



## **Radcliffe Academy Trust (RAT)-Meadowbrook College Consultation Document to join River Learning Trust (RLT)**

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

#### **Aim:**

The aim of this document is to enable stakeholders who are part of the consultation process to view questions and answers to further understand the key aspects of RAT interest in joining with RLT. If you have a question that you would like to raise, please forward to [hayden.davies@meadowbrookcollege.org](mailto:hayden.davies@meadowbrookcollege.org)

#### **What is a Multi Academy Trust (MAT)?**

A Multi-Academy Trust is a legal entity that governs a group of schools through a single set of Directors. It is set up by a group of schools, often in close geographical proximity to each other and they share a common ethos and vision. Meadowbrook College (which is the college within the RAT) will join as an alternative provision academy providing provision across Oxfordshire. When Meadowbrook College joins it will be part of family of schools within the River Learning Trust which currently has twenty-eight schools benefiting from being part of a large MAT.

#### **Why are schools forming MATs both locally and nationally?**

Changes in the educational landscape mean that little remains of the Local Education Authority in Oxfordshire. Oxfordshire County Council and the Government see the long-term future for schools as working together through local groupings. Schools can use the strong collaboration and accountability afforded by the MAT to drive up standards and share best practice and services across the trust, replacing aspects of former local authority support. It is also the case that smaller MATs are joining larger MATs so that they have greater opportunities to be part of a larger family of schools to increase the scale of support and challenge to the schools.

#### **What will the changes and benefits be?**

RLT is experienced in working across and with Oxfordshire schools as it provides the SCITT provision for teacher training which is county wide. This is an Ofsted 'Outstanding' provision and provides an example of how RLT works collaboratively with schools to secure strong support for education professionals and this is also aligned with the ethos and practice at the heart of Meadowbrook's practice in working with Oxfordshire schools.

Governance at local college level will remain unchanged – individual governors would be appointed at college level and there would be staff and parent representation as now. Local Governance responsibility is set out in a scheme of delegation. By joining RLT we aim to collaborate and work with other schools to continue our school improvement journey to provide the best possible outcomes and experiences for Meadowbrook College students.

We will retain all that is unique to Meadowbrook College: our name; our values; our identity; our staff and our provision.

Meadowbrook College will retain lots of local decision making, some things are aligned which are educationally beneficial and some are the same across the Trust. (e.g., HR policies).

## **Why do we want to join a MAT?**

Through joining a MAT with other local schools, we stand to gain through:

- Having a partner that has the capacity, expertise, infra-structure, and quality of staff to contribute to the ambition for constant improvement to the quality of education at Meadowbrook College.
- Being part of a larger organisation that can provide professional development opportunities for all our staff and greater opportunities for our pupils and students.
- Helping us to continue to both recruit and retain quality staff.
- Sharing expertise, resources and best practice and raising standards and improving outcomes across all key stages.
- Greater purchasing power for contracts and cost savings through economies of scale, thus helping us to secure our medium and long-term financial future.

## **What has been happening so far?**

The RAT Trustees, RAT members with Meadowbrook College headteacher and senior staff have considered in detail the opportunities and challenges that may arise through the formation of joining a larger and successful MAT. The Trust Board and members considered in detail nine MATs operating in the local or regional area and invited three to provide detailed further information to be considered. RAT then shortlisted three MATs and made the final selection based on the most appropriate partner deciding that River Learning Trust is the best fit for Meadowbrook College. The three shortlisted MATs provided due diligence information, alongside visits to the three MATs and reciprocal visits to Meadowbrook College by the three shortlisted MATs.

As part of project oversight, the RAT Trust Board appointed an external advisor in April 2022 to aid the project to further build capacity to support the stages in the process. There are weekly project updates to the Trust Board. Members, Headteacher and Business Manager with a project team meeting regularly to assist with progressing the project.

The RAT Trust Board met on 2/12/2022 where they took the decision to join RLT and this was communicated to staff on 6/12/2022.

Due diligence across both trusts has progressed and it is now mutually agreed by RLT and RAT to secure the next process of formal consultation with stakeholders.

## **How will this impact our relationships with Oxfordshire Schools?**

We will continue to work and build further our close partnership with Oxfordshire schools. RLT has a successful and highly regarded experience of leading the SCITT provision and works closely with non RLT schools. These are all prominent features which informed RAT Trustees' direction to choose RLT as a suitable MAT.

It is important to note that RLT and RAT have discussed the importance of continuing the current model of support to all Oxfordshire schools, and that RLT would encourage and support Meadowbrook College to commission across county schools.

To secure the best model of working with Oxfordshire schools there will be a Headteachers Steering Group with membership of schools from the primary, secondary and special sectors to work with the Meadowbrook headteacher and local governing body. In addition to the Meadowbrook College local governing body there will be a headteacher (not of a RLT school) to aid the model of effective support and challenge to Meadowbrook College.

