

12 June 2020

Dear Parents, Carers, Families and Friends of The Oxford Academy,

Formal consultation to join the River Learning Trust

As you will know, the River Learning Trust (RLT) has been working alongside The Oxford Academy (TOA) this year and in particular since the Ofsted inspection in November 2020. We have previously communicated the plan that TOA would join RLT later this year and we are glad that these plans are continuing. This proposal is supported by The Department for Education and the current Interim Academy Board (IAB - the Governing Body). The IAB believes this move will support sustainable improvement at TOA and increase the level of support and challenge for staff, benefiting the whole school community, as well as bringing financial stability for the school.

The processes required to make this change legal are complex however, we are all working to try to make this change happen in September 2020, and consultation with staff started, with the support of Trade Unions, after half term.

As part of the process to join the RLT family of schools, the IAB would also like to hear what you think. I hope you will take a few minutes to read the proposal below and frequently asked questions which details the key issues about joining a MAT, and are published on [our website](#).

There is also a simple [form](#) on our website, which allows you to tell us what you think of the idea and for you to raise any questions you may have. The questions will be answered to individuals, if requested.

The period of consultation opens today and will remain open until Friday 17 July 2020. If you want to raise any issues with me directly, please contact me: consultation@theoxfordacademy.org.uk

We look forward to hearing your views.

Yours sincerely,



Tony Wilson
Chair of Interim Academy Board

The Oxford Academy – Formal consultation to join River Learning Trust

What is the proposal?

The Interim Academy Board is consulting on the proposal for The Oxford Academy (TOA) to join River Learning Trust (RLT). This means the way the school is governed will change: the existing charitable company running the school will cease to exist and the school will open as a new academy within River Learning Trust.

Why is this being proposed?

Following the school's Ofsted Inadequate judgement in November 2019, the Department for Education has worked with River Learning Trust to transfer The Oxford Academy to a new Trust.

What are the benefits of joining River Learning Trust?

The Interim Academy Board (IAB) has agreed to continue with the decision for RLT to become the new Sponsor for the school, and over the past nine months RLT has been working more closely with the school across all areas (for example: leadership, behaviour and safeguarding, curriculum, financial and operational matters). The IAB believes transferring into RLT will support sustainable improvement at TOA and increase the level of support and challenge for staff, benefiting the whole school community, as well as bringing financial stability for the school.

Are there any wider implications for this change?

No – admissions to the school will continue to be made through Oxfordshire County Council and no changes are planned to the admissions arrangements for the school. The school will continue to work with partner schools

Why River Learning Trust?

River Learning Trust (RLT) is a local Multi Academy Trust of 22 schools across Oxfordshire and Swindon as well as Oxford Teacher Training (Cherwell OTSA SCITT). The Trust has significant experience in the secondary sector, with six secondary schools already in the trust – five in Oxfordshire (The Cherwell School, Chipping Norton School, The Marlborough CofE School, The Swan School and Wheatley Park School). The Oxford Academy will be able to draw upon this expertise for best practice challenge and support. The Trust has a strong emphasis on Everyone Learning (staff and pupils) and a Commitment to Excellence. The Trust can accommodate Church of England schools.

What is the process and next steps?

This consultation will run until Friday 17 July. Any concerns, opinions or questions can be raised through the online form ([LINK](#)). The IAB and the RLT Board of Trustees will consider feedback and make a final decision about whether to continue with the transfer. The final decision about whether the school can transfer to RLT rests with The Secretary of State for Education who will sign a new funding agreement for the school. The plan is for the change to take place from the 1 September 2020, however there may be reasons beyond anyone's control that delay this date.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT)?

A Multi Academy Trust (MAT) is a charitable organisation, set up to govern more than one school through a single Board of Trustees. The MAT is accountable for the performance of each school in the group although each can still have their own Local Governing Body, much as they would a local authority school, with the MAT Board of Trustees delegating authority to them, whilst the final responsibilities rest with the Trust Board. MATs provide advice, support, expertise, challenge and a strategic overview.

Why is TOA required to join a MAT?

