



Lees Hall Road, Sheffield, S8 9JP
 T: (0114) 2507394 F: (0114) 2507857

enquiries@talbot.sheffield.sch.uk
 headteacher@talbot.sheffield.sch.uk
<https://talbotlearningcommunity.org.uk>

Interim Headteacher Ms Tricia Bennett

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

We hope the consultation will generate interest and a series of questions. However, in lieu of this, we enclose several FAQs. At the end of consultation governors will collate all questions and answers, share with all stakeholders, and use these to inform their decision.

What is an academy?

An academy is a school that is no longer maintained by the local authority (LA), but instead run as an educational charity, and directly accountable via a Board of Trustees to the Department for Education (DFE).

What is a Multi Academy Trust (MAT)?

A MAT is a partnership of schools (academies) who work together. Just like a single academy they are an educational charity, and directly accountable via a Trust Board to the DFE.

In Sheffield, just like much of the country, all but one secondary school, about 1/3rd of primary schools and one specialist schools are academies. While their status is different, in almost all other aspects they operate just like other community schools.

Are any Specialist Schools academies?

There is one specialist academy in Sheffield. In South Yorkshire and across the country there are lots of specialist academies.

How are MATs different?

MATs are different in that their schools work together in much closer partnership than LA schools. This means they focus strongly on school improvement and ensure each school runs efficiently. There are lots and lots of benefits of partnership working not least the collective energy and support that is provided to schools to ensure they can be the best they can be.

MATs do have an over-arching trust board and a Chief Executive Officer who are responsible to the DFE. However, they also have a governing body and a Headteacher for each school who are accountable for school effectiveness.

Academies are funded in the same way as maintained schools, although they are accountable to the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) at the DFE and must publish annual accounts. They are accountable to Ofsted, follow the same admissions protocols and still work in close partnership with the LA and Learn Sheffield.

Who are Mercia Learning Trust (MLT)?

MLT are a very successful primary and secondary Sheffield MAT currently made up of six schools. This means Talbot would be joining the following school's partnership.

Name	Type	Age range	Pupil No	Ofsted grade	Over-subscribed	Additional
King Ecgbert (KES)	Secondary	11-18	1400	Outstanding	Yes	Integrated Resource for Autism
Newfield (NF)	Secondary	11-16	1050	Good	Yes	Co-located with Talbot



Mercia (M)	Secondary	11-18	800*	Not yet inspected	Yes	Opened 2018 & growing
Totley	Primary	3-11	430	Outstanding	Yes	Feeder to KES
Nether Edge	Primary	3-11	420	Outstanding	Yes	Feeder to KES & M
Woodlands	Primary	2-11	410	Good	Yes	Feeder to NF

The trust has a strong reputation for leading effective schools, and for its mainstream inclusive practice for vulnerable and SEN students. The trust is seen by many as the strongest MAT in Sheffield and one of the best in the region.

What will be the benefits to Talbot Specialist School (TSS)?

TSS will retain its culture, identity, and successful ways of working and most of its autonomy. We expect to benefit from:

1. Specialist challenge and support to help us improve. We will particularly benefit from curriculum expertise and advice in other aspects of school improvement.
2. Sharing and developing best practice for SEND and vulnerable children.
3. The trust currently employs over 650 staff. Its scale and reputation will help to recruit, retain, and develop senior leaders and staff.
4. The backing of an organisation with a £30m annual income and the flexibility to manage future budget uncertainty.
5. High quality management of key central functions such as finance, estates, IT, HR, payroll, design, and marketing. This will free key staff to focus on school effectiveness for our children.
6. Practical benefits of a single organisation overseeing the management of the building / estate.
7. Greater investment in building / site improvement and IT.
8. Greater influence across the city and region, particularly in relation to SEND policy and practice.

How will MLT benefit from partnership with Talbot?

MLT is keen to grow in a sustainable way with good local schools. Given its co-location with Newfield Secondary, closer partnership will simplify site management considerably. However, Talbot SEND expertise (including the Fusion Hub) will help it better meet the needs of mainstream and the Integrated Resource for students with autism.

Talbot will add to staff and resource capacity, which will help the trust expand its school improvement capability and ability to invest in all its schools.

What will happen to the Fusion Hub?

The Fusion Hub is a separate arm of Talbot School which provides training, guidance, assessment, and SEN support to schools in Sheffield and across the region. MLT is committed to continuing this objective, but also working with staff to further develop and strengthen its offer.

Are there any disadvantages of joining a MAT?

Just like LA maintained schools, not all MATs are of similar high quality. We have comprehensively investigated the quality of many MATs, and believe MLT is very strong. MLT has a secure reputation within the city and the region. Two schools were very weak prior to joining the trust and are now securely good. The trust successfully launched a new secondary school (Mercia) in 2018. Its three other schools are outstanding, and all are over-subscribed and enjoy high levels of parental / community support.

