



Ryecroft C.E. (C) Middle School

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Headteacher: Miss R. Baramuszcak

11th October 2017

Dear Parents and Staff,

As you may already be aware, the governing body of Ryecroft C.E. (C) Middle School has applied to become an academy under the Academies Act 2010.

We propose to join the Uttoxeter Learning Trust (ULT), a multi academy trust recently formed by schools in the Uttoxeter Pyramid of schools. Ryecroft Governors and senior staff have been actively involved in the formation of this trust to ensure its Vision and Values make it attractive to all the schools in the Pyramid. The formation of the Uttoxeter Learning Trust will enable us to build on the current cross-Pyramid work to create a strong structure for 3-18 education across Uttoxeter. We are pleased that the establishment of the ULT and Ryecroft involvement in it is fully supported by Staffordshire County Council.

However, before any final decision is made by Governors to convert to an Academy and join a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) the Governors are undertaking an extensive consultation programme, to record the opinions of pupils, staff, parents, the wider community and other stakeholders. The results of this consultation process will then be used to inform the Governors decision as to whether to move to academy status. This period of consultation starts on Monday 9th October 2017 and will close on Monday 20th November 2017. Governors are keen to listen to the views of all interested parties during this period.

Further information about what becoming an academy means, and how to comment on the proposals, is set out below.

Frequently asked questions:

Will Ryecroft Middle School definitely become an academy?

The governing body has submitted an application to convert to academy status and is working towards a conversion on 1st January 2018. However, the school is not obligated to become an academy until the contract between the academy trust and the Department for Education (known as the Funding Agreement) is signed. The governing body has not even begun to negotiate the Funding Agreement with the DfE yet.

The academy trust will not sign the Funding Agreement until parents and carers of pupils at the school, staff at the school, and pupils themselves and other partners have had the opportunity to comment on the proposals. We would like to invite all parents and carers to a meeting at Ryecroft C.E. (C) Middle School on Thursday 2nd November 2017 at 6.00pm, to learn more about the proposals to become an academy, or to comment on the proposals.

We are also undertaking meetings with staff, and will be keeping pupils informed throughout the process. Any comments or representations which are made about the proposals will be considered by the governing body before a decision is taken to sign the Funding Agreement. Details of how to provide comments and representations are set out below.

The governing body will not sign the Funding Agreement unless they are content that conversion would be in the best interests of the school taking account of all of the legal and practical ramifications.

What is an academy?

An academy is essentially an independent school which is funded by the state. It is independent of the local authority and receives its funding direct from central government.

Previously academies have tended to replace schools which have poor results or otherwise needed to improve. Under the Academies Act 2010, all schools are able to become academies. As Ryecroft C.E. (C) Middle School is a '*good school*' (Ofsted 2013), we have been able to apply to join a Multi Academy Trust with schools within the Uttoxeter partnership. Schools already in the ULT are: Picknalls First, Thomas Alleyne's High School and Windsor Park Middle. A number of other schools in the Uttoxeter pyramid of schools are also planning to join the ULT.

What are the benefits of being an academy?

- academies are independent of local authority control – this means that academies have more freedom about how they conduct themselves
- academies receive their funding direct from central government – this means that academies receive more funding because none is retained by the local authority for the provision of central services
- academies have more freedom over the curriculum taught – this means that academies do not need to teach parts of the National Curriculum which they do not consider is appropriate for their pupils
- academies can set their own pay and conditions of service for their staff – academies have the freedom to alter the pay and conditions of their staff (subject to normal employment law protections for staff) and so can provide staff with better pay and conditions than previously
- academies have more freedom to undertake innovative projects – academies are companies and so have more freedom to undertake innovative projects, such as setting up and utilising trading subsidiaries

Are there any disadvantages to becoming an academy?

As an academy we will be directly liable for matters such as insurance, employment liabilities, pensions, health and safety, and, property maintenance. However, as mentioned above, academies receive more funding from central government to help them meet these additional costs.

What is a MAT?

A MAT is a Multi-Academy Trust. It is a legal entity that governs a group of schools through a single set of directors. It is set up by a group of schools, usually a local collaboration, that share a common ethos and vision.

Will the admissions arrangements change?

As a local authority maintained school admissions arrangements are set by the local authority, and the local authority also decides which pupils should be offered places at the school. As an academy, we will be in a position to put in place our own admission arrangements, and decide which pupils should be offered places in accordance with those arrangements. The academy will still be bound by the national admissions code, and Admissions Appeals Code.

The current admission arrangements will remain in place for the time being. If the academy wanted to change its admission arrangements consultation would be required.

Will staff leave?

If the school converts to an academy, all staff currently employed by the local authority will automatically transfer to the new academy on their current pay and conditions. Although the academy will have more freedom to amend those pay and conditions in the future, the Governing Body does not intend to take such a step in the foreseeable future and in any event, any change to pay and conditions would need to be consulted upon with staff representatives.

Will Ryecroft C.E. (C) Middle School change?

A key principle of the MAT will be that member academies maintain their own character. We want to continue to be an excellent school. We therefore do not intend to change Ryecroft C.E. (C) Middle School except in ways which we think will improve the school even more. For pupils, it is unlikely that they will see much, if any, change in their day to day school lives. Academies do have the power to vary their curriculums and vary the length of the school day, however, we do not intend to take any such steps at this stage and would engage with parents/carers, staff and students if we did ever intend to make such changes in the future.

How can I find out more?

A meeting will be held at the school on **Thursday 2nd November 2017 at 6.00pm**. We would encourage you to attend if you have any questions, or simply want to learn more.

There is also more information about academies on the DfE website:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/academies>

How can I make representations?

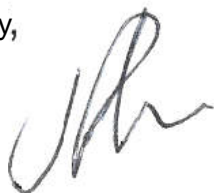
To respond to this consultation on whether the conversion of the school to academy status should take place can be made:

- in writing to: Ryecroft C.E. (C) Middle School, Ashbourne Road, Rocester, ST14 5NW
- or by email to: headteacher@ryecroft.staffs.sch.uk

The closing date for representations to be made is Monday 20th November 2017 – 12.00noon

Thank you for taking the time to read this information, please feel free to contact us if you require any additional information. We think our school is very special; we will do everything in our power to protect it and to secure the future we all believe it deserves. Therefore, please be assured that we will only commit to this course if we believe it is in the best interests of the pupils, parents, staff and the wider community.

Yours sincerely,



Mr J Bednall
Chair of Ryecroft C.E. (C) Middle School Governing Body

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