



Learning, Culture and Children's Services

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Dear Parents, Carers and Students

Consultation on Academy Conversion

Following extensive discussions within the Danesgate Management Committee and consultation with local stakeholders we are now launching a period of consultation on our plan to convert to an academy. The proposal is that The Danesgate Community (currently designated as a Pupil Referral Unit) converts to an Alternative Provision Academy within a small Multi Academy Trust (MAT) which will comprise The Danesgate Academy and, possibly in the future, a new Free School aimed at young people with complex additional needs as well as social, emotional and mental health needs.

We would hope to merge our MAT with a larger MAT at some point in the future as this will be important for our sustainability and school improvement but, for now, we are focused on securing autonomy around decision making so that what emerges from any change to Danesgate will meet the needs of our students now and in the future.

In order that you can work out what this will mean for your son or daughter we have put some 'frequently asked questions' about academies on the back of this letter. It is really important that we hear and understand the views of parents and other stakeholders to make an informed decision about conversion to academy status. Please send in any written comments about this proposal by 2.11.16 either by post to - Patricia Head, Danesgate, Fulford Cross, YO10 4PB - or by email to - tricia.head@york.gov.uk. The final decision will be made by the Management Committee (Danesgate's name for its Governing Body) following this consultation.

In considering the change of status from a Pupil Referral Unit to an Academy we are driven by a desire to protect and improve the specialist provision that your son or daughter gets at Danesgate. In becoming The Danesgate Academy we would have the autonomy to shape our own destiny in a changing school system. We would also be in a stronger position to consolidate future partnerships that will enhance our school improvement. In becoming The Danesgate Academy we would be able to maintain all the elements of Danesgate that we cherish as well as grow provision that is needed.

Yours faithfully

Paul Guilfoyle
Chair of Management Committee

Patricia Head
Headteacher

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers about Academy conversion

What is an academy?

Academies are publicly funded schools that are not managed by a local authority. Their independence means that they have more flexibility in some areas of decision making than local authority maintained schools. They still have the same duty as local authority maintained schools to provide free education for local children and are subject to the same laws, regulations and codes when it comes to admissions, exclusions and SEN provision. Where several academies combine together to create a formal legal structure this is known as a multi-academy trust or MAT for short. An Alternative Provision Academy (which is the kind of Academy that Danesgate would become) works in close partnership with its local authority and local schools who can commission places and support for local children and young people.

How does the conversion process work?

Once a decision is taken to convert to academy status, the school must then go through a detailed application and legal process with the eventual conversion being subject to the approval of the Regional Schools Commissioner

What would the relationship be between the Academy and the Local Authority?

Academies are not maintained by the LA, but places in any Alternative Provision Academy are commissioned by the LA and local schools and so Danesgate would continue to play an important role in terms of the city-wide provision for the children of York. Danesgate expects to play as full a part as now in supporting vulnerable young people who need help to maximise their potential.

Who would the Academy be accountable to?

Elements of academy performance would still be accountable to the Local Authority. The academy would also be accountable to OFSTED, the DfE, the Educational Funding Agency and the Regional Schools Commissioner.

What would be the timescale for conversion to an academy and MAT?

A decision on conversion will be taken this academic term. The length of the conversion process is largely determined by the time taken to complete the application form, supply all the legal and personnel information and gain approval from the Regional Schools Commissioner. Our aim would be to convert to academy status in March 2017 but it may be much later than this.

What would happen to the admission arrangements?

Admission to Danesgate would be just as it is now – on a referral basis from schools or SEN Services or Health. All referrals will continue to go through York's Behaviour & Attendance Partnership. If we were to open a Free School in the future then parents would be able to request a place at Danesgate just like any other school but we are only in the very early stages of a Free School plan and the first step is to convert to an Academy.

What would happen to our funding and assets?

Funding would be similar to now and based on a place plus funding model as currently designed. We would have the opportunity to review the funding we get in for commissioned services and also create new relationships with schools in and around York who may wish to commission provision on top of what York LA may commission. The academy trust would take on a number of assets and liabilities which previously belonged to the LA. The land and buildings would transfer to the Secretary of State who would then lease them back to the academy on a 125 year basis.

Would the terms and conditions of employment for staff change?

The academy trust would be the employer of staff. Staff contracts would automatically transfer from the local authority/maintained school governing body to the academy trust at conversion under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE). As part of TUPE arrangements, all staff are entitled to transfer to the Trust under the same employment terms and conditions. Once the academies have been established, any changes to terms and conditions would be subject to consultation with staff and Trade Unions as they are now. It goes without saying that Trade Unions would be fully recognised within the MAT and fully engaged with throughout the conversion process and in the future development of the MAT.

Patricia Head

30.9.16