



# Riverbridge School

## **Proposal to Convert to Academy Status by Joining the Lumen Learning Trust**

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

#### **1. What is an academy?**

An academy is a state-funded school, independent of the Local Authority, which is required to follow the same regulations and serve its community in the same way as other state-funded schools. They are funded directly by the Department for Education rather than the Local Authority.

#### **2. What is a Multi Academy Trust?**

This is a group of academies operating under an overall governance structure. Schools are now encouraged by the Department for Education to join a multi academy trust; it is unlikely nowadays for any school to be accepted as a stand-alone academy.

#### **3. What changes will children and parents see?**

Very few. The school will continue to be called Riverbridge Primary School; there will be no change to the uniform; the teachers and support staff would transfer across; and most importantly the ethos, character and principles of our school will stay the same. We can see this with both Echelford and Saxon, which are both individual schools, despite being members of the same academy trust.

#### **4. Why don't we just appoint our own Headteacher without joining an academy trust?**

Recruitment for teachers is exceptionally challenging (especially in Spelthorne) and this situation is even more acute when it comes to recruiting headteachers. On average, every primary headship has to be advertised at least three times and the most applications received over the course of those three adverts is just one. Seemingly, senior school leaders simply don't want to take on the traditional headteacher role. This is not the case, however, in the context of multi academy trusts where the additional role of Executive Principal (or its equivalent) offers another level of support and accountability. In addition, when recruiting our own head, we have to take on board the lead-in time; to appoint for September we would need to be advertising now. Should we be successful, we then have the possible issue of a new headteacher wanting to do things 'their' way and the added pressure this could bring to staff, which could then lead to yet more instability. Mrs. McCarthy, Mrs. Tarrant and the staff team have brought about positive changes quickly and we would like to see the momentum of these changes continuing in order to secure the best outcome for the children.

#### **5. What will happen to Mrs. McCarthy, Mrs Tarrant and the leadership team?**

Mrs. McCarthy and the leadership team will still be leading Riverbridge, and she will continue to play a significant leadership role for the foreseeable future. However, titles may change and some of the existing team members may take on additional or different responsibilities. Mrs Tarrant loves Riverbridge, but she is needed full-time in her other school. From the Spring term, Mrs Tarrant has reduced to one day per week at Riverbridge, and over time this will reduce

further. However, Mrs Tarrant and Mrs McCarthy, as local champions of education, work together on a variety of projects, and further collaboration amongst all of the schools is envisaged.

## **6. What does academy status mean for staff?**

All current staff would transfer to the academy under TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment) regulations, on their current pay and conditions.

## **7. What is actually involved in joining an academy trust?**

The first steps are to fill in an application to convert, and the process takes approximately five months. The school's finances and performance are considered by the Department for Education. The school needs to ensure smooth processes for the transfer of staff, and any lettings contracts we hold are all transferred over to the multi academy trust.

## **8. Will governance of the school change?**

Yes. The existing Governing Body would be dissolved and reconstituted with some of the same members to form a Local Governing Body. The Chair of each Local Governing Body of every school in the Trust is, by virtue of the role, automatically a Director of the Trust. In this way each school can feel they are equal partners in the strategic direction of the school. The Department for Education states: "*the principles of governance are the same in academies as in maintained schools, but the governing body has greater autonomy. Academies are required to have at least two parent governors*"

## **9. How is the provision monitored if the Local Authority isn't involved?**

The Local Authority does not automatically have a monitoring role with Lumen Learning Trust schools, because it is down to the leadership team and each school's Local Governing Body to make sure the quality of provision is right for our children. That being said, Lumen Learning Trust considers itself to work in partnership with the Local Authority and commissions Local Authority colleagues to offer support in the monitoring arrangements of the schools. Academies are monitored by the Department for Education and are also subject to Ofsted inspections. In addition, we will continue to be a member of the Spelthorne Schools Together confederation, benefitting from the events on offer and the local shared knowledge.

## **10. My child is on the SEN register – what will happen to their extra funding?**

Nothing changes – the responsibilities of an academy towards children with special needs remain the same as schools which are not academies.

## **11. My child is eligible for Free School meals – will this change?**

Nothing changes – Free School Meals will still be provided for those children who are eligible.

## **12. Are we confident Riverbridge's results won't suffer further?**

Both the governing body and the school leadership team believe this change is the right move for Riverbridge and is actually the best option to secure the successful future of all of our pupils.

## **13. Will Breakfast and After School Clubs still operate?**

Yes. Whilst the provision of these may change over time in accordance with the needs of the school, they will not change as a direct result of conversion to academy status.

#### **14. Will the Admissions Policy change?**

No. Academies must abide by the Admissions Code and take part in the co-ordination of place planning with the Local Authority. As a school which has never operated a selection process as part of its admissions procedures we would not be allowed to introduce it once we are an academy.

