

FAQs Parents – Coten End Primary School

Academisation and Joining a MAT

1. What is a Multi Academy Trust?

A Multi Academy Trust (MAT) is what is normally formed when a number of schools join together as a single Trust (in this case, Stowe Valley MAT) with a Board of Directors answerable to the Trust's members. The Trust becomes independent of the Local Authority (LA, in this case, Warwickshire County Council, WCC) with all staff becoming employed by the Trust, and all assets transferred to the Trust.

The Trust is the legal entity and it has one set of Articles that govern all the academies (each individual school) within it. The Trust has a Master Funding Agreement with the Secretary of State for Education and each academy also has a Supplemental Funding Agreement. Academies are funded by central government (specifically the Department for Education, DfE) and independent of direct funding and control by the LA.

As of June 2023:

- 40.4% of state funded primary schools are now academies
- 80.4% of state funded secondary schools are now academies

2. Are all academies the same?

No. There are many different types of academy. Some schools have become academies independently (Single Academy Trust – SAT), others have joined together with other schools to form a Multi Academy Trust whilst others have joined larger national MAT groups, often known as academy chains. Different academies have a variety of school improvement and governance arrangements. Schools are no longer allowed to convert to single academy trusts.

3. Why are we considering converting to an academy now?

We are currently funded via Warwickshire County Council, our Local Authority. The current educational climate is changing and many schools nationally are choosing to take advantage of academy status. We are not obliged to convert to an academy and can continue to be maintained directly by WCC. However, cuts in central government funding to LAs in recent years have led to reduced local budgets and cuts to services. These cuts are continuing and it is possible that the requirement to further reduce local budgets and spending over the next few years may ultimately impact the ability of the Council to deliver its core services, including supporting schools.

- Being a part of a MAT will allow us greater freedom and independence to ensure we meet the needs of our families and children rather than being constrained by the Local Authority.
- Belonging to a MAT allows the school to benefit from better common services to support us improve education, support staff and provide essential pupil support services.

Being a part of a MAT will give us the economies of scale to ensure services across the school - finance/HR/capital/marketing are delivered at a better cost, allowing us to

spend more of our budget on children's education ensuring they get the best they possibly can.

4. Why are we looking to join Stowe Valley Multi Academy Trust?

We believe that joining the SVMAT is the right move for our school, its pupils and the wider community that we serve. It will offer us a range of benefits, such as:

- Enabling us to have a network of like-minded schools and allowing us to develop collaborative partnerships. This will allow us to learn from others and share our strengths.
- Improved recruitment and retention of high-quality staff. Becoming a member of SVMAT enables significant progression opportunities for staff which helps us retain our best employees and develop future leaders.
- The ethos and values of SVMAT fit with our beliefs. Unlike many trusts, SVMAT firmly believes in the distinctiveness and individuality of the schools and communities they serve. The CEO of the Trust, Ranjit Samra, understands our school and the way we work. The agreement between the school and the Trust will mean that the Headteacher and Governing Body continue to make the key decisions about the education of your children and how our school operates.
- SVMAT are a family of local schools that work together to provide the best education for every child, every day. Their ethos is 'Be kind' and 'Believe in every child, every day'

5. Which schools are currently part of the SVMAT and are any others looking to join?

The Stowe Valley MAT currently consists of Southam College, Southam Primary, Stockton Primary, Byfield Primary School, Bilton School, Bishops Itchington Primary, Rokeby Primary, Temple Herdwyke Primary, Kineton High School, Oakley School and Myton Gardens Primary. The MAT also has the potential to grow as other like-minded schools join.

6. Will there be changes to our school?

SVMAT vision is for schools to retain their sense of place and their local community identities. There will be no change to our school name, branding or uniform. The changes will be centred around our school having greater opportunities. Much of what will happen will be behind the scenes and not impact at all on the day-to-day running of the school. The recruitment of staff, the curriculum, the holiday dates, the timings of the school day and all the decisions that directly affect your children will be completely at the discretion of the Headteacher and Governing Body. There will be no disruption to the pupils' education by conversion to academy status or joining SVMAT. Admissions to Reception and other year groups will still be managed centrally by WCC Admissions.

