



# **Topcliffe CofE VC Primary School**

## **A Public Consultation**

Main points arising from the Public Consultation on  
the proposal to convert the school to  
academy status

24<sup>th</sup> April 2017 to 26<sup>th</sup> May 2017

## **Executive Summary**

### **Consultation Process**

- The proposal was to convert Topcliffe Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School to academy status and join Elevate Multi Academy Trust on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2017.
- The consultation was jointly undertaken by the Governing Body of the school and the proposed sponsor, Elevate Multi Academy Trust and took place between 24<sup>th</sup> April 2017 and 26<sup>th</sup> May 2017.
- Consultation leaflets, including a list of 'Frequently Asked Questions', were distributed to parents/carers, staff, local schools and nurseries and partner organisations. The leaflet issued contained a form for respondents to submit comments.
- Enquiries were encouraged to be raised with the school via reception, via email or by post.
- A page on the school's website, with a feedback page, was set up outlining the proposal for the conversion to Academy Status, as well as a downloadable version of the consultation leaflet.
- Briefing sessions/meetings were held with parents/carers and staff.
- A public drop-in session was arranged for specific queries to be raised.
- Formal TUPE meetings, led by the local authority, were held on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2017 with staff at the school which were also attended by representatives of Trade Unions and Professional Associations.
- The Sponsor, Elevate Multi Academy Trust, advised that some 'measures' were being declared.

### **FEEDBACK**

- 83% of respondents were in favour of the proposed conversion to academy status.

### **NEXT STEPS**

- There will be public access to the report on the consultation in June 2017 via the 'Academy Consultation' page of the school's website, but there will be no public access to the individual responses received as they are covered by the Data Protection Act.
- The Department for Education will consider the outcomes of the consultation as part of the Funding Agreement sign-off process for the proposed academy conversion of Topcliffe CofE VC Primary School.

## **Section 1**

### **1.1 Introduction and background**

Topcliffe is a 1FE Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School in Thirsk, North Yorkshire (DfE No. 815/3120) with 107 pupils on roll. The school was awarded Good by Ofsted following an inspection in January 2017. The school also achieved an Outstanding rating following a SIAMS inspection in October 2016. In addition, Topcliffe is part of The North Star Teaching School Alliance, which is a collaboration of 70 primary schools in North Yorkshire.

Much has been in the news over recent months about academisation and the government's recent 'U-turn' on forcing all schools to become one. However, it is clear that an academised system is still very much the direction the government wishes schools to take. With this in mind, Topcliffe's Governing Body have been presented with an opportunity that we believe could further develop the high standards and special ethos our children and staff currently enjoy and thrive in. Specifically, we have been invited to join a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) that is in the process of being set up.

The working title of the MAT is Elevate Multi Academy Trust and the foundation partners will be Meadowside Primary School and Aspin Primary School (which are both in Knaresborough and which are both classed as Outstanding schools by Ofsted), alongside Knayton Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School (which is a similar size to Topcliffe and another Church of England school). The intended governance structure of the proposed MAT will reflect its collaborative arrangement between Church and non-Church academies and we would work with the York Diocesan Board of Education to ensure that Topcliffe's Church of England foundation would be protected in such arrangements.

Prior to submitting a request into the Department for Education to seek permission to convert, consent was sought and given by the York Diocesan Board of Education (YDBE).

### **1.2 About Elevate Multi Academy Trust**

Changing our school's status from local authority maintained schools to an academy will give us many of the freedoms we deserve as mature and successful organisations. At the heart of Elevate Multi Academy Trust's ethos is the desire to work in collaboration with each other and other schools, and each school will still be involved in this, whilst each keeping its own distinctive ethos.

We believe strongly that all children have the right to a high-quality, stimulating education, and it is our moral duty to provide this, ensuring that under the new more stringent assessment regime that now exists, that children 'keep up' in their education, and that children, parents and the school all have their own role to play.

Through working together, we can use our money wisely to put more money into teaching and learning. Our key purpose is to provide education for primary-aged children, and Elevate will be a Primary Academy Trust. The Trust has developed a

highly-skilled workforce, and all schools are experienced in recognising that its staff has to have a stimulating and supportive workplace as much as the children do.

