



RUSHMERE HALL PRIMARY SCHOOL

**A PROPOSAL TO CONVERT TO ACADEMY STATUS AND JOIN THE
EKO TRUST**

**CONSULTATION DOCUMENT
September 2020**

1. What is the proposal?

The Governing Body of Rushmere Hall Primary School proposing that the school convert to academy status to join Eko Trust, a successful multi academy trust.

2. Why and how has the Governing Body come to this proposal?

2.1 The changing educational landscape

Rushmere Hall is already successful school, offering an excellent quality of education that we believe enables each pupil to fulfil their potential. The school has a positive, supportive and caring community of staff, pupils and families working together to support the academic, social, emotional, creative and physical development of all our children.

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. As many schools in Suffolk convert to become academies, the number who are under the local authority control are reducing. It means the provision and support for L.A schools is reducing and the opportunities to work and collaborate with others is diminishing because those schools are supporting the schools within their own trust.

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. Local academies are competitive and are able to tempt our staff with opportunities they we cannot offer as a single entity. They are able to provide progression across their trust schools for inspiring leaders and ensure that home grown talent (e.g. trainees) are retained between their group of schools.

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. We already have many financial challenges which have been created by the expansion of the school to three forms of entry. The expansion was linked to the creation of a local housing development and the need for additional school spaces. The development has not yet been built and therefore many year groups remain undersubscribed.

2.2 Government policy for schools to become academies

It is government policy that schools should become academies and currently there are nearly 9,000 academies, the majority of which chose to convert to academy status. Around 36% of primary phase schools have become academies while 77% of secondary schools are academy status (*Source: DfE academies list census August 2020*). A key part of the academy policy is that schools should work in partnership with other schools through multi academy trusts rather than be on their own. There are huge benefits of collaboration and this school is currently quite isolated as many of the local schools are already part of trusts. In fact, in the original North Ipswich Cluster, only ourselves and Northgate High School are not part of an academy trust.

2.3 The Governing Body's investigation

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. In fact a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis was completed on the options open to us. Remaining as we are provided very few opportunities. Setting up our own trust created a threat that would add too much pressure to current staff and joining an existing trust meant that we would potentially lose some of our identity and relinquish a number of powers to the trust.

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. The impact of the support provided by Eko was immense. Senior leaders and class teachers benefitted from the quality of the support and guidance offered. Much of this support was documented and referred to in newsletters across the last academic year. The trust was also incredibly supportive during the school lockdown period.

Once this work had commenced in June 2019, it became apparent very quickly that Rushmere Hall and Eko Trust shared a similar vision, ethos and values.

With the support of the Governing Body, the Headteacher commenced discussions with Eko Trust about how Rushmere Hall could be part of Eko Trust as the founding school in a new hub of Ipswich and Suffolk schools.

Between January and September 2020 there was a series of meetings with Eko Trust. Governors explored how, as a member school, Rushmere could both retain appropriate control, autonomy, independence and benefit from the Trust's expertise, support and resources given Eko Trust is currently centred around East London. In parallel there has been a robust and thorough process of due diligence covering standards, leadership, governance, finance and operations.

On September 23rd 2020 the Governing Body met to consider the outcome of its investigations and due diligence. The Governors agreed that joining Eko Trust by converting to academy status would help our school sustain and enhance the quality of provision for pupils, staff and wider school community. The governors felt it was an exciting opportunity and a chance to be part of the creation of a new Ipswich hub whilst benefitting from the experience, success and support that the London based hub could provide.

3. What are the benefits of Rushmere Hall joining Eko Trust?

Rushmere Hall has already seen the benefits first-hand of working with Eko Trust. By converting to academy status and joining Eko Trust, we would be able to deepen these ties and strengthen the collaboration and joint working between headteachers, senior leaders, staff and governors.

In particular, Kaizen Primary School is recognised by the DfE as a Teaching School and is a founder member of the East London Early Years and Schools Partnership (ELEYSPP). This means that new teachers can be trained in the schools as well as more experienced teachers being provided with high-quality professional development.

For pupils, this support for teachers will result in enhanced teaching and learning and a strengthened curriculum experience, giving children the very best opportunity to achieve the optimum educational outcomes.

Governors and senior leaders will have more time to focus on what happens in their own schools. The schools will be able to run more efficiently by accessing services and resources managed and commissioned across an organisation with funding of more than £10 million.

Further benefits can be broken down by different groups within the school community.

