



## **Helix Academies Trust Consultation**

### **Frequently Asked Questions and Answers**

1. What concerns do the leaders of RPS and MHS have about academisation?

One concern is if we are not given the go ahead to convert and form the trust. We have come a long way so far and are excited about the prospect of starting the MAT, so to miss out now would be disappointing. Secondly, whilst we are committed to growing as a MAT, we want to make sure we do so carefully and sensibly. Our priority is to ensure deliberate growth whilst maintaining standards at both RPS and MHS.

2. What is the timeline for academisation?

If things go to plan then we are aiming for a start date of November 2023.

3. Admissions; do RPS students get priority with MHS? What happens if more schools join?

We are interested in the prospect of altering the admissions criteria at MHS to give RPS pupils preference over pupils in other local primary schools. This would be something that we would also offer to other schools currently in the traditional catchment area who join the trust, so over time the benefit would reduce.

4. What is the growth plan?

We support the DfE plan to have a MAT with either 10 schools or 7500 students. We plan to grow to this level carefully, with schools within the local area or slightly wider. We are aware of trusts that are smaller than 10 schools/7500 students and are deemed a success.

5. Who is in charge?

Every trust needs a CEO, and the CEO of the trust when it starts will be Joe Barker, the current Headteacher of MHS.

6. Does every school become the same and have the same curriculum?

No, we are not proposing a very tightly controlled MAT where 'one size fits all'. Schools will retain a level of autonomy and will make their own decisions about the curricula that their pupils follow.

7. Will other high schools potentially join too?

Yes, we are interested in working with other secondary schools.

8. Will becoming an academy stop capital funding?

No, we are reassured that potential capital funding for additional places is still available.

9. Will MHS have a resource base?

MHS has already opened a resource base in 2022, and is planning to take on a second cohort in September 2023. This is subject to funding from the LA, but the signs are very positive.

10. Are there any plans to change PAN?

No

11. Will times of the day change?

Not as a result of academisation. Schools may change the shape of the school day for other reasons, but not due to academisation.

12. Is there criteria for schools coming into the MAT?

Schools would need to be within a 30 minute drive of RPS/MHS, and at the moment would need to be 'Good' or 'Outstanding' as judged by Ofsted. They would also need to subscribe to the vision of the MAT and have values that align with this.

13. Are there plans for people to move between schools?

No, we value the stability of teachers and other staff working in one school. However, we hope to build many opportunities for staff to visit the different schools and develop their practice. As the MAT grows, new colleagues may be employed on different contracts that allows more movement between schools, but again the priority would be stability and high quality provision in each school.

14. Both schools are currently 'GOOD', what happens if a school is downgraded. Is there a risk?

Yes, there is always a risk that either school could be graded as 'Requires Improvement' or worse. If that happened when part of the trust, then the trust is responsible for bringing about the improvements needed rapidly.

15. What does the role of the LA become?

The LA retains some responsibilities regardless of how many schools are Academies, and we would maintain close working relations in other aspects too. For example, the many secondary schools in the authority that are already academies still work with the LA for admissions, placing students who might be difficult to place and to try to avoid permanent exclusions.

16. Do schools have power over holiday dates?

In theory, yes. But we don't intend to make any changes to the holiday dates. This would have potential consequences for parents and staff alike. There is also no plan to change the primary two week Whit break. There is a real possibility that we could align INSET days, both to help us with combined CPD and to support parents who have children at both schools.

17. Can we expand on how finances are ringfenced, how will conflict be resolved?

We will use the national funding formula to allocate funds to schools. Conflicts in terms of what additional funding may be allocated to each school will be resolved by the board of Trustees.

18. Will teachers earn the same money?

Yes, teachers' pay and conditions will remain the same. We will continue to use teachers pay scales as set by the statutory teacher pay review body. This applies to all teachers including those on main scale and upper scale.

19. Explain the schools conditioning fund?

The CIF – conditions improvement fund – is a fund that is not available to maintained schools. As an academy, we can apply to this fund for to improve the infrastructure of our schools. They have a different focus each year; one year we may be successful in applying for a roof, the next year the focus might be windows. The local authority simply doesn't have the money required to bring the school estate up to an adequate standard.

20. Is a sixth form still planned at MHS?

Yes, but this may take some time. If the need is there, we will pursue this in the future.

21. What is the admin burden on the school?

Setting up will be time consuming, but in the longer term, we will be able to create central teams to reduce the burden and increase efficiency. For instance, a finance team.

22. When funding comes to school will the NFF be applied?

Yes.