### **1.3 Ethos of Elevate Multi Academy Trust**

Elevate's mission is 'All achieve together', with well-developed strategic aims to:

- Deliver educational excellence to support every child to thrive and succeed;
- Provide a broad, holistic range of learning opportunities for pupils to allow them to develop their moral, spiritual, cultural and social understanding;
- Forge strong, meaningful partnerships rooted in a shared commitment to improving and supporting schools and the communities they serve;
- Champion a culture of continual professional development that thrives on positive challenge;
- Provide a high-quality fully inclusive school for the local community;
- Be a school which would follow the National Curriculum and give students the best chances of achieving their potential and competing in the local and wider jobs market;
- Provide personalised learning in order to develop young people for transition to secondary education and onwards into the world of work;
- Develop very close links with the local community so that mentoring and experience opportunities would be available for all our students.

At Elevate Multi Academy Trust we are committed to improving the life chances of all children. Where we have the capacity to make a difference, we are morally bound to do so. Members of the Trust strive together for excellence in partnership, so that our children, staff and Academy communities benefit from excellent teaching, learning and leadership.

### **1.4 Building on firm foundations**

At the time of our last inspection, Topcliffe was judged 'Good'. We have continued to work hard since that inspection to secure high attainment and progress for children in our school. Despite the recent changes to assessment, our school has attainment which exceeds both local and national averages.

We are part of the North Star Teaching Schools Alliance, which has over seventy schools involved in it. This allows for close collaboration and provides training and development for staff.

Our school has innovative and carefully planned curriculums, appropriate to our pupils. As an academy we will be free to develop our curriculum without being tied to the National Curriculum. Our school will continue to teach the National Curriculum, and pupils will be tested in line with maintained schools (e.g. SATs at Y2 and Y6). We strive to be a high-performing school that is well placed to meet the needs of children in the 21st Century.

Like the school, the academy would be designated with a Church of England religious character and the YDBE would remain the relevant religious authority. We

would work closely with the YDBE to ensure that the Church of England foundation of Topcliffe would be preserved and developed in the new structure. For example:

- Religious education will continue to be taught as previously;
- The daily act of Collective Worship will continue to be provided in accordance with the trust deed/Anglican tradition;
- The special provisions relating to the appointment of staff at a Voluntary Controlled school will continue to apply in relation to academy staff;
- The academy will continue to be inspected in the same manner under the SIAMS framework. (SIAMS stands for Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools and provides a process for evaluating the extent to which church schools and academies are distinctively and recognisably Christian institutions);
- The school land (except the playing fields) will be held on trust by Church site trustees; and
- In considering any changes to the admissions arrangements, Elevate would also need to have regard to the YDBE's guidance and advice.

The school name will change slightly post conversion, to Topcliffe CofE Academy.

### **1.5 Purpose and process for the consultation**

The consultation set out to assess public opinion in relation to the proposed conversion of Topcliffe to academy status. The consultation comprised a marketing campaign and quantitative research based upon:

- A consultation period, of five term-time weeks, between 24<sup>th</sup> April 2017 and 26<sup>th</sup> May 2017.
- Consultation leaflets, including a list of 'Frequently Asked Questions', distributed to parents/carers, staff, local schools and nurseries and partner organisations. The leaflet issued contained a form for respondents to submit comments. *See Appendix A for full stakeholder list.*
- Communications with parents and the community during the consultation process notifying them of the arrangements.
- Information was made available on the school's website ([www.topcliffe.n-yorks.sch.uk/school-information/mat-information/](http://www.topcliffe.n-yorks.sch.uk/school-information/mat-information/)) setting out the background to the proposed conversion to academy status, a feedback page and a downloadable version of the consultation leaflet - *See Appendix B for the details shown on the website and Appendix C for the consultation questions.*
- A meeting was made available for parents/carers and the public at the school on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2017 with 4 parents in attendance together with representation from the Headteacher, School Governors, YDBE and representatives of Elevate MAT.

- A staff meeting was held at the school on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2017, attended by 12 teaching and support staff (inc. staff from the onsite Nursery), along with members and representatives from Trade Unions (ATL, NUT and Unison), North Yorkshire County Council, the Headteacher, School Governors and representatives of Elevate MAT.
- A 'drop-in session' was held on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2017 for any stakeholder to ask questions, with 2 parents in attendance together with representation from the Headteacher, School Governors, YDBE and representatives of Elevate MAT.

