13th September 2017

Dear Parents,

**Re: Walton Oak School’s intention to seek to join a Multi Academy Trust**

There has been much said in the press over the past several years about school academies, including the government’s wish for all schools to ultimately convert to academy status. Whilst this is currently not a legal requirement, for a number of reasons, the governors of Walton Oak have decided that we should now seek to join a Multi Academy Trust (MAT).

**What is a MAT?**

A MAT is a group of schools, led by a ‘trust board’ of governors. All MATs operate in slightly different ways, but generally, the trust board is made up of experienced school governors, includes a chief financial officer for the trust and is headed up by a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or Executive Headteacher. This trust board becomes the employer of all members of staff in the school (rather than Surrey County Council), and the school becomes accountable to the trust board for its outcomes. Instead of our school funding coming from Surrey County Council, it comes directly from the Department for Education (DfE). Effectively, this means that the school is no longer under Surrey County Council control, though some services, such as Special Educational Needs and Surrey Children’s Services remain unchanged.

**What would this mean for Walton Oak?**

If we were to join a MAT, very little would obviously change initially. The staff would remain the same, and we are committed to looking for a MAT that would allow us to retain our personal and unique character. However, we believe there are multiple benefits to joining a MAT at this time, including the following:

* School to school support for developing good practice will be offered by the MAT, from practitioners with current, practical experience of the challenges faced in education today.
* The MAT has the resources to source the best and most cost effective training and support structures, rather than being committed to what the county has to offer.
* In times of need, for example if the school has staffing shortages, expertise can be shared across the MAT.
* The school does not need to follow the National Curriculum (though we would still need to take part in KS1 and KS2 national tests).
* Staff are offered better career development within the MAT, leading to better recruitment and retention of top teachers and support staff.

**What are we looking for in a MAT?**

The governors and SLT have considered what is important to Walton Oak in seeking a good fit. We are looking for a MAT that will meet the following criteria:

* Walton Oak retains its unique ethos and values, including its branding and uniform.
* The school retains a high degree of autonomy in its day to day running
* Other schools within the MAT are geographically close
* Our governing body is directly represented on the trust board
* We remain a two form entry school (with the current bulge years in years 1 and 2 working their way through untouched)
* Our physical environment, including our large grounds, remain the same
* We retain our specialist music, PE and Forest School teachers

**What Happens Next?**

At this point, the governors are having initial discussions with a few shortlisted MATs to help us decide which may be the best fit. Assuming we have found a suitable fit and wish to proceed, we must apply to the DfE for permission to do so and then a period of formal consultation with staff and parents will begin. Then governors from Walton Oak and from the trust board will undertake an intensive due diligence exercise to unpick all the details before proceeding any further. All being well, the school then converts to academy status and joins the MAT.

**How can you help/find out more?**

Just as governors have had the opportunity to discuss what we want from this potential move, we are keen to hear your views. At this point, this is not a formal consultation, but nevertheless, your views at this stage are important to us.

Some further information can be found at the following sites. There are links to these sites on our website.

<http://parentapps.co.uk/benefits-joining-multi-academy-trust/>

<http://www.uhy-uk.com/wp-content/uploads/Multi-academy-trusts-explained-our-review-and-insights.pdf>

To give your thoughts, and to find out more, I would like to invite you to an open meeting in the school hall on **Wednesday 27th September at 6:45pm**. Please fill out and return the form below or call or email the school office to indicate if you wish to attend the meeting and how many seats you require. Alternatively, feel free to give your views in writing to me at the school. Please note, this meeting is for **parents only**; no children may attend.

Yours sincerely,

Mandy Watts

Head teacher

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­­­­­­­­­­I would like to attend the open meeting in the school hall on Wednesday 27th September at 6:45pm

I require \_\_\_\_\_\_ seats.

Name of child/children:

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_