#### **15. If I have a complaint who will deal with it?**

Just as is the case now, initially complaints will be dealt with by the most relevant staff, then the leadership team then the governors. When it comes to complaints, the Local Authority only offer guidance and where necessary, mediation; governors are ultimately responsible for the conduct of staff etc. This will not change.

#### **16. Will there be any additional costs to us as parents as a result of the school becoming an academy?**

No. The charges that will be made to parents will be the same as charges that would be made if the school were not an academy.

#### **17. What are the benefits to becoming an academy?**

The government says academies enjoy more freedoms e.g.

- The ability to set their own pay and conditions for staff
- Greater control of their budget
- Greater flexibility with the curriculum
- Greater opportunities for formal collaboration with other public and private organisations
- Some additional income

In addition, the governors believe the benefits include:

- Continuity and stability for staff and pupils
- The opportunity to become part of a sponsor school means Riverbridge can continue to benefit from the outstanding leadership and guidance provided by the Lumen Learning Trust
- That staff are more likely to stay with Riverbridge. Conversely, if a new headteacher were sought, then higher staff turnover is more likely.

#### **18. What is an academy sponsor?**

An academy sponsor is an academy which takes on the responsibility of another school. With the additional responsibility comes additional funding and opportunities for staff which in turn are of obvious benefit to our children. Riverbridge will initially be the beneficiary of this, but eventually Riverbridge staff will be part of that overall sponsor role and be able to share their own learning and expertise.

### **19. Thinking ahead, if the Trust goes on to sponsor another school, would our teachers move or be seconded, or would teachers from the other school come to Riverbridge?**

In this situation Riverbridge teachers may be offered opportunities to support team members from the other school through modelling of teaching, lesson planning and coaching. Nothing that could compromise Riverbridge's children's learning needs would be allowed to happen.

### **20. What happens if we don't become an academy?**

Given the shrinking Local Authority control and budget, underpinned by the Government agenda of every school becoming an academy by 2020, we feel our school could become isolated and/or be forced to join another academy group which may not fit as well with our ethos as the Lumen Learning Trust. We are in a position at this point to **choose** and be proactive about our securing our future.

### **21. What other options have been considered?**

The governors considered other local and national multi-academy trusts. These included several local secondary school academies, but it was felt that primary schools do better when linked with other primary schools and that their needs and requirements can get lost with the larger secondary school organisations.

Other primary multi-academy trusts were also considered, but none of them were able to compete with the fact that we already have an excellent working relationship with the Lumen Learning Trust, and retain a focus on our local community. We share the same expectations and values for our children, and are already benefiting from the strong leadership of Mrs McCarthy and other members of the Lumen Learning Trust team.

### **22. Why would the Lumen Learning Trust wish to take on Riverbridge?**

First of all, individuals from the Lumen Learning Trust board of directors have expressed how impressed they are with Riverbridge as a school and want to continue working with us. The Lumen Learning Trust is a local multi academy trust, set up explicitly, on the request of the Department for Education, to support local schools. They take pride in their partnership work with local schools and are keen champions for Spelthorne children across Surrey in many different contexts. Riverbridge fits into their criteria of being a local primary school which would benefit from their guidance and their values chime very much with ours. As a sponsoring Trust, Lumen Learning is expected to take on more schools over the next few years; consequently they feel this is a natural development of our current successful relationship. Mrs McCarthy feels that Riverbridge is a great school that will fully benefit from the input the Lumen Learning Trust can give and, in time, will also be a centre of excellence which could offer support to other local schools.

### **23. Why didn't you decide to join the Bourne Academy as this includes Matthew Arnold School?**

We seriously considered the Bourne Academy as an option for this very reason. However, as it is primarily an academy for secondary education, we didn't feel sure that this would give our school the best chance of holding onto its own values and priorities. It would also mean a complete change of leadership, which did not fit with our top priority.

## **24. Will Riverbridge have a “Head of School”?**

The Lumen Learning Trust prefers its schools to have Headteachers, rather than Heads of School. Echelford and Saxon both have Headteachers, and in time, Riverbridge will follow this model. However, that will take time to come into effect. Mrs McCarthy will continue to have a very strong presence as Executive Principal going into the next academic year.

## **25. What is the difference between a Headteacher and a Head of School?**

There is no definitive answer to this, but a Head of School is likely to have a slightly lower status than a Headteacher. The Head of School is somewhere between a deputy Headteacher and a Headteacher. The Head of School reports into the Executive Principal, who holds the majority of the decision-making power. This model tends to be used where schools within an academy chain all adhere to a common framework, guidelines, rules, uniform etc. A Headteacher will hold more autonomy, and it is this that will ensure Riverbridge is able to maintain its own identity whilst still benefitting from the cohesion of being part of an academy trust.

