

ACADEMY CONSULTATION REPORT RUSHMERE HALL PRIMARY SCHOOL

1. Background

The Governing Body of Rushmere Hall Primary School has been considering a proposal to convert the school to academy status and join Eko Trust. It resolved in September 2020 to consult upon this proposal.

The Academies Act 2010 requires the Governing Body of a Local Authority maintained school to carry out a formal consultation on this proposal, as set out below.

5.1 Before a maintained school in England is converted into an Academy, the school's governing body must consult such persons as they think appropriate.

5.2 The consultation must be on the question of whether the school should be converted into an Academy.

5.3 The consultation may take place before or after an Academy order, or an application for an Academy order, has been made in respect of the school.

This report describes the consultation programme undertaken by the Governing Body, the feedback from this programme and summarises the outcome of consultation.

2. The Role and Responsibility of the Governing Body

The Department of Education Governance Handbook 2019 summarises the purpose of governance as *'to provide confident and strong strategic leadership which leads to robust accountability, oversight and assurance for educational and financial performance.'*

The DfE Governance Handbook further states that it is the responsibility of the Governing Body to develop *'a clear and explicit vision for the future set by the board, in collaboration with executive leaders, which has pupil progress and achievement at its heart'* with a *'determination to initiate and lead strategic change when this is in the best interests of children, young people and the organisation, and to champion the reasons for, and benefits of, change to all stakeholders'*;

It also states;

'As the accountable body, the board is the key decision maker. It may delegate operational matters to executive leaders and governance functions to committees (including LGBs in a MAT) or in some cases to individuals, but the board as a corporate entity remains accountable and responsible for all decisions made and executive leaders operate within the autonomy, powers and functions delegated to them by the board.'*

**the board should be taken to mean the accountable body for the school or group of schools: in local authority (LA) maintained schools, this will be the governing body.*

Therefore, it is within the remit of the Governing Body, given current Government policy, to assess the benefits and risks of academy status and to decide whether it is appropriate for their school.

3. The Purpose of Consultation

The purpose of consultation is for the Governing Body, in accordance with the Academies Act 2010 and the DfE Governance Handbook 2019, to present the proposal to stakeholders, to gather feedback on the proposal and to understand the level of stakeholder interest, support and objection.



The Governing Body can then determine whether there is any significant stakeholder objection to the proposal that would cause them to reconsider.

4. Consultation proposal

To convert Rushmere Hall Primary School to academy status and join Eko Trust.

5. Consultation Process

The academy consultation ran from Monday, September 28th 2020 to Friday, October 23rd 2020, a period of four (4) academic weeks.

A summary of the consultation plan, identifying the different stakeholders, how those stakeholders were consulted and what information was to be provided, is below.

Stakeholder	Approach	Information provided
Parents and carers of pupils attending the schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter & consultation document sent out Monday, Sept 28th. • Consultation presentation published on website on Monday, Oct 5th. • Consultation meetings was held on Wednesday, October 7th at 2.00pm and 6.00pm • Meeting Q&A summary published Friday Oct 9th. • Survey open from Monday, October 12th until Friday, Oct 23rd 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent Letter • Consultation Document • Consultation presentation • Meeting Q&A summary • Survey
Staff employed by the schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter & consultation document sent out Monday, Sept 28th. • Consultation presentation published on website on Monday, Oct 5th. • Consultation meeting was held on Wednesday, October 7th at 3.45pm. • Meeting Q&A summary published Friday Oct 9th. • Survey open from Monday, October 12th until Friday, Oct 23rd 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff letter • Staff FAQs • Consultation presentation • Consultation survey • Meeting Q&A summary • Survey
Other stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter & consultation document sent out Monday, September 28th 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder letter • Consultation Document

6. Consultation meetings

6.1 Staff consultation meeting: 3.45pm on Wednesday, October 7th, 2020

The staff meeting was attended by approximately 40+ members of staff using videoconferencing.