7. When is this proposed to happen?

Subject to the outcome of the consultation, submission of our application to the DfE, confirmation from the DfE and granting of an academy order, we would look to convert on 1st January 2025 although this is not completely within our control.

8. How will this affect school staff?

On conversion to academy status, teachers and non-teaching staff employed by the school will transfer with the same terms and conditions via a formal TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment) process. In addition, conversion will not affect any union memberships. Presently, staff are employed by WCC, but following conversion staff will be employed directly by the SVMAT. Teachers' pay and conditions will remain and, as such, salaries will remain the same. Support staff pay grades will remain the same. One driver of consideration of academisation is the increased opportunities available to school staff with increased Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities and collaboration across schools across the trust.

9. How is an academy funded?

Currently, in maintained (LA) schools all revenue funding goes directly to the LA. They take a proportion of the money from the school budget to provide essential services to the school and the rest is delegated under the Local Management of School. Schools can buy additional services from the LA and other providers. As a result, some schools currently depend upon the LA for many services such as school improvement, HR, finance etc.

Academies receive a similar level of per pupil funding as maintained schools, plus funding to meet additional responsibilities that are no longer provided to them by the LA. Within a MAT, the money that would have been provided to the LA to run the school is provided directly to the MAT. The MAT will retain some of the budget to provide services to the schools within the MAT.

10. Does this improve our current funding arrangements?

Our decision to convert is not motivated by money. Converting to an academy will not be to our detriment financially and there may be some financial gain due to increased buying power across the MAT and economies of scale. We will receive a conversion grant from the DfE once the decision to convert has been approved.

11. Will the Governors have less authority and control?

Our governing body will continue to play a crucial role in shaping Coten End's performance, ethos, values, and long-term strategy. Within the SVMAT Trust, each school is expected

to maintain a Local Governing Body (LGB), tasked with executing key strategic governance functions tailored to the specific needs of each individual school. These LGBs will retain representation from skilled and experienced parent, staff, and other governors, to effectively fulfil their duties. These responsibilities are similar to those that Coten End governors hold now; including monitoring progress against set targets, engaging with stakeholders, ensuring sound financial management, and adherence to established policies.

Following academisation, certain governance responsibilities, such as oversight of health and safety, will transition to the central trust board. This adjustment will afford governors more time to fulfil their crucial role as a 'critical friend', collaborating closely with the school to provide support, challenge and hold it accountable for delivering high-quality education.

12. Does SVMAT have the capacity to raise standards and achievement?

SVMAT has its own school improvement capacity which is generated from schools across the Trust rather than externally. Presently we do not receive any school improvement support from the LA. The MAT will challenge and support the school in equal measure and intervene rapidly if any school is underperforming. Support is bespoke for each school depending on priorities.

13. Would the current level of support for SEND children be maintained?

The availability and quality of SEND support are important factors in our decision-making process. SVMAT shares Coten End's commitment to offering an inclusive curriculum that caters to the needs of all children. Furthermore, there is expertise available within SVMAT which we anticipate will facilitate more timely access to a broader range of services.

14. Would access to clubs, wraparound care and extracurricular activities change?

No, Coten End will continue to offer the wide variety of extracurricular activities, with KidzOwn continuing to operate on the school site. It is anticipated that the external companies providing sports etc will continue as they are at present. SVMAT offers the opportunity to participate in cross-trust collaboration, such as a MAT-wide production at the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry. We anticipate joining SVMAT would lead to more of such opportunities for Coten End Primary School children.

15. Can Coten End withdraw from the conversion process once in progress?

Schools are able to withdraw right up until the point that they sign the funding agreement. Once this is signed there is a legally binding agreement between the Secretary of State and the academy. Once a school converts to academy status it cannot return to Local Authority maintained status. If a school is unhappy then it is also hard to leave a multi-academy trust once a school has joined, as it requires the consent of the Secretary of State for Education and the identification and consent of another multi-

academy trust. That makes decision making period all the more important to ensure Coten End and SVMAT share vision, values and ethos.

16. Will Friends (PTA) continue to operate, and will they retain their current funds?

Joining SVMAT will not impact Friends (PTA) or fundraising. The funds that Friends has generated belong to the charity and will not be transferred to SVMAT.