools are required to have Ofsted inspections. The Hamwic Trust employs two Ofsted Inspectors who also carry out reviews to support and challenge the school.

In getting the school to good/outstanding, will there be more pressure on staff and consequently pupils?

No, staff are welcoming the opportunity and support. Staff usually welcome the opportunity and support and pupils benefit from this.

Do academies exclude more pupils more than maintained schools?

This would be a school decision and our schools have always been inclusive and would continue to be so.

How does the Hamwic Trust invest in schools?

The Hamwic Trust is a not for profit organisation, however the Trust provides support in terms of standards, school improvement, finance, HR, health and safety and IT as well as submitting capital improvement bids to the Education Funding Agency to improve school buildings.

Why has every school not become an academy?

It is the current government agenda for all schools to be academies by 2020.

Will teachers be out of class more?

No, teachers get planning time (PPA) approximately one afternoon a week and there are also after school sessions and Inset days dedicated to CPD.

What changes will parents see on a day to day basis?

Probably not a great deal. There will be a lot of support for teachers and support staff in the background, however there probably won’t be a huge noticeable change. The school will still have the same Governing Body and the focus will be on raising standards and expectations.

Will the school be financially better off?

Not necessarily, however there will be benefits from economies of scale through procurement and also some service level agreements will no longer be necessary.
What about the academies that have failed?

There has been a lot of negative press regarding academies. The Hamwic Trust has a track record of raising standards in their schools with three years of data demonstrating that standards have improved. The model is based on local communities of schools supporting each other (with Head Teachers meeting regularly) for the benefit of the pupils within their community.

What say do the parents have?

Part of the consultation process is to consult with parents and staff. All feedback and questions will go to the governors for consideration.

How long does the process take?

In general it is approximately three months.

How do staff feel?

Staff have been very supportive and are looking forward to having extra support and the opportunity to observe other schools and share best practice.