23. Why Helix? Why not joining another trust such as Laurus?

Helix is the suggested name for the trust we want to create. A helix is a symbol of strength and resilience and has connotations of DNA, suggesting that education runs through our DNA. Interestingly, the more strands there are to a helix, the stronger it becomes.

We believe that we can create something rooted and established in our shared values. We want to set the direction of travel for our MAT that respects the uniqueness of each community.

We could just join an existing MAT, however that would mean sacrificing a great deal. We would likely have to fully adopt policies, procedures, curriculums and of course our vision and values would be set by someone else. This would be a sacrifice too much for us.

24. What protection does Romiley have if the HT from MHS, is CEO?

The trust is held accountable by a board of trustees. The trustees are held accountable by a group of members. Getting governance right is crucial in this regard. Other MATs adopt a system of executive headship, where schools no longer have a headteacher, but have a head of school. In reality, the head of school role is not a headteacher position at all. This is not the model we are proposing. The head of Romiley will remain headteacher. Initially, the head of Marple will also remain headteacher as well as hold CEO position.

25. What happens to the GB of Romiley/ MHS?

The GB of Romiley and the GB of Marple will become the local governing board with delegated authority from the board of trustees. In a way, it is similar to how it works under a local authority, with a governing board having delegated authority from the LA, just on a smaller scale. There can be different degrees of delegated authority though, depending on the needs of the school. Ultimately, the trust board holds the responsibility for the governance of the trust.

26. Disadvantaged children - what are the plans?

Like now, a school is accountable for how it spends the pupil premium grant and catch up fund. We will continue to spend the pupil premium wisely on disadvantaged children to help them make the best progress they can. Research shows that investing in high quality teaching and learning makes the biggest impact on disadvantaged pupils. Through continuous improvement of teaching and learning, and a keen eye on attendance, pupils who are disadvantaged will stand the best chance to meet their potential. This, alongside specific interventions or actions after identifying underlying barriers to learning will ensure our disadvantaged pupils make excellent progress. The pupil premium report and strategy will continue to be published on the school's website.

27. Will there be better transition between year 6 and year 7?

We certainly hope so, and this is what we will work on. Nationally, children appear to dip in year 7 after the high expectations of primary teachers in year 6. We don't want this to happen in the MAT.

28. Would MHS be happy to change your admissions policy to give priority to RPS children?

Yes, this is something we would support. Of course, this is something that would have to be discussed and agreed by the trust board. It is also worth pointing out that if, at some point, all feeder schools had this amendment to the admissions policy, there would no longer be any benefit to this.

29. What feedback have you had from teaching staff?

We have been really transparent with all school staff and have had open discussions and forums to ask questions. The staff feel as though they would prefer to have control over the direction we take, our curriculum, policies and procedures. Change is of course unsettling, but they feel reassured that their pay and conditions will be protected.

30. Have any other local schools been in touch?

Yes, two schools have been in touch since we published the consultation. These are initial exploratory conversations.

31. Are there any disadvantages of setting the trust up?

Whilst we've been given positive indications from the regional directors' office, there is still the possibility that the plan will not make it past panel.

There will be more accountability and scrutiny over the finances of the MAT. Rightly so, but with that comes a greater burden.

Initially, there will be savings and efficiencies, but the larger savings and efficiencies happen when the MAT is larger.

It is possible the DfE may strongly encourage the MAT to take on schools that do not meet our conditions of membership. We will need to maintain a strong position and hold firm to our conditions of membership to ensure the only schools that join our trust meet these criteria. E.g. within 10 miles or 30 minutes travel.

32. How can we support you to show you we support the plan?

You can engage with the consultation by emailing your thoughts, comments, concerns etc.

33. Why academise?

The government white paper on education set a MAT led education system as one of its priorities. At the moment, there is broadly a two tiered system: maintained schools and academies. Nearly 40% of primaries and 80% of secondaries are already academies, including some of the most successful schools in the country. While the policy document (the white paper), never became law (the education bill), it is still the policy, and for the most part, it doesn't need legislation. This is the direction of travel; the choice is no longer if we academise, but when and who do we join.

Our vision is to continue to work closely together to form a multi-academy trust from the ground; a values based, people first trust that respects and protects the unique communities of the schools in the trust. We believe we can create something special that other schools will want to be part of. We would also benefit from financial efficiency, greater professional development opportunities, and better transition for our pupils.

34. Will the uniform change?

No, we want to respect the uniqueness of each school and the communities they serve. This includes the uniform and the logo.