Benefits of being part of EKO Trust			
Students	Staff & Leadership	Leaders & Governors	School
Enhanced... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching and learning • Curriculum • Provision for SEND and vulnerable students • Extra-curricular opportunities • Access to resources • Pastoral support provision 	Better... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development • Coaching & mentoring • Subject/Dept. expertise • Academic planning • Resource sharing • Peer-to-peer network • Career opportunities 	Greater... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership support & challenge • Leadership training • Governor training • Governor support • Operational management support • Sharing of practice • Focus on the school 	Effective and efficient... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central services • Procurement and commissioning • Resource sharing • Policy management • Systems & procedures

5. What can you tell me about Eko Trust?

5.1 Trust history and growth

Eko Trust was established in 2016 by the Headteachers and Governors of three East London schools that could see the benefits of closer partnership working and shared similar vision and values. Almost uniquely, the founding group was a mix of two primary schools and a 4-18 special school. Since then, two further primary schools have joined and a new special school has been opened.

Information about the six schools already part of the trust can be viewed on the Eko trust website.

<https://www.ekotrust.org.uk/>

By 2025 Eko Trust plans to grow to around 15 schools and 5,000 pupils organised into three geographical hubs.

Rushmere Hall will be the founding school of a planned Ipswich & Suffolk hub and there has already been interest from other local schools about what Eko Trust has to offer.

5.2 Trust Vision and Values

The vision for the Eko Trust and its member schools is summarised as ‘*Collaborating to Learn*’. Every member of the trust community is empowered to learn, to be ambitious and to be resilient.”

The Eko Trust is a learning community that provides an excellent education through highly effective collaboration based upon mutual support and challenge.

The core values of the trust and its member schools are:

- Vitality** means we feel healthy, capable and energetic. We have a sense that our actions have meaning and purpose.
- Optimism** means we focus on positive outcomes to a greater extent than negative ones. We know optimism is important in coping with difficult life events. We think that optimists are generally happier with their lives than pessimists. We trust that in the end everything will be alright, even if the outcome is different to what we first imagined.
- Integrity** means we live by sound principles and are motivated to behave ethically. This ensures Eko Trust will carry out our charitable objective to advance education for the public benefit.
- Courage** means we have the mental or moral strength and resilience to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear or difficulty whilst going about our work. We will take risks in areas that will improve the education we provide - learning, improving and changing.
- Equity** means we know that everyone is different and needs different things to be able to achieve. Fairness trumps equality. We will do whatever it takes to break down barriers, close gaps and get everyone to a high-level end point.

6. How is Eko Trust governed, led and managed?

The Eko Trust is governed by a single board of trustees including existing governors from the founding schools. The trustees have the range of important knowledge, skills and expertise needed to oversee an organisation of 1600+ students, 250 staff and around £10m of public funding. The CEO of the Eko Trust is Mrs Rebekah Iiyambo, and in this role has specific responsibility for overseeing the trust's legal, financial, governance and HR functions.

The Trust has overall accountability to the Department for Education (DfE) but each individual school remains subject to individual Ofsted inspection.

Rushmere Hall, like the other schools in the Trust, would continue to have a Local Governing Body, with representation for parents, staff and the wider school community. Governors and the Headteacher would continue to decide how the school is run with the vast majority of decisions still made locally.

The Headteacher would be part of a leadership group with the other headteachers, to be responsible for developing and implementing Trust plans for school-to-school support and collaboration.

School funding will still be calculated and allocated on a school-by-school basis with each school contributing to the central costs of running the Trust, which would be kept as low as feasible. The Trust's finances are subject to close scrutiny by the DfE's Education Funding Agency and independently audited accounts are published. The Eko Trust would become the employer of Rushmere Hall staff.

To find out more about Eko Trust please visit <http://www.ekotrust.org.uk/>

7. How will the school be run after the Eko Trust?

At Rushmere Hall, our pupils will continue to be taught by the same teachers, in the same classrooms, wearing the same uniform. Over time children may notice changes in the way they learn and be able to access a wider range of opportunities, as we benefit from trust-wide initiatives to enhance teaching, learning and the curriculum.

The school name and identity will remain the same and we will retain control over the admissions policies and processes, which must be compliant with the national admissions code. The 'feel' of the school will remain the same as the values and ethos held by the trust are virtually identical to our own. Having visited the schools within the Trust, the governors have already recognised that our schools 'feel' and have the same level of care for the children and openness with the parents.

All staff would continue to work in our school with the same responsibilities and terms and conditions as now. There would be opportunities for some staff to take on wider responsibilities across the trust to enable the trust to function effectively and efficiently. This may provide them additional responsibilities that they have been looking for to further their career and enhance their teaching. Staff would also have access to enhanced professional development. There are no plans to make any posts redundant as a result of joining Eko Trust.

8. What are the next steps?

The proposal is for Rushmere Hall Primary School to convert to an academy and join Eko Trust on January 1st 2021.

In November the Governing Body will then consider a report on the consultation and, if satisfied with the outcome, will proceed with the proposal.

After that there would be a number of legal, regulatory and operational tasks to be completed by January 1st 2021 and the transition would be carefully managed to ensure day-to-day running of the school is not affected.

Parents, carers and staff will be kept fully informed.