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13<sup>th</sup> March 2024

Dear Parent/Carer,

### **Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs)**

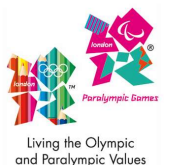
We are writing to inform you that the Governing Body is considering applying for Shoreham Village School to join a multi-academy trust.

**A multi-academy trust is an education charity that runs a group of schools – it is not a private company and cannot make profits.** Nationally, three-quarters of secondary schools and a third of all primary schools are academies. Like any other state school, academy schools are free to attend, are inspected in the same way by Ofsted, and children take the same statutory tests (such as SATs).

The school governors and I have kept a close eye on the national and local picture relating to MATs over many years and have met with representatives from a number of MATs such as Aquila, Cygnus, Pioneer and Weald of Kent to explore what Shoreham might gain from joining these MATs. Our key question has always been, and remains: “Do the children at our school benefit from joining your MAT?” Governors and I are now of the opinion that the answer to this question is, “yes”. There is no compulsion for a school such as ours to join a MAT at this time. As a very successful primary school, we know that we are in a strong position to determine which MAT to join should we elect to do so. This strength of position gives us an excellent negotiating position when speaking with any MAT. There are potentially lots of reasons why joining a group of schools would make us stronger as a school. We want to be part of a strong and sustainable group of schools so that we are well-placed to meet the challenges we will face over the coming years and ensure we have the right support to continue to improve. Financial security is also an element that we must consider carefully.

MATs can and do vary enormously. As part of our due diligence, we would rightly only consider a MAT that appears to have a vision and values that are aligned to our own. It is important to ensure, from our perspective, that the MAT is a reasonable size and is on a sound financial footing. A larger MAT is more likely to have the infrastructure in place to most effectively support its schools. Some of the smaller MATs have been taken over by bigger MATs in recent years. We have been approached by one secondary school in the last three years with a view to forming a MAT with them. Initial discussions were taken no further as we concluded such an arrangement would not be in the best interests of our school.

The release of the government White Paper in 2022 prompted a lot of renewed discussion about MATs. In the local context, most schools continue to look at their options. Seal Primary School converted to become an academy in March 2023 alongside Four Elms Primary School plus primary schools in Dartford and Tunbridge Wells.



Since June, Governors and I have held informal conversations with The Pioneer Academy (TPA). These conversations have been positive which has led us to believe our school could benefit from joining TPA. You can find out more about TPA by following the link below:

<https://thepioneeracademy.co.uk/bexley/primary/pioneeracademy>

TPA has two schools in the Sevenoaks area – Halstead Primary School and Edenbridge Primary School. Both have encountered difficulties over the last few years but, since joining TPA, appear to have very much been on an upward trend. TPA currently has seventeen schools in total and appears to be on a sound financial footing. Ightham Primary School (an Outstanding school) are currently consulting to join The Pioneer Academy.

In all our discussions with MATs, we have been very clear that we are a community school and that this cannot and will not be compromised in any way. For example, there would be no change of uniform and the name of the school would remain Shoreham Village School.

The purpose of this letter is to appraise you of the current situation on an informal basis before we consider moving towards a more formal consultation with all stakeholders including parents.

Yours sincerely,

Gillian Lovatt-Young  
Head

Jasper Dale  
Chair of Governors

