

Clifton Hill School

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Academisation Consultation

As you may already be aware, the governing body of Clifton Hill has applied to become an academy under the Academies Act 2010 and is proposing to join The Weydon Multi Academy Trust (WMAT). The governing body is now consulting on whether the school's conversion to academy status should take place. Further information about what becoming an academy means, and how to comment on the proposals, is set out below.

Will Clifton Hill School definitely become an academy?

The governing body has submitted an application to convert to academy status and is working towards a conversion between September 2024 and January 2025. However, the school is not obligated to become an academy until the contract between the multi academy trust and the Department for Education (known as the Funding Agreement) is signed.

The academy trust will not sign the Funding Agreement until parents and carers of pupils at the school, staff at the school, and, where appropriate, pupils themselves have had the opportunity to comment on the proposals. We have written to all parents and carers and have also invited them to a meeting on **Thursday February 29th at 2.30pm at Clifton Hill School** to learn more about the proposals to become an academy, or to comment on the proposals. We have also planned meetings with staff, and will be keeping pupils informed throughout the process.

Any comments or representations which are made about the proposals will be considered by the governing body before it takes the final decision to convert to academy status. Details of how to provide comments and representations are set out below.

The governing body will not vote to proceed with academy conversion unless they are content that conversion would be in the best interests of the school, taking account of all of the legal and practical ramifications.

What is an academy?

An academy is essentially an independent school which is funded by the state. It is independent of the local authority and receives its funding direct from central government.

We are proposing to become an academy as part of the Weydon Multi Academy Trust (or WMAT). This means that we will be part of an academy group comprising The Ridgeway School, The Abbey School, The Park School, Farnham Heath End, Weydon School, Woolmer Hill School, Rodborough School, Crondall Primary School and Brooklands School.

What are the benefits of being an academy?

In the school's opinion the benefits are numerous:

- academies are independent of local authority control – this means that academies have more freedom about how they conduct themselves
- academies receive their funding direct from central government – this means that academies receive more funding because none is retained by the local authority for the provision of central services

- academies have more freedom over the curriculum taught – this means that academies do not need to teach parts of the National Curriculum which they do not consider appropriate for their pupils
- academies can set their own pay and conditions of service for their staff – academies have the freedom to alter the pay and conditions of their staff (subject to normal employment law protections for staff) and so can provide staff with better pay and conditions than previously
- academies have more freedom to undertake innovative projects – academies are companies and so have more freedom to undertake innovative projects, such as setting up and utilising trading subsidiaries.

Are there any disadvantages to becoming an academy?

WMAT will be directly liable for matters such as insurance, employment liabilities, pensions, health and safety and, property maintenance. However, as mentioned above, academies receive more funding from central government to help them meet these additional costs, and in any event, the WMAT already deals with these matters for the schools it supports, including The Ridgeway, The Park and the Abbey which are all Special Schools.

Once the school has converted, there is currently no route to revert back to being a maintained school under local authority control – academy conversion is a permanent change.

If the school was underperforming in the future, the Secretary of State may have the power to force the school (as an academy) to transfer to a different academy trust. However, in those circumstances, it is likely that the Secretary of State would have the power to intervene even if the school remained a local authority maintained school.

Will the admissions arrangements change?

As a local authority maintained school Clifton Hill's admissions arrangements are set by the local authority, and the local authority also decides which pupils should be offered places at the school. As an academy, WMAT will work with the local authority to put in place admission arrangements, and decide which pupils should be offered places in accordance with those arrangements. The academy will still be bound by the national School Admissions Code, and School Admission Appeals Code.

Will staff leave?

If the school converts to an academy, all staff currently employed by the school/local authority will automatically transfer to the new academy on their current pay and conditions. Although the academy will have more freedom to amend those pay and conditions in the future, the governing body does not intend to take such a step in the foreseeable future and in any event, any change to pay and conditions would need to be consulted upon with staff representatives.

Will Clifton Hill School change?

We do not intend to change Clifton Hill School except in ways which we think will improve the school even more. For students, it is unlikely that they will see much, if any, change in their day to day school lives.

Academies do have the power to vary their curriculums and vary the length of the school day, however, it is not intended to take any such steps at this stage and would engage with parents/carers, staff and children if we did ever intend to make such changes in the future.

How can I find out more?

A meeting will be held at the school on Thursday 29th February at 2.30pm at the Clifton Hill School. We would encourage you to attend if you have any questions, or simply want to learn more.

There is also more information about academies on the DfE website:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/academies>

If you can't find the answer to your question here, or on the DfE website, and cannot attend the meeting on Thursday 29th February, please email info@clifton-hill.surrey.sch.uk who will try to assist you.

How can I make representations?

To respond to this consultation on whether the conversion of the school to academy status should take place:

Representations can be made in writing to:

Chair of Governors, Clifton Hill School

Or by email to:

Chair of Governors Ann Corrigan or Headteacher Lucy Wijsveld

c/o Clifton Hill School info@clifton-hill.surrey.sch.uk

The closing date for representations to be made is Friday 15th March 2024