On this basis we do not see disadvantages in this partnership.

What will change for staff?

Academy conversion and joining MLT will not be especially apparent to staff, and any changes are likely to be positive ones. Typically staff within a MAT enjoy access to higher quality CPD, career progression and much more likely to be retained. Staff currently employed at Talbot by the LA will automatically transfer to MLT on their existing pay and conditions protected under TUPE regulations. This means staff will retain their pay, existing pension arrangements, maternity & paternity and sickness rights and benefits etc.

Mercia Learning Trust has stated that:

1. Staff are not expected to work in a school other than their own.
2. The trust is currently a 'living wage' employer for its lowest paid staff.
3. It is committed to staff well-being and managing workload, and to ensure it is a great place to develop a career.
4. It recognises trade unions and actively works alongside them as required.

There are many examples of staff securing promotion across MLT, which has helped retain great staff.

Doesn't joining a MAT mean that everything will change?

If a weak school joins the trust substantial change is very likely. However, Talbot is a good school with established working practices and policies that will remain in place. As such joining a MAT will not be especially apparent to staff, pupils, or parents. However, we hope it will better enable us to work with other schools and benefit from opportunities to develop and strengthen.

1. The school's name, term dates, admissions protocols and school times will not change. Any changes that are made in the future will be guided by the needs of the school, not forced by the MAT.
2. There will be very little that will change in the day to day running of the school.
3. The leadership team will continue to lead and drive forward the improvements at the school.
4. There will be no immediate or significant changes to the way we operate day to day or in our curriculum delivery. Any changes we do make will be driven in response to the needs of students.
5. There will still be governors for the school. Trustees will delegate governance functions down to the local governing body. There will also still be elected parents on the local governing body. We intend to ensure a high level of continuity in our governance during the conversion period.
6. The school will be subject to the exact same Ofsted inspection framework as now and will continue to work with the Local Authority and Learn Sheffield as key partners.

What are the safeguards for vulnerable pupils?

Under the terms of the Funding Agreement (the contract between an academy trust and the Secretary of State), an academy has to act in exactly the same way as a maintained school in relation to Special Educational Needs, behaviour and exclusions.

What's the timescale for this change?

If the governors decide to proceed, this will be with a view to joining Mercia Learning Trust on 1 September 2023 or at the earliest date after that.

What about governance?

Within MLT, The CEO and trust board (trustees) are directly accountable to the Secretary of State (Education) for school standards and all aspects of academy management. Nevertheless, Local Governing Bodies (LGB) are essential to the effective management of schools. Mercia Learning Trust has confirmed that:

1. All Mercia Learning Trust schools have fully functioning LGBs with delegated responsibilities for school standards and safeguarding.
2. Each LGB is properly engaged in any key decisions pertinent to a school.
3. Mercia Learning Trust can and will intervene in an LGB if it believes it is ineffective

4. Mercia Learning Trust may ask one LGB to share its practice to help improve another.

What happens to school land and buildings when it joins a Trust?

School land (which is owned by the Local Authority) is leased to the academy trust for a period of 125 years.

How are academies funded?

Each school, whether it is maintained by the LA or part of a MAT, is funded in the same way. Income comes into the city and is passported to the trust who then allocate the full amount to each school.

MATs do receive more income for buildings improvement via an annual grant called School Capital Allocation. This is pooled by the trust and allocated to schools based on need.

How do trusts manage central functions?

A maintained school is charged a percentage of its income, usually by the LA, to provide school improvement support, and manage *at a distance* finance, HR, site health and safety and IT. A MAT is responsible for all central functions and applies a comparable levy on its schools to manage these on their behalf.

Can property or land be subject to a change of use or sold off?

The rules regarding land disposal or change of use apply to both Local Authority maintained school land or leased academy land, and require an application to, and consent from, the Secretary of State.

What support is available to academies if they get into financial difficulty?

MATs employ specialist staff to manage finance. It is a requirement that MAT trustees have a Risk and Audit committee who focus strongly on academy finance and risks. Academy finance and practice is subject to a great deal of guidance and scrutiny by the ESFA (Education Skills Funding Agency) and expressed in The Academy Handbook which is published annually.

A MAT is subject to an annual external financial audit completed by a registered firm of accountants which leads to a published audit report. MATs must also undertake separate thematic internal audits from different external auditors linked to their risk management strategy. All is closely scrutinised by the ESFA. If academy finances or management are deemed weak, trusts receive financial notices to improve and more regular intervention and scrutiny.

Mercia Learning Trust annual audits are exemplary, and its financial position is strong.

Do MATs make profits?

No. MATs are educational charities whose purpose is to provide great schools for children. Any unspent income is placed in reserves and targeted back to schools to help them improve. Trustees are all unpaid volunteers who give their time freely.