The format of the meeting was as follows;

- The Headteacher, Paul Fykin, set out the reason for the proposal in the context of the school's current situation and challenges and the investigation carried out by the Governing Body. He explained the benefits of the proposal for pupils and staff and what would remain the same in the school.



- The CEO of Eko Trust, Rebekah Iiyambo, described the Trust's vision, the characteristics of the current member schools, Trust approach and its governance, leadership and management,
- Project Manager, Philip Cranwell, explained the implications of the proposed conversion for staff.

Staff were then given the chance to ask questions, via the video conference 'chat' facility. These questions and the answers given are attached as appendix A.

6.2 Parent/carer consultation meeting: 2.00pm and 6.00pm on Wednesday, October 7th

The parent/carer meeting at 6.00pm was attended by 2 parents and carers using video conferencing but there were none present at the 2.00pm meeting.

The format of the meeting was

- The Headteacher, Paul Fykin, set out the reason for the proposal in the context of the school's current situation and challenges and the investigation carried out by the Governing Body. He explained the benefits of the proposal for pupils and staff and what would remain the same in the school.
- The CEO of Eko Trust, Rebekah Iiyambo, described the Trust's vision, the characteristics of the current member schools, Trust approach and its governance, leadership and management,

Parents were then given the chance to ask questions and summaries of the Questions & Answers are attached as appendix B.

7. Consultation survey

7.1 Survey management

The Governing Body carried out a survey of parents, carers, teachers and support staff using an online survey form, which was open from midnight on Monday, October 12th and closed at midnight on Thursday, October 23rd.

The survey comprised the following questions:

- 1. Please enter an email address**
- 2. Which best describes your relationship with the school? (Parent/Carer, Teacher, Support staff)**
- 3. Did you attend any of the online consultation meetings or watch the video presentation on the website? (Yes or No)**
- 4. What do you like about the school? (Open answer)**
- 5. Do you support the proposal for the school to convert to academy status and join Eko Trust? (Yes, Maybe, No or Don't know)**
- 6. Could you explain your answer to question 5? (Open answer)**
- 7. Is there anything you would like to say about the proposal? (Open answer)**

7.2 Survey responses

A total of 45 responses were received broken down as shown in table 7.2a below. Although the response rates are below the average rates for primary school surveys conducted by Cranwell Consultancy, they are of the same magnitude i.e. parent rate averages at about 5% and teacher rates are in the range 60-70%.



Table 7.2a Breakdown response rates by cohort

Respondent Type	Universe (No.)	Responses (no.)	% Response Rate
Parents/carers	630	17	3%
Teachers	34	15	44%
Support staff	84	13	15%

The breakdown of responses to the question 5 "Do you support the proposal for the school to convert to academy status and join Eko Trust?" are shown in table 7.2b.

Table 7.2b Breakdown of responses to Q4 by cohort

Respondent Type	Response to Q4 as number and % of responses							
	YES		MAYBE		NO		DON'T KNOW	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Parents/carers	10	59%	6	35%	0	0%	1	6%
Teachers	9	60%	4	27%	0	0%	2	13%
Support staff	6	46%	4	31%	2	15%	1	8%

It is worth noting that there just two (2) NO responses from support staff and none from parents/carers or teachers.

7.3 Survey responses to questions 4 and 6

The responses to questions 4 and 6 provide useful qualitative context to the quantitative data from question 5. Since anonymity was promised to respondents the narrative responses can't be shared beyond the Governing Body those responses have been summarised.

In response to Q4 'What do you like about the school?' respondents describe a school that is caring, friendly and supportive and offers a broad and diverse education to meet the needs of all pupils.

The comments of the majority (25 out of 45) that responded YES to the Q5 have three key themes.

- Trust in the Governors and Headteachers to choose the right future strategy for the school and that the decision has been founded on investigation and due diligence
- Recognition that the school should be proactive and determine its own future.
- Belief that the proposal will benefit the school, its pupils and its staff

The comments of the significant minority (14 out of 45) that responded MAYBE to Q5 also have three key themes.

