

Rationale and Process

Portesbery School entered into an Associate Agreement with the London South East Academies Trust (LSEAT) in February 2025. There was no presumption that Portesbery School would be converting to become an academy or join LSEAT. It did however present the opportunity for the school to consider, in detail, how becoming an academy and joining LSEAT might provide support in some specific priority areas moving forward and allow our Governing Body to evaluate all the pros and cons of this.

We are nearing the end of a full year of research by governors and senior leaders, including the following list of activities, which is not in any way exhaustive:

- *Entered into a 12-month associateship agreement.*
- *Participated in workshops as part of LSEAT's internal review of its governance framework and scheme of delegation.*
- *Visited numerous LSEAT's academies and held meetings with their headteachers and other leaders*
- *Attended numerous LSEAT academy board and provision board meetings as observers and reviewed the minutes of academy, provision and Trust board meetings*
- *Attended every Academy Leader half-termly meeting in Orpington since April 2023.*
- *Attended Walton Leigh/Manor Mead Strategic Planning Day and a chance to ask their governors/senior leaders, LSEAT's DCEO and an LSEAT Head key questions.*
- *Held monthly progress review meetings with LSEAT's CEO*
- *Participated in associateship reviews with LSEAT's Deputy CEO, Strategic Lead and Director of Surrey and Sussex.*
- *Worked collaboratively with the Director of Surrey Hub and other LSEAT staff to explore many areas including SDP, SEF, Curriculum, Contracts, Assessment, Behaviour, EHCPs and Quality Assurance cycle.*
- *Obtained, read and reviewed LSEAT's annual reports and accounts and other financial data*

- Obtained and explored in detail LSEAT policies and other documentation on key issues including HR and staff terms of employment

- Held technical meetings and exchanged detailed emails with LSEAT executives and responsible for estates, finance, HR and ICT. Followed up these meetings with discussions with School Business managers and Headteachers to fully understand the impact at a school level.

- Commissioned an independent expert training session for governors on MAT governance and specifically highlighting questions arising from LSEAT's governance framework and scheme of delegation

- Met a small group of LSEAT local academy board chairs and, separately, community governors.

Under the previous government there was a move to push all schools into academisation and all smaller trusts into larger multi academy trusts. That has now passed and there is no requirement for Portesbery to convert to academy status as we are rated good by Ofsted, have an excellent reputation, are financially stable and are consistently oversubscribed for places.

While the necessity to pursue MAT membership has been removed, the Governing Body recognise that there may be advantages in doing so and therefore continued to look in detail at the potential benefit of joining a larger MAT. We also recognise that out of seven SLD settings in Surrey, Portesbery are the only one who are not part of a MAT. In addition, out of 26 Surrey Special Schools, only Freemantles, Gosden House, Limpsfield Grange and Sunnydown are LA maintained schools, and every other specialist setting is an academy.

When considering all the detailed evidence, we all need to keep in mind our four non-negotiables:

- **Autonomy** - we want to maintain control over local decisions around curriculum, staffing, staffing structure and allow us to continue to do what is right for our students, families and staff. We want to join a group whose Vision, Values and Priorities align with our own, is student-centred and has staff wellbeing at the core of everything it does.
- **Geography** - we want to be part of a group that is close geographically so that collaboration is meaningful and resources, systems and training can be shared.
- **SEND focused** - we want to be part of a group that is made up predominantly of special schools, as we often have little in common with mainstream primary and secondary schools and have different priorities and challenges.

- **Financial security** - we want to ensure that our finances become and remain secure.

“Collaborating with other similar settings within a suitable geographical location to enhance financial security, increase CPD opportunities and maintain autonomy, so that we can secure a bright future for our pupils.”