## Section 2

### 2.1 Overall analysis of responses

In addition to comments received from the public and staff meetings, 12 formal responses were received via the online and paper surveys.

Respondents were asked to indicate which of the following categories applied to them:

Answer Choices	Responses	
A parent/carer	67%	8
A member of staff	25%	3
A local resident	0%	0
Other (please specify)	8%	1
<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>12</b>

In response to the key question of ***'Do you agree that the school should become an Academy and enter into a Funding Agreement\* with the Secretary of State?'***

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	83%	10
No	17%	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>12</b>

Supporting Note: \* *The funding agreement is the contract every converting school must sign with the Secretary of State for Education. It's the formal consent to allow the school to convert and it provides the operating framework for the school, including the commitment to ongoing funding. We are therefore seeking your feedback on whether you support the conversion, and if so, for you to respond accordingly above.*

### 2.2 Sample comments from respondents who agreed that the school should become an Academy

- This offers a wonderful opportunity to share resources and training for both children and staff. This in turn can even result in a wider range of after school clubs and provisions of schools located nearby, i.e. Knayton with Topcliffe.
- If the governors wish to make the case more compelling then they should explain why Elevate was a better choice than other MATs and the status quo. It is hard to judge without that context.
- Seamless process transitioning the Toddler Group/Pre-School. Reception to 11 years. Breakfast and Homework groups. More sport after school. Maximum communal dining.

### **2.3 Sample comments from respondents who disagreed that the school should become an Academy**

- There is no evidence that Academies improve outcomes for children. I estimate there would be around 900 children in this MAT - to be financially secure would need thousands more. If this is to go ahead the Headteacher and Governors would need to be very strong in order to stand up for our children. We do not want to be a mini-Meadowside and they should ensure they are not moulded by Mr Ashley and his followers. Uniform should not be changed unless the MAT are going to fund this for every child. Funding should go to school improvement/children, not for the executive leaders. Above all keep our children's education and love of learning at the heart of everything. Education is about them - not about the power of a few!
- I think it's a terrible idea. I don't support academy schools. The information you have given is a very one sided view. I'm not sure we have a choice or say in what will happen?? I worry very much about what the curriculum will be like and how we can have input if we don't like how the school is run.
- Note: A separate letter and a list of questions were also received from a parent highlighting some concerns. Most of these questions were raised by the parent at the parents' meeting. The parent also met with the Headteacher, subsequent to the consultation meetings, and expressed their broad support for the conversion.

### **2.4 Sample questions raised at the parents and community meeting**

- What due diligence did the school undertake on Elevate?
  - Being part of the North Star Teaching Alliance, Topcliffe has worked very closely with the founding schools of Elevate MAT and continuously benefit from their support.
  - Topcliffe's Headteacher has been involved in the Steering Group managing the set-up of Elevate and has been involved in defining the strategy and approach of the MAT.
- What credentials does Nigel Ashley have to be CEO of the MAT?
  - Nigel has been a Headteacher of two 'Outstanding' primary schools; he leads the North Star Teaching School Alliance of 70 schools; he has the education values to deliver outstanding education; he has the support of the Trust's key supporters including the Dioceses of York and Leeds; and is endorsed by the Regional Schools Commissioner for North of England.
- Is the conversion going to impact on the day to day running of the school?
  - There will be continued professional development for staff. They won't be taken away to another school.
  - Headteachers spread across more than one school within the Trust may be necessary as a result of financial constraints.

- Will staff be expected to work longer hours?
  - As the Trust will not be adopting the Standard Teachers Pay & Conditions Document, staff will be rewarded for any additional or exceptional work undertaken.
- Is the conversion a 'done deal'?
  - Following the consultation process, the Governing Body will consider the outcomes and decide whether to resolve to continue to pursue academy status, or not.
  - The outcomes of the consultation process will also be issued to the Department for Education. It will ultimately be a decision for the Secretary of State to decide whether the school converts.
- What is the Diocese's view?
  - The YDBE will support and accommodate a school's needs as long as the school will be effectively supported by the Trust.
- Who appoints the Trust's Members and Trustees?
  - The Members are appointed by the Dioceses of York and Leeds, and from recommendations from colleagues as long as they have the relevant skills to support and challenge the Trustees.
  - The Trustees are appointed by the Members. Equally, they are appointed on the basis of the breadth of their skills and competencies.
  - At school level, the Local Governing Body (LGB) will have delegated authority on certain matters as defined in the Trust's Scheme of Delegation.
  - The LGB will have 'earned autonomy' depending on its performance and Ofsted rating.