- General concern about being part of a multi academy trust based on the bad reputation of some
- Anxiety that the school might lose its caring, friendly atmosphere
- Specific concerns about the impact on the SEN resource bases within the school

The comments of the two people that responded NO to Q5 suggested they were questioning the need to be part of a multi academy trust and that a suitable trust had been identified.



8. Consultation summary

The consultation on the proposal has been comprehensive and stakeholders have been given clear opportunity to ask questions, receive further information and express views about the proposal.

Of the 45 survey responses received there were only two (2) NO responses.

Therefore, the Governing Body of Rushmere Hall Primary School is advised that the consultation has not demonstrated any significant objection to the proposal for the school to convert to academy status and join Eko Trust.



APPENDIX A: SUMMARY OF STAFF CONSULTATION Q&A ON OCTOBER 7TH

How does the Trust generate its own money?

The Trust's central costs are funded by contributions from member schools termed the *Trust Central Charge*. This charge is agreed each year and the Headteachers are involved in deciding what support and services the Trust will provide to member schools.

What opportunities are available within the trust? Are these advertised internally or externally?

All jobs within the Trust and its member schools are advertised internally and some will also be advertised externally depending on the role.

What does the Trust feel that Rushmere has to offer?

This was included in the presentation video. The trust recognises the school's expertise in inclusion and phonics teaching. It also recognises that there are lots of staff at Rushmere will a lot of experience that Trust schools could benefit from.

Does the Trust have sponsors?

No.

Will Rushmere & the Trust keep the Hearing Impaired Unit and the Speech and Language Hub?

Yes. The arrangements surrounding this will need to be worked out with the Local Authority but the school, the trust and the L.A will want the school to continue to run these additional provisions.

What professional development opportunities are there for support staff?

Eko Trust has a track record of providing excellent professional development for support staff from learning support assistants to finance and admin staff. Rushmere Hall support staff will be able to access this CPD and as the Suffolk hub grows there may also be further job opportunities

What professional development opportunities are there for teaching staff?

Eko Trust has a track record of providing excellent professional development for all teachers offering pathways from NQT through to main scale and upper pay scale teachers as well as Specialist leaders of Education (SLEs) and middle and senior leadership. Rushmere Hall teachers will be able to access this CPD as the Suffolk hub grows there may also be further job opportunities

Will the school have more money in the budget? Will the school be better off financially?

Rushmere Hall will receive the same funding as now but as part of the Eko Trust will be able to access better quality services which offer greater value for money as well as accessing the resources and expertise of the entire Trust.

Will the school be able to provide additional support staff members to support with challenging children?

The school will retain control over how it chooses to manage its budget and deploy staff to meet the needs of all its schools

What Ipswich schools have the Trust worked with?

The trust worked with Britannia Primary School, Sprites Primary School, The Willows and many more schools in Ipswich. A number of these schools are already part of academy trusts and these were additional sources of funding for the trust rather than opportunities for the trust to expand. Moving forward the trust will continue to sell its services to other schools in order to increase the amount of income it generates and in turn feeds back into the school budgets.



How many schools does trust want to take on? How many will be in the Suffolk Hub? What sort of schools?

Eko Trust has a growth plan based on up to 15 schools organised into three regional hubs. Rushmere Hall will be the first member school in the Suffolk hub. The schools will be a mix of those performing well and those that need support. However, the Trust will manage the mix to ensure that firstly, member schools are supported and secondly, the Trust has the resources to support a weaker school.

Will the management structure change? What additional leadership power will the school benefit from?

The school will retain control over its leadership structure. The role of the YTrust leadership is to support the Headteacher and staff in sustaining and enhancing school performance and pupil outcomes

Will there be a support staff representative?

The composition of the Local Governing Body is up to the current Governing body within board parameters. If the Governing Body would like to have a support staff representative within its composition then that is possible.

If staff do take on a secondment or cover maternity leave in another school, do they need to interview for the role?

