



ACADEMY CONVERSION

OAKFIELD LODGE - JOINING MANOR HALL ACADEMY TRUST

BACKGROUND

Over the last decade Academies have dominated the educational agenda and have provoked both emotive and ideological debates.

In 2014 Oakfield Lodge was matched with the Adelaide Trust as a sponsor following an inadequate inspection by Ofsted, the progress to academy status was slow and a pause was issued on the process by the Regional Schools Commissioner in 2018. In September 2020 Oakfield Lodge entered a School Improvement agreement with Manor Hall Trust, to ensure that the school continued to make good progress and build on the recent Requires Improvement inspections. The Associate Membership arrangements with Manor Hall Academy Trust has been a positive experience and has enabled staff at all levels to benefit from collaborative working with colleagues in similar settings.

Manor Hall is a trust that specialises in leadership and governance of schools that meet the needs of young people that demonstrate additional, special or complex educational needs. Oakfield Lodge is such a setting, and therefore the match has a multitude of benefits, all of which are focussed on combining to provide an excellent education that meets the needs of its children and young people. There are significant benefits to Oakfield Lodge in joining a Multi Academy Trust that has within it other pupil referral units. The collaborative work that can be done across the PRU settings will lead to improved provision and outcomes for our students.

The Trust began its formation in 2013, with leaders visiting other Special and Mainstream Academies, had meetings with colleagues and had dialogues with senior officers of the Local Authority. The question being asked was how could being an Academy significantly improve outcomes for pupils? The trust now governs 14 schools, including two pupil referral units.

You can find out more about Manor Hall Trust here; <https://manorhall.academy/>

Nationally, there is a strong feeling amongst educationalists that there is an expectation from government, that all schools will be expected to become Academies as part of the government's school improvement strategy. This message has recently been revisited by the Education Secretary Gavin Williamson. The desired model seems to be the placing of schools in clusters, led by an external sponsor or an outstanding school. This philosophy is reflected by the shrinking of Local Authorities as demands are made on Local Authorities to save money. Services within County Councils are being streamlined and minimalised. This has seen Local Authorities become commissioners of services rather than providers. For Oakfield Lodge the priority is ensuring that we join a MAT that has knowledge and expertise of the PRU setting and brings with it true opportunities for school improvement. Over the last academic year staff from Oakfield Lodge have built strong working relationships with the schools from Manor Hall Academy Trust and these have already had an impact on School development, staff training opportunities and administrative practices within our school. The Associate membership has enabled Oakfield Lodge and its Management Committee to gain an insight into the workings of the Trust and evaluate the benefits a conversion would bring to the school and its students. The collaborative work across the PRU's (including Oakfield Lodge) is considered a strength of the school improvement work being undertaken.



WHAT ARE THE MAJOR DIFFERENCES BETWEEN A MAINTAINED SCHOOL AND AN ACADEMY?

An Academy is no longer under the control of the Local Authority, although as a Special Educational Needs & Disabilities Federation (SEND) the LA has a statutory responsibility to provide certain services. Pupil admissions and the element of the budget related to pupil need, top up, are still controlled by the LA. The top slice (money the LA takes off schools to fund services) would be devolved into the School budget, although the Trust would have a wider set of responsibilities to finance.

The Trust is in actual fact a limited company and audited as such. The academies within the trust therefore have greater autonomy; have control over the curriculum and the services and resources necessary to achieve better value for money. Also the Trust has more control over pay and conditions.

Other potential impacts are increased role and responsibilities for the Head teacher and SLT and a change in financial skill requirements for administrative staff. The Management Committee would become known as the Local Advisory Board accountable to the Directors of the Manor Hall Academy Trust as set out in a document called the scheme of delegation.

WHY ACADEMISE NOW?

Oakfield Lodge is no longer subject to an Academy Order, however as the only Pupil Referral Unit in Cheshire East, school improvement support and the opportunity to benefit from economies of scale are becoming an increasing challenge.

WHAT IF THERE IS A CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT?

If there were to be a change of administration, it is widely understood that this would not signify a reverse to the Academies agenda; this process has advanced too far. It is for more important now to ensure that Oakfield Lodge becomes a member school of a Trust that hold a shared understanding of our children and young people, and hold similar values, beliefs and ethos.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and staffing of the proposed academy would remain as it currently stands. Any changes to this staffing structure will be made in line with factors that lie away from the Academy Trusts control, such as commissioned places from the Local Authority, or national funding agendas, for example.

OTHER STAFF

The Staffing structure would remain the same as it exists now, with the only caveat being as outlined above. Staff terms and conditions of employment would be subject to TUPE and therefore these would be protected under the conversion process.

ADMISSIONS

Pupil admissions to the Academy would continue to be determined by Cheshire East LA.

TIMELINE

June 2021	Governors approve the decision to commence the conversion application process
June 2021	30 day informal consultation with stakeholders commences
July 2021	Head Teachers Board to determine if an academy order will be granted
August 2021	Due diligence commences, including formal consultation and TUPE
November 2021	Conversion expected to be completed.



THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

This stage of the consultation process is the opportunity for all those associated with Oakfield Lodge School to make their views known regarding the academy status and to learn more about Manor Hall Trust and the process of conversion. There are within this document some frequently asked questions which you may find useful. The consultation period will be a minimum of 30 days from the 21st June 2021. During this period there will be consultation clinics where stakeholders can attend to ask questions.

Friday 9 th July	3.30 – 4.30	staff and wider stakeholders
	4.30 – 5.30	parents/carers

Due to Covid restrictions these events will take place via Teams and a link to the meetings will be provided in advance.

If you wish to attend a virtual consultation clinic please contact admin@oakfieldlodge.cheshire.sch.uk or call the school office on 01270685626

Stakeholders are welcome to contact the Headteacher regarding this process. Please address any concerns to: Ms G Bailey, Head Teacher at Oakfield Lodge
01270 685626 head@oakfieldlodge.cheshire.sch.uk

Where there are questions that Ms Bailey is unable to answer, these will be referred to the Trust CEO for clarification.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The most frequently asked questions are listed below and will be answered during the awareness session.

1. On balance what are the advantages for our children and young people?
2. What happens to staff contracts and pay and conditions?
3. What happens to staff pensions?
4. What would happen if staff had to be made redundant under an Academy?
5. As a limited company what happens if the school gets into financial troubles?
6. What happens – if we move away from the safety net of a LA and major damage happens to the building?
7. How do we access Capital funds to improve our facilities as an Academy?
8. How does the budget work? Does each school retain its budget or is there one budget?
9. What would be the impact on our Residential status?
10. How is the Academy governed?
11. Does being an Academy strengthen our profile as a federation?
12. Could other schools join our Academy at a later stage?



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13. Is there an expectation that as an Academy we would work with other weaker schools?
 14. Could we become a sponsor?
 15. Who decides which pupils are admitted to our schools?
 16. Can we set our own fees for pupils?
 17. Can we charge other authorities different fees for their pupils?
 18. Who owns the buildings and land after becoming an Academy?
 19. Are there any financial incentives attached to becoming an Academy?
 20. What is the time-line for becoming an Academy?
 21. Who helps us with the process?
 22. Who decides if we can become an Academy?
 23. What model of Academy would we become- who would become our partners?