## **26. How does the Lumen Learning Trust function in terms of its business model?**

The Lumen Learning Trust is a charity. It is not run as a money-making venture. The ethos of the Trust is to ensure good quality education for local children. The directors and governors are all volunteers and operate in much the same way as the current governing body at Riverbridge. The school offers support to other schools and charges for this advice and support, thus generating income for the Trust. This income is put back into the funds available for the schools within the Trust.

## **27. How is the Lumen Learning Trust funded?**

Currently the funding for Riverbridge comes from the Department of Education to the Local Authority, i.e. Surrey County Council. The Local Authority takes a set percentage “top slice” of the funding to cover central costs and then gives the remainder to the school. With a Multi Academy Trust, the Department of Education gives the funding directly to the academy trust.

## **28. How do you distribute the money?**

The amount each school within the Trust receives is according to a set formula based on pupil numbers and certain other factors. Therefore, Echelford is allocated a set amount, as is Saxon and as would be Riverbridge. The Lumen Learning Trust allocates a percentage “top slice” for central services such as catering and administrative overheads and the remainder is awarded to each school. Thus, each school MUST be allocated its allocated share – it is not permissible for the Trust to take funding allocated to one school to be used in another. The central services are overseen by the Resources Committee, which is Chaired by Trust’s Finance Director and made up of the following:

- Identified Directors
- Representatives from each school’s local governing body (not the Chairs of Governors)
- School Business Manager from each school
- Headteacher from each school

- Executive Principal
- Finance Manager

### **29. How are the Lumen Learning Trust's finances monitored?**

All finances are audited by an externally-appointed firm of auditors to ensure legal compliance regarding expenditure as well as best value. The Accounts and a best value statement are published on the Trust's website.

### **30. How many schools will the Lumen Learning Trust take on?**

The Lumen Learning Trust is a sponsor school and therefore there is an expectation for it to sponsor other schools which require support. The Board of Directors are keen not to expand too fast, nor too much. They are also keen to ensure that the schools that they do take on "fit" in terms of values and approach. It is envisaged that the Lumen Learning Trust will expand to five schools in the next few years. This is not set in stone, but is desirable.

### **31. Does the Lumen Learning Trust have freedom of action to be competitive with salaries and benefits?**

Yes, one of the benefits of academy status is an amount of autonomy in terms of salaries. Other expenditure decisions are also in the gift of the Trust, such as catering and cleaning contracts, Human Resource support and any other peripheral service. For example, the Trust no longer receives its school meals from the Local Authority catering services, but instead have their own independent provider, a contract which offers an increase in quality and improved value for money.

### **32. How will children see the positive impact of joining the Lumen Learning Trust?**

Because Riverbridge will maintain its own identity, the changes to the children will not be overt. However, the impact should be evident in their achievement and attainment. They will see their teachers benefitting from the input of sharing of best practice, and they may appreciate being offered a choice at lunchtime!

### **33. How will you protect children from instability if this is likely to continue for the next couple of years?**

It is exactly for this sort of scenario that the governors are keen to pursue the option of joining the Lumen Learning Trust, i.e. to ensure continuity and stability by having Mrs McCarthy very much leading the school forward.

### **34. How will you keep the pace of change going if you can't recruit a head?**

The Trust will first of all look internally to fulfil any leadership requirements, and until a suitable Headteacher is in place, Mrs McCarthy will continue to have a very strong presence in the school.

### **35. Staff turnover has been a feature at Riverbridge over the last 12 months – will this be improved?**

As everyone will have noted from the press reports, teacher recruitment – particularly teachers with experience - is a significant challenge nationally, and especially in boroughs like

Spelthorne, which are very close to London boroughs who offer additional weighting to their salaries; this challenge therefore is not particular to Riverbridge.

Some of the turnover was expected as this often happens when a headteacher moves on. Our situation is also affected by the fact that our arrangements re the leadership of the school are interim. We believe by making a clear and definite decision about the future leadership we will be better placed to recruit.

**36. Will the OFSTED timetable remain in place?**

No, when a school converts to being an academy, OFSTED reset the timetable. The school has no say in this matter. Currently, OFSTED are due for a visit by October 2016. This deadline would no longer be in place and OFSTED would give the school a new timeframe (2 or 3 years) for a visit.

**37. Wouldn't it be better to have the OFSTED visit first and then convert?**

The governors are not able to see any advantage in waiting. The school's performance is improving, but there is no guarantee that an OFSTED visit in September/October would provide a "Good" rating. In the event that the school received another "Requires Improvement" rating, then the decision-making process regarding governance and leadership of the school going forward would be taken on by the Department for Education rather than the school leadership team and the governing body. The Local Authority is on board with the school's proposal to join the Lumen Learning Trust.