Yes, to ensure that the recruitment process is transparent, equitable and effective in identifying the best person for any role.



APPENDIX B: SUMMARY OF STAFF CONSULTATION Q&A ON OCTOBER 7TH

Will there be money available for building improvements and repairs to this school if needed?

Eko Trust has been successful in securing capital funds to improve its member schools and if there is a clear need for building improvement it is hoped this track record of success will continue. A number of building improvements funding by the Local Authority will be agreed before the conversion.

Why a London trust when there are plenty of trusts locally?

The Governing Body has been considering very carefully the future strategy for the school, actively exploring different options, including;

- remaining as a stand-alone community school within the Local Authority,
- co-founding a new multi academy trust, and
- joining an existing local multi academy trust.

None of these options felt right for the Governing Body. However, a new way forward presented itself in late 2019.

Eko Trust, a successful East London based multi academy trust, was commissioned by Suffolk County Council to provide school improvement support to a number of Ipswich primary schools. Not only was this support very helpful for Rushmere Hall, it also gave the Headteacher and staff the unique opportunity to work with and get to know colleagues from Eko Trust.

It became apparent very quickly that Rushmere Hall and Eko Trust shared a similar vision, ethos and values.

Why isn't the school collaborating with local schools already?

The school does work with local schools already. These schools are already part of academy chains / trusts and therefore their capacity to collaborate with us is reduced as they are working between their trust schools.

How will the school collaborate with schools who are based in London?

The current Covid crisis has forced Eko schools and their staff to work together in new ways, using video conferencing and collaborative software, even when only a few minutes apart. This approach is likely to continue and so enables Rushmere Hall to work closely with other schools. As the Suffolk hub grows there will be additional opportunities to collaborate more locally.

What plans do the trust have for Rushmere?

Rushmere Hall is a school doing well and Eko Trust will support the Headteacher, staff and Governors in sustaining and maintaining the quality of education it provides. If the school is facing challenges then the role of Eko Trust is to support the school in addressing them in the most effective way possible

Will the ethos and caring nature of the school change?

No. Eko Trust prides itself on each member school retaining its own ethos, culture and atmosphere. It is a caring culture that all Eko Trust member schools share in.

Will the school continue to deliver a broad curriculum or is it all about results?

Schools are judged by the outcomes their pupils achieve and so understandably Eko Trust expects its member schools to achieve the best possible outcomes for all their pupils. However, the Trust believes it is important for children to develop socially, emotionally physically and creatively and all its members schools offer a broad curriculum that meets their needs.



The Eko Trust is comprised of 1/3 Special Needs schools, which often require larger amounts of funding in order to support the complex needs of their pupils. Will this have a disproportionate effect on any funding that Rushmere will receive?

No. Each school receives all the funding it is allocated by the Department for Education, less the agreed *Trust Central Charge*.

How much are the trustees paid? The reason for asking, previous academies have been left in disrepair while the trustees have still been paid a great deal of money?

Trustees are volunteers and do not receive payment,

What is the problem of scrutiny? Don't we need this to ensure we are delivering an excellent standard?

Scrutiny is a fundamental part of school management and leadership. Effective scrutiny enables schools to sustain and improve performance and pupil outcomes because it provides ideas, resources, expertise and capacity to do so.

How does being part of trust help "take the pressure off" ?

The Governing Body is absolutely determined that the school should offer the very best quality of education. Yet this ambition is becoming harder to achieve in an increasingly challenging educational landscape of tightening budgets, greater scrutiny of school performance and pupil outcomes and the need to meet wider needs of children and their families.

Challenge 1: Sustaining and raising school performance and pupil outcomes

Schools face much greater external scrutiny of their performance and pupil outcomes. This places increased pressure on Headteachers, teachers and teaching staff. In the past Suffolk County Council has provided excellent support for its schools. But, through no fault of its own, it now has less funding and resources, which it has to target at the weakest schools. This means we receive much less support for school improvement.