When Ofsted judges an academy as inadequate, the Regional Schools Commissioner (who reports to the Secretary of State for Education and is responsible for education provision within one of eight areas across the country) can close an academy. However, they can also identify a new academy trust to take on responsibility for the academy (this is sometimes referred to as an academy transfer). The decision for TOA has been to find a new Academy Trust to transfer the school to.

What will change?

From a governance perspective, the school will have a new Local Governing Board (who appoint and manage the Headteacher), they will report into the River Learning Trust (RLT) Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees are appointed by the Members of RLT. All of the people involved in the governance of the trust and the school are volunteers. Further information about the governance structure of River Learning Trust can be found on their website: riverlearningtrust.org

TOA currently has three existing sponsors (The Diocese of Oxford, Oxford Brookes University and The Beecroft Trust). Between them, these sponsors have appointed the Governing Board, along with Parent and Staff Governors, and the Local Authority has also been able to appoint members of the Governing Board. If TOA joins RLT, the sponsors (and Local Authority) will no longer have the same ability to appoint Governors. However, The Oxford Academy is a designated Church of England school, and therefore the Oxford Diocese will still be able to nominate a minority number of members for the River Learning Trust to appoint to the Local Governing Board.

Parents will continue to elect parent governors and the staff will elect staff governors, as happens now. The decisions the Local Governing Body can make is set out in a scheme of delegation, which is reviewed on a regular basis.

The move to RLT is done to secure improvements at the school, and parents should feel changes to the way the school communicates and consistency in delivering its policies and procedures (aligned to RLT standards) as well as the quality of education provision at the school. However, we live in challenging times and the way education is being delivered is evolving, so the support from parents is more vital than ever to help make a success of this change.

What will not change?

The intention with this legal transfer is not to have a 'clean slate' with changes in the look of the school, so there will not be any changes to the buildings (other than some improvements to areas of disrepair), the school's name, the uniform or the Christian values. Staff will also be transferred to RLT under TUPE.

What are the benefits of joining a MAT?

Through joining a MAT with other local schools we stand to gain through:

- Having a partner that has the capacity, expertise, infrastructure and quality of staff to improve us as a school and help us on our journey towards becoming a strong school;
- Being part of a larger organisation that can provide professional development opportunities for all of our staff and greater opportunities for our students;
- Helping us to both recruit and retain quality staff;
- Sharing expertise, resources and best practice and raising standards and improving outcomes across all key stages;
- Greater purchasing power for contracts and cost savings through economies of scale, thus helping us to secure our medium and long-term financial future.

How is funding organised within the MAT?

Funding for schools within a MAT is allocated on an individual academy basis. It is governed through a master funding agreement between the Secretary of State and the MAT and supplementary agreements between the Secretary of State and each school within the MAT.

Will there be an impact on OUFC or The Oxford Academy Endowment Fund?

No. The school will continue to work with its partners to help students access a broad curriculum.

Will joining RLT impact on the admission arrangements for The Oxford Academy?

No. There are no plans to change the admissions criteria. However, the Admissions Authority for the school will become River Learning Trust, which will delegate day to day responsibility to the school and OCC will continue to administer admissions.

How will this impact our feeder Primary Schools?

We will continue to work in close partnership with all of our feeder primary schools. We will continue to meet regularly as a partnership.

Will the staff be expected to work in other schools or provide cover in other schools?

No. Staff will not be asked to work in a partner school if they do not wish to do so, although having the ability to move staff between schools could provide a great opportunity for career development if it was needed and also help to retain excellent staff and leaders within the RLT family of schools.

Will there be a loss of autonomy for the Local Governing Bodies?

It will be up to the trust board of the MAT to decide how much (or how little) power is delegated back to the local governing bodies, so ultimately they may lose some autonomy, but not for the day to day operation of the school. The scheme of delegations for schools for RLT can be found here <http://www.riverlearningtrust.org/information/> and demonstrates that in the majority of areas the local governing body will continue with its current functions. We will also continue to have Governors for a range of stakeholders: parents, community, Diocese and staff.

What will happen to our land and buildings?

All land and buildings will be leased by the MAT rather than by The Oxford Academy Trust and the upkeep will continue to be the responsibility of TOA. but now as part of RLT.