

Headteacher: Mr Ben Riggott

Parkside Community School
Boythorpe Avenue, Chesterfield
Derbyshire S40 2NS

Tel: 01246 273458 Fax: 01246 551361

Email: info@parkside.derbyshire.sch.uk

Web: www.parkside.derbyshire.sch.uk

BRI/JHO

9th May 2022

Dear Parents/Carers,

Consultation on a proposal for Parkside Community School to convert to Academy Status and join the Embark Federation Multi-Academy Trust.

Following our most recent letter on this subject in January, the DfE's Regional Advisory Board has given approval for Parkside Community School to be one of four Derbyshire Secondary schools to join the Embark Federation Multi-Academy Trust.

At a meeting of the Governing Body on Tuesday 3rd May, the Governors of Parkside Community School have resolved to consult with staff, parents/carers, students and other key stakeholders on the proposal to convert to academy status and join the Embark Federation Multi-Academy Trust.

The formal consultation period will run **from Monday 9th May until Friday 17th June.**

The proposal has been discussed thoroughly at Governing Body level. We have taken great care to explore a wide range of possible scenarios which could help to better ensure the ongoing provision of high quality education for all pupils who are part of Parkside Community School now and in the future.

The Governing Body have evaluated various options for the future of the school against the following criteria:

- Enhances our capacity to achieve our core purpose and achieve our organisational objectives within our established framework of values
- Supports accelerated school improvement
- Increases organisational efficiency
- Provides opportunities for formalised collaboration between schools within the local community and within reasonable geographical proximity
- Enhances leadership and developmental capacity
- Support financial stability, effective maintenance and development of the school's buildings and facilities
- Enables the school to maintain a high level of autonomy

We have chosen to fully explore the possibility of joining Embark as their core beliefs of Family, Integrity, Teamwork and Success are very closely aligned to our values and ethos. They are a Derbyshire based, medium-sized Trust who help schools to retain their unique identities whilst providing the benefits of partnership. Children and young people are at the heart of Embark's work. Embark's shared vision is to create 'stand out schools at the heart of their communities'. Currently, Embark's schools are Primary, Infant and Junior Schools, including our neighbour William Rhodes Primary School. The detailed proposal being considered is for Parkside Community School to join Embark

alongside three other strong Derbyshire Secondary schools. The Governing Body are excited by the potential to be at the heart of the development of an even stronger group of schools working together for the good of our children.

In joining a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT), the over-riding concern of governors is to ensure that our school continues to provide the best possible standard of education and care for our children. With this in mind, we are keen to hear your views on the proposal being considered.

Key points of joining this Multi-Academy Trust:

- Our school will retain its character and will continue to look, feel and be the same as it is now with the same school name, school times, holiday pattern, uniform and admission policy. Most of the changes will be unseen and will not affect the day to day running of the school.
- Schools retain an individual headteacher, rather than a 'principle' or an 'executive headteacher'; with the headteacher leading the school on a day to day basis alongside the school's governors, whilst receiving support and challenge from the MAT to ensure the best provision for our children.
- The joining of a MAT means funding for running our school comes directly to us, meaning we have more control over how it is spent. It will also mean some services can be shared across the schools which will help them be more efficient and make sure that funding is focused on teaching, learning and support for children and young people.

Academy status is becoming more common. Over 70% of secondary schools now belong to a trust and many local authorities have encouraged and supported schools to organise themselves within groups, such as federations or MATs. The recent government white paper has also highlighted the national ambition for all schools to be part of a MAT by 2030 at the latest. As their budgets have decreased, local authorities are altering the services they make available to schools.

There are 47 secondary schools in Derbyshire who were once all maintained by the local authority. A significant number of these Derbyshire secondary schools have already chosen to leave the local authority and become academies. This has severely impacted on local authority finances and this, in turn, has affected the quality and range of support the local authority is able to provide to its schools. There is likely to be 8 local authority maintained secondary schools left in Derbyshire by this time next year. At the time of writing this letter, there are 12 maintained secondary schools in Derbyshire. Of our 4 closest partner Primary Schools, one is an Embark school; the other three are currently Derbyshire County Council maintained schools. Whilst we are in active dialogue with other leaders and governors, do not know with certainty what other schools' Governing Bodies are considering. They are, however, likely to be monitoring the situation carefully and will be planning in the best interests of their schools.

Our local authority (Derbyshire County Council or 'DCC') has made it clear that it expects all schools to consider the pros and cons of joining any Trust. Becoming an academy means removing the school from the control of the local authority. The decision to consider changing our status has not been taken lightly and the governing body have spent a long time looking at the possible advantages and disadvantages of such a move.