Challenge 2: Retaining the best staff team

At the heart of every good school is a strong team of leaders, teachers, teaching staff and support staff who work together to help and develop every child, so they flourish. As a school, we receive a diminishing amount of Local Authority support and the opportunities for professional development, career progression and mutual support and challenge are reduced. We need to retain, develop and recruit the very best staff team to achieve the best outcomes for the children. We also need to help staff achieve a better work/life balance.

Challenge 3: Coping with financial pressures

The fact is that pupil funding is not keeping up with the range of cost increases, which means each year we have to find more savings from an ever-tighter budget. We are concerned that these cutbacks will strip back the breadth of learning beyond the core curriculum that we can offer our pupils. It will also mean reducing the wider support we offer our children and families.

Being part of Eko Trust will enable Rushmere Hall to cope with these challenges more effectively.

What happens if parents don't want this?

It will depend on the proportion and numbers of parents that object alongside the views of staff. If there is a significant objection from all parts of the school community then the Governing Body would need to consider this versus what they believe is the right strategic direction for the school. It is worth bearing mind that there are parent governors on the Governing Body that have been involved in the strategic planning. The governors have decided to present this option to the parents and the community because it is a credible opportunity. The due diligence process was extremely thorough and the checks carried out prior to sharing this with the governors has been extremely thorough.



What is the appeal process?

There is no appeal process as such. The Governing Body has both the responsibility and authority to make decisions about the school's future

If Rushmere enters into the Eko Trust, will the entry level requirements for teaching staff remain the same? E.g. will it still be a requirement for teaching staff to hold a relevant and appropriate degree before appointment?

The vast majority of teachers will continue to have Qualified Teacher Status (QTS).

How will the survey be managed?

The survey is online and anonymous. The results of the survey will be shared with Governors who will consider them before making a final decision.



APPENDIX C: Summary of narrative responses to consultation survey

Q4. What do you like about the school?

The responses can be summarised as;

- Large diverse community
- Excellent learning opportunities
- High level of care and support
- Friendly faces
- Supportive staff
- Friendly atmosphere
- Incredibly inclusive
- Openness, honesty and overall ethos
- Broad focus - all areas of the curriculum (Not just literacy and maths)

Q6. Could you explain your answer to question 5 (which was 'Do you support the proposal for the school to convert to academy status and join Eko Trust?')

The responses of those responding YES (total of 25 respondents) can be summarised as;

- The best way forward for the school
- Enables the school to achieve better and offer more opportunities
- The best option available to us.
- Trust the governors and senior leaders with making the best decision for the children
- A chance to get extra support and collaborate with others
- The Eko trust seem to be a successful trust with a good reputation
- Better for the school to proactively making this decision than being in a position where it is forced upon the school
- Pleased that the CEO is a Headteacher and therefore has an education focus
- Impressed with the trusts approach to supporting disadvantaged children
- The school my child previously attended was run more smoothly once taken over by a trust.
- The trust appears to have the same ethos and drive as Rushmere.
- The trust is a good fit for us.
- Having worked with the trust over the last year or so, I have seen the benefits they can provide.
- This is a great opportunity.

The responses of those responding MAYBE (total of 14 respondents) can be summarised as;

- Concerns over whether the trust would invest in the school property once no longer owned / maintained by the local authority and how the swimming pool will be affected.
- Concerns that this is too soon and that we need to see the implications of this on staff and the provisions within the school.
- Concerns that the negatives of the trust have not been shared.
- Confirmation needed on the impact of the conversion on the special provisions / units within the school
- Some academy chains / trusts do not always receive good press
- Worries over the trust coming in and removing staff
- Nervousness about the school losing its caring ethos.

The responses of those responding NO (total of 2 respondents) can be summarised as;

- Not feeling sufficiently informed as to what Eko can offer in its entirety. A feeling that the school is already successfully achieving a lot of what the trust can offer.
- Concerns that this is going through during COVID times.
- Worries around cases from poor performing trusts and the implications of that.
- Questions around staffing / trustee changes at the trust