

**Hanwell Fields Community School:  
Becoming an Academy with the United Learning Trust-  
Where the governors are in their thinking**

---

**Context**

It is the Government's policy to encourage schools to become Academies and more and more are taking up this opportunity across the country. In Oxfordshire there are already a number of academies with others planned for the near future. In Banbury itself we have seen an academy developed by the United Learning Trust and where many of our own children go on for their secondary education.

In considering these national and local initiatives, the Governors of Hanwell Fields School have spent some time exploring the advantages and disadvantages of becoming an Academy and this has culminated in their proposal to pursue Academy status for the school and to ask the United Learning Trust (ULT) to become our sponsor. What follows is a summary of the main points that we concluded from our research and deliberations.

**What are the Advantages?**

The Governors consider the following factors to be significant advantages which will lead to benefits for pupils at Hanwell Fields School:

- Academies have more freedom to decide what services to buy and from whom to buy them, thereby ensuring best value for money
- Academies receive funding direct from the Government and thereby receive the share of the Direct Schools Grant (DSG) currently retained by the Local Authority. This will mean that the school will receive additional funding, although there will be more expenditure incurred through buying services that are currently provided by the Local Authority
- The additional funding will help the school at a time when budgets are under considerable pressure and are likely to remain so for the foreseeable future
- Academies have greater freedom to focus on issues that are important to us and those that will have the greatest possible impact on pupil learning. Academy Status would help us achieve our vision for the school as an increasingly outstanding centre of learning
- As a large, national sponsor the United Learning Trust gives the school access to expertise, ideas and resources not always available in our current, local authority setting
- While we will maintain our existing partnerships, we will also be able to form a close working relationship with North Oxfordshire Academy and this will benefit the children and staff in our school in many different ways. There will be the opportunity to share ideas, resources, staffing expertise as well as the opportunity for our staff and pupils to make use of the facilities and equipment at North Oxfordshire Academy. From a financial perspective, we can look at joint service agreements which could reduce our costs significantly.

### **What would be different?**

- We would use the new opportunities and freedoms to further raise the achievement of all children.
- The autonomy given by Academy Status means that in the future we can ensure that the curriculum offered by the school best meets the needs of our pupils
- As an Academy, we would continue to respond positively to national and local initiatives, although we would be able to ensure that our response was always in the best interests of the students
- The United Learning Trust would become the employer and they would take on full employment responsibilities including salaries and pensions

### **What will remain unchanged?**

- As an Academy the school would continue to follow the same high quality procedures and policies that we currently have
- It is the intention of the Governors and Senior Leadership Team that there would be no immediate significant change in terms of the curriculum, the length of terms and the school day. As currently these would be kept under annual review.
- As an Academy we would continue to comply with the Admissions Code
- The school would continue to function as a fully inclusive school, providing education for pupils of all abilities
- We will continue to be named Hanwell Fields (a ULT Academy) and our uniform will not change
- We will still have links to the Local Authority who have approved the move to Academy Status. We will also retain our commitment to Area and Locality partnerships

### **We believe that we can further develop our work in the following ways:**

- Utilising the very significant skills and experience of the United Learning Trust as a major sponsor across the country
- Utilising the committed and strong leadership that currently exists
- As an Academy, the school will have access to all government grants by applying directly to the Department for Education or other appropriate agencies

### **What possible disadvantages have been identified and how will these be avoided or overcome?:**

- Academy status brings increased liabilities including those for employment, finance, payroll, and ICT. If we were to become too involved in these matters there would be the danger of being distracted from our core purpose of teaching and learning. However, by belonging to ULT a great amount of this responsibility, and liability for the effective delivery of these functions, will be transferred to their central office teams.

- In the main, unions remain philosophically opposed to the academies programme. Part of this is about a concern that they will have less opportunity for collective negotiations to secure the best terms and conditions for school workers. However, ULT have recognised all the major teaching unions as well as UNISON and have national agreements with them and consultative forums where issues and proposals are routinely discussed.
- Any decision to break away from the LA may leave remaining schools in a worse position as central services diminish. However, the governors recognise that hundreds of academies are springing up in all parts of the country and that government policy is encouraging this to continue. We want Hanwell Fields to be at the forefront of developments and not be left behind. In our case, the LA is aware of what is being proposed and are being kept informed.
- By joining ULT this could be merely substituting one form of control for another. However, the governors view is that there is much to be gained from joining the ULT family of academies and that this will offer new insights and thinking that will help Hanwell Fields become even better. ULT see their role as one of supporting and enriching the education on offer to our children and have no desire to get involved in with day-to-day routines or changing things that are working well.

### **Conclusion**

The educational landscape around us is changing significantly and it is critical to the future development of Hanwell Fields School that we keep abreast of issues that might affect us and take the opportunity to grow and develop further. A move to Academy status with the United Learning Trust, we believe, will facilitate this, allowing us to move forward on our agenda of providing outstanding education without losing focus on our core work. We now seek the views of parents, carers and the wider community on the proposal to convert Hanwell Fields to an Academy sponsored by the United Learning Trust.

Jane Haggitt  
Headteacher

Kay Baul  
Chair of Governors