A key part of the decision-making process was the consideration of the advantages of a local MAT who has a positive relationship with OCC and understanding of the local context of Oxfordshire schools. This was viewed as a significant factor in the RAT Trustees decision making when considering other possibilities of national MATs which did not have the local relationships and advantages of understanding the local context of alternative provision.

**Will the staff be expected to work in other schools or provide cover in other schools?**

No. Nobody would be asked to work in a partner school if they were not contracted to do so. Although having the ability to move staff between schools could provide a great opportunity for career development if it was needed and help to retain excellent staff and leaders within the RLT family of schools.

It is important to note that one of the reasons for choosing RLT is that they have local understanding and knowledge of Meadowbrook College, they are clear that Meadowbrook College would retain its county wide remit to support schools and vulnerable students at risk of exclusion and disengagement in education. Many Meadowbrook College staff have expertise of working across schools and their contracts would remain to be in place in relation to this practice.

**How is funding organised within the MAT?**

Funding for schools within a MAT is allocated on an individual academy basis. It is governed through a master funding agreement between the Secretary of State and the MAT and supplementary agreements between the Secretary of State and each school within the MAT.

**Will Meadowbrook College lose its financial independence and its ability to manage its own finances?**

There would be common financial procedures across schools within the MAT, but each school will be expected to manage their own budget.

Meadowbrook College as an alternative provision provider is currently financed on an annual basis through OCC, government grants and commissioning with schools. It has been discussed that with the benefits of a larger MAT with financial expertise RLT can assist with helping to secure financial stability to enable Meadowbrook College to be even more financially secure. An example of this would be supporting Meadowbrook leaders in their negotiations with OCC as commissioners of alternative provision places.

**Will there be a loss of autonomy for the local Governing Bodies?**

It will be up to the trust board of the MAT to decide how much (or how little) power is delegated back to the local governing bodies, so ultimately, they may lose some autonomy, but not for the day-to-day operation of the school. The scheme of delegations for schools for RLT can be found here <http://www.riverlearningtrust.org/information/> and demonstrates that in most areas the local governing body will continue with its current functions. We will also continue to have Governors for a range of stakeholders: parents, community, and staff.

**Who will lead the MAT?**

The Trust Board, with the Chief Executive Officer (Paul James), will be responsible for the Governance of the Trust. Our Headteacher and senior leadership team would continue to run Meadowbrook College as they currently do. In addition, Headteachers sit on the RLT Education Board, Chair of Governors on the RLT Governance Board, the lead Finance and Resources Governor on the RLT Resources committee and one of the staff Governors on the RLT Staff Board. Further details about these groups can be found in RLT's constitution available here: <http://www.riverlearningtrust.org/information/>

**Additional FAQ's -consultation questions as part of the stakeholder consultation**

**Are there any plans to change the admission priorities in the arrangements for Meadowbrook College?**

In seeking a suitable partner for a merger, the Trustees attached great importance to the continuation of the current model of support to all Oxfordshire schools. RLT recognises this and has assured the Trustees that it will encourage and support Meadowbrook College to commission

across the county. As part of the continuing support to the whole of Oxfordshire it is planned to establish an Advisory Headteacher Steering Group, engaging with a majority of non RLT headteachers representatives from Oxfordshire's primary, secondary and special schools, and including a representation from OCC. Reviewing and advising on accessibility will be an important part of the remit to ensure the ongoing commitment to accessibility for all Oxfordshire schools.

**Will staff contracts change?**

Staff contracts will follow the TUPE process with no measures or plans expected. The RLT CEO explained that there were no promises about the future and changes, re-organisation may be possible and staff would be protected by the legal framework.

**Will there be re-structuring?**

The RLT CEO said that re-structuring would not be as a result of the merger. Any restructuring would be as part of Meadowbrook College identifying AP demands and planning appropriately. The Headteacher commented that there were no short-term plans and if the climate changed going forward then a consultation process would be introduced.

**Will there be centralised resources?**

No, RLT do not have a centralised curriculum but there is value in sharing resources by subject, to lessen the workload of staff and provide high quality resources to staff and children.

**Will Meadowbrook College retain SEND autonomy?**

Yes, and support will be offered and we would work together to support children with SEND needs. RLT is passionate about inclusion by design, with a focus continually on the resources and training needed to meet the needs of all children.

**Does RLT use Smart Clinic?**

RLT does not use Smart Clinic but has a similar programme of occupational health and well-being for staff, Wellbeing Solutions, which is an employee assistance programme, mental health first aid and counselling services.

**Do schools in RLT all follow the OCC school term dates calendar?**

Term dates are in line with OCC and there is no standardisation. The HT added that MBC currently follows the OCC calendar.

**Are RLT schools expected to attend other schools for CPD and inset?**

RLT may offer collective CPD and inset at schools elsewhere although attendance is not considered mandatory.

**Does RLT recognise levels of service and current terms and conditions?**

Yes, we do. The RAT Chair commented that this would be a legal requirement.