### ***2.5 Sample questions raised at the staff meeting***

- Is there a Trust policy for rewarding honoraria to staff?
  - A Trust wide policy has yet to be developed, but it will include some core principles for rewarding staff. The implementation of this policy will be consulted on when ready.
  - Ultimately, it will be the Headteacher and governors to decide upon any honoraria to be paid.
- Will there be any changes to pensions?
  - No. Teachers will still be opted into the Teachers' Pensions Scheme and support staff will be opted into the Local Government Pension Scheme, with no changes to the employee contributions.
- Will staff be issued with new contracts?
  - No.

- Will staff be forced to work at other schools in the Trust?
  - No. This will only occur if staff request the opportunity to do so as part of their CPD.

### **2.6 Sample questions raised at the drop-in session**

- What extra-curricular activities will the school provide if it becomes an academy?
  - There will be no changes to the current provision. The MAT will not impose these types of changes on the school.
  - The Local Governing Body will consider other opportunities in the future, including holiday clubs and before & after school clubs.
- Will the term times change?
  - No.
- There are proposed changes to the some bus routes to the school (e.g. the 8.20am bus from Dalton to Topcliffe and the 3.15pm bus from Topcliffe to Dalton. How will this affect the Academy?
  - The school has no control over the bus routes as they are managed by the bus company and the local authority.
- What would the school be like for pupils in 2 years?
  - The school will continue to grow and move forward in the way the leaders of the school have planned. The journey will be enhanced through the support of the MAT and the experience and knowledge of colleagues in the MAT. The school will continue to follow the traditions and ways of working that are successful and will strive to be an excellent school providing the best education the children can get.

## **Section 3**

### **Next steps**

- There will be public access to the report on the consultation in June 2017 via the 'Academy Consultation' page of the school's website, but there will be no public access to the individual responses received as they are covered by the Data Protection Act.
- The Department for Education will consider the outcomes of the consultation as part of the Funding Agreement sign-off process for the proposed academy conversion of Topcliffe CofE VC Primary School.

## Appendix A: Stakeholder List

- All parents and carers (consultation leaflet sent home with pupils)
- All staff and governors (including those who were absent, on sick leave or on maternity/paternity leave)

<b>Primary Schools in catchment</b>
Alanbrooke Community Primary School
<b>Secondary Schools in catchment</b>
Thirsk School & Sixth Form College
<b>Other educational establishments</b>
Alanbooke Nursery
Topcliffe Pre-School Playgroup
<b>Other Agencies working in School</b>
Social Services
School Nurse
Young healthy Minds
Health Visitors
Family Action
Specialist teaching Service
Turn around
Educational Psychologist
Speech and Language
Occupation Therapist
Physio Therapist
Community Paediatrician
Children and Young People Services
Home Start
Early Help Workers
<b>MP'S</b>
Mr K Hollinrake

<b>WARD COUNCILLORS:</b>
Mr G Key

<b>Places of Worship</b>
St Columba's Church
<b>External groups using the school's facilities</b>
Mr M Cromack
<b>Other</b>
Police
Libraries
Local Authority officers
York Diocesan Board of Education
<b>Local Businesses</b>
Cragill
The Angel at Topcliffe
York House Leisure
<b>Trade Unions</b>
ASCL
NAHT
NASUWT
NUT
ATL
VOICE
UNISON

## Appendix B: Academy Consultation details on the website



**Topcliffe Church of England VC Primary**  
Growing, believing, achieving together

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Admissions	
Collective Worship	
Forms	
FOTS	
Key Stage Results	
<b>MAT Information</b>	<b>MAT Information</b>
Ofsted	<a href="#">Academy Conversion Consultation Letter to Parents/Carers</a>
Our Local Church	<a href="#">Academy Conversion Consultation Information</a>
Policies	
Prospectus	
Pupil Premium Funding	
School Council	
School Day	
School Meals	
School Reports	
Special Educational Needs	
Sports Premium	
Staff >	
Testimonials	
Term Dates	
Transport	