Advantages of joining a MAT:

- Our experience suggests working together as a group of schools helps to raise standards and improve our practice.
- Schools who are part of a MAT can work together to help recruit and retain the best staff and give staff excellent development and career opportunities. Shared professional development can more easily be arranged and afforded.
- School leaders and teachers can share thinking and planning, thus helping to spread expertise.
- Governors and trustees can work more strategically, especially during challenging times.
- Groups of schools can find it easier to find and fund specialist expertise (both specialist teachers and specialists in areas such as exams, data analysis, finance, health and safety).



- We will be able to create and share staffing roles that operate across the MAT that would not have been possible in any one individual school
- The MAT structure allows headteachers to focus more on teaching and learning as the business-side of the role becomes more coordinated across the MAT.
- Economies of scale can be achieved by MATs and help schools to provide more within the limitations of annual budgets.
- Shared professional development can more easily be arranged and afforded.

The total amount of money a school has is affected by the proportion of the school's budget removed by the local authority at source. This is often referred to as 'top slicing'. Derbyshire top slice in the region of 5-9% of schools' budgets and schools are then required to pay for essential services including HR, finance and legal support. Maintained schools are encouraged to buy these services from the local authority. The local authority's top slicing from schools helps to pay for local authority salaries and the upkeep of local authority buildings such as County Hall in Matlock. Embark top slices 5% but this then includes services for schools such as HR, finance and school improvement. More details about the services provided by Embark as part of their central offer via the top-sliced 5% of schools' budgets can be found here www.embarkfederation.com/our-central-offer/

Governors believe that academy status within a carefully chosen MAT could be the best way to support the school in continuing to develop and improve; enhancing teaching and learning, whilst retaining the values and ethos of our school. The opportunities created and benefits of four good Secondary Schools working more closely together and being able to shape school improvement within an effective, supportive and community-focussed MAT for children and young people across Derbyshire could be too good an opportunity to miss.

Possible Disadvantages of Joining a MAT:

- For this to be successful it requires a school to join a MAT which contains schools who have a similar vision and values for the future and a MAT with these values at its core. A school opting to join a MAT with different values and a different approach to theirs would result in significant changes for the school, its staff and its students.
- Joining a pre-existing MAT may bring financial savings, but this should not be assumed and should not be the reason for a school joining. A proportion of each school's budget is 'top-sliced' by the MAT, in order to fund the shared services/support for all schools within the MAT. The amount of 'top slice' varies from MAT to MAT, but is likely to be in the region of 5-10% of each school's annual budget. As outlined above, Embark top-slice 5%.
- There are costs associated with joining a MAT (costs linked to due diligence checks, legal advice etc.). The DfE provide £25,000 to help cover the costs linked to start-up. The use of this financial support varies between MATs..
- Some MATs will dictate how a school looks and acts, as well as how that school can liaise with other schools from outside of the MAT. This would impact negatively on some of the existing partnerships a school may have.
- If a school begins to underperform, either financially or in terms of student outcomes/Ofsted grading, control of the school can be transferred centrally. This can have a significant impact on local governance.
- Once part of a MAT it is extremely difficult for a school to withdraw from this formal partnership.
- There could be significant upheaval for the school, depending on the type of MAT chosen, as new governance and leadership structures are adopted.

What we would like you to do

We would like to know what you think of our plans, so we invite you to take part in our public consultation which will run between Tuesday 3rd May and Friday 17th June.

We will be holding a consultation day at school which will give you the opportunity to find out more about the proposed trust and ask any questions that you may have, as outlined below.

Thursday 19th May

9:00 – 10:00am – Informal coffee morning to be held at Parkside Community School with headteacher and senior leaders, and the trust leader and trustee representatives from Embark.

10:40 – 11:40am – Meeting with members of Parkside Parliament, the headteacher and the Embark trust leader and representatives.

3:30 – 4:30pm – Staff meeting to be held at Parkside Community School with headteacher/senior leaders, and the trust leader and trustee representatives from Embark, to discuss the proposal and answer questions.

5.30pm – 6.30pm – Parents'/Carers' meeting held at Parkside Community School for parents to come and find out more about the proposal and ask any questions of the headteacher, senior leaders, trust leader and trustee representatives from Embark.

Please also read the Frequently Asked Questions attached with this letter.

Please send any questions or views, positive or negative, to consultation@parkside.derbyshire.sch.uk or alternatively you may write into the school.

Governors will carefully review all of the feedback received during consultation, before deciding whether or not to proceed with the proposed changes.

Yours sincerely

Ben Riggott
Headteacher

Jean Horton
Chair of Governors