**38. Is 'Good' good enough – should the aim be to be outstanding?**

Yes, the school must aspire to be Outstanding, but Good is certainly a great first step!

**39. How will the school performance improve? How long will it take to get to Good?**

It is anticipated that the school's performance will improve as more initiatives are taken forward and those already implemented start become embedded. Riverbridge already has strong elements of Good practice in place. It is anticipated that this year's end of year results will be an improvement on last year's. No one has a crystal ball, but the tables below give some indication with how Echelford has improved. We have also included information about St Ignatius as the Lumen Learning Trust provided support and Mrs McCarthy took on the executive headship in an interim role from 2014 to 2015. These scores are set against Riverbridge scores, which we believe will improve in this year's cohort.

End of Key Stage 2 (Year 6) Level 4+ in Reading, Writing, Maths			
	<i>Echelford</i>	<i>St. Ignatius</i>	<i>Riverbridge</i>
<i>2012</i>	62%	51%	71%
<i>2013</i>	58%	70%	57%
<i>2014</i>	64%	74%	68%
<i>2015</i>	90%	91%	77%

% Expected Progress made from the end of KS1 to the end of KS2									
	<i>Echelford</i>			<i>St. Ignatius</i>			<i>Riverbridge</i>		
	<i>R</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>M</i>
2013	90%	70%	73%	85%	81%	78%	85%	83%	81%
2014	93%	96%	85%	92%	88%	84%	85%	98%	85%
2015	96%	98%	91%	97%	98%	91%	94%	97%	92%

**40. Previous decisions around amalgamation and the subsequent move from three bases to two etc. seem to have been made prior to parent consultation and some of the outcomes have dented parents' confidence – how will you address this?**

The decision around the initial amalgamation was a Local Authority decision, and the new governing body of the amalgamated school sought to change from three bases to two almost immediately. The process took a long time to gain approval, but the governors feel the move to two bases was the right one, and has paved the way for future cohesion across the school.

We hope that you feel more informed regarding this proposal and that your questions and concerns are being addressed. We aim to keep communication with stakeholders as a priority throughout.

**41. Single school academies have failed – what makes the Lumen Learning Trust different?**

The Lumen Learning Trust believes its strength comes from having a group of like-minded, local schools working in collaboration, and enjoying economies of scale in purchasing that become available by way of having academy status. The opportunities it can offer to staff wishing to further their careers in a safe and supportive environment can also assist with attracting good teaching staff.

**42. How will the Lumen Learning Trust prioritise between the 3 schools?**

Each school is an equal partner.

**43. Will the current governors remain?**

At the point of conversion, the current governing body at Riverbridge dissolves and a new Local Governing Body is set up. The Chair of Governors sits on the Board of Directors of the Lumen Learning Trust, and some of the other governors would sit on sub-committees such as the Resources Committee of the Trust. It is anticipated that the current governors would be members of the new Local Governing Body, but a formal process must be followed.

**44. Will the school accept sponsorship from private companies or religious entities?**



No, the Lumen Learning Trust does not seek or accept sponsorship from any private company or religious body. The Trust acts as a sponsor of other schools, which means they offer support to them.

#### **45. What do the children think?**

Most children are as yet unaware of the proposal, unless their parents have explained it to them. There will be more information for them in the event of a final decision. However, the governors have consulted with those children who are members of the School Council. Initially, they were taken aback and were concerned that they would have to get a new uniform and school logo. It was quickly explained to them that this would not be the case. They were pleased as they had heard that Echelford have more choice of school dinners and that Saxon were good at sport so they could help us with our sports. Overall, the children were very positive about working closer with other schools and some said they would like the school to be known as The Riverbridge Academy!

#### **46. What is "Plan B" if we our application to join the Lumen Learning Trust is refused by the Department of Health?**

Currently, the governors do not have a Plan B. At present, the governors are resolved to pursue the option of joining the Lumen Learning Trust, and the Trust's Board of Directors have voted to accept this application. Such is the strength of performance of the Lumen Learning Trust schools, it is unlikely that the Department for Education would reject the application given the current climate of encouraging schools to convert to academy status. The Department of Education has already been in contact with Mrs. McCarthy and will be meeting with her in the next week or so. In the event that the application were rejected, the governors would then give consideration to other options.

#### **47. What happens if half of the parents object to the proposal during the consultation period?**

The governors are currently consulting with a range of stakeholders. These include parents, staff, children (via School Council), the Local Authority, other local schools and the general wider community. The deadline for feedback is February 26<sup>th</sup> 2016. Once all the feedback has been collated, the governors will consider this feedback, take a view and then make a decision.

#### **48. If the Government changed what would happen?**

The current accepted thinking is that even with a change of government, it is unlikely that the academy agenda will change for the foreseeable future. However, as with any initiative set by the incumbent government, the governors know that this may change and would then act accordingly.