

# Birch Wood School: *Exploring Opportunities with Discovery Schools Trust*



# An education at Birch Wood School **ENABLES!**

**E** – Empowering students for independent lives.

**N** – Nurture

**A** – Aspire and Achieve

**B** – Belonging

**L** – Love of learning grows

**E** – Engage and Interact

**S** – Safe and happy



‘We have an unwavering passion and determination to continuously improve our school and to provide the best outcomes for every pupil; not because we aren’t good enough, but because we can always be better’

The governing body at Birch Wood Special School is committed to providing an excellent education for our pupils while maintaining our role at the heart of the community and preserving our unique values and strengths.

With this in mind, we are exploring the possibility of joining **Discovery Schools Trust**, a respected partnership of 15 primary schools and 3 special schools established in 2012.

Discovery's mission, vision, and values align closely with our commitment to inclusion and excellence, and we see this as an exciting opportunity to enhance our work.

# Who are Discovery?

## Mission

Our fundamental purpose is to ensure that all our pupils realise their potential.

## Vision

Discovery Trust aspires to achieve **excellence** in all areas of our work. The children and families we work with have confidence in the teachers and leaders of the Trust who act with **integrity** and demonstrate **respect** for individual needs. Discovery aspires for all our schools to become **sustainable** and **inclusive**, driven by a passion for working in **partnership** with all stakeholders.



Inclusion



Sustainable



Partnership



Integrity



Respect



Excellence



## Why are we Exploring this Partnership?

- Sustain the high standards and ethos you expect from Birch Wood
- Expand collaboration with other schools, including Discovery's 3 special schools, to enhance teaching and learning.
- Offer greater professional development opportunities to recruit and retain outstanding staff.
- Access Discovery's expertise in areas like compliance, technology, and teacher training.



## Why are we Exploring this Partnership?

- **Discovery has a very strong central team** - this expertise will enable Birch Wood colleagues to focus on more operational matters which will assist in the smooth day to day running of the school.
- **Discovery run their own teacher training.** This would allow Birch Wood to more easily recruit the best teachers – this is particularly important during a time when there is a national shortage of teachers.
- As a maintained school, there is a risk of being isolated with a lack of collaborative partners. By joining Discovery, Birch Wood will be able to collaborate with colleagues across a range of settings, including other special schools.
- A local primary school in Melton Mowbray, is part of the Trust. We have already been working in partnership with the school to help develop curriculum, joining the Trust will formalise this partnership.

# Some Key Benefits and Reassurances about Joining Discovery

- **Retention of Birch Wood's Identity**
  - *No changes to name, logo, uniform or ethos*
- **Autonomy Preserved**
  - *We retain control over key areas like term dates, curriculum, and therapies*
- **Enhanced Collaboration**
  - *Access to resources and expertise across the trust, including other special schools*
- **Support for Staff**
  - *No redundancies or forced reassignments; enhanced development opportunities*
- **Technological Advantage**
  - *Discovery is a Microsoft Showcase Organisation, offering cutting-edge tools to support learning and communication.*



## What are the risks being considered?

Birch Wood is a successful school with a strong ethos and clear values. Would joining a trust compromise the values, ethos, identity and standards of the school?

This has always been our main concern. However, the offer from Discovery and all of our subsequent interactions have reassured us that the leaders at Birch Wood will be supported to run the school in line with our ENABLES ethos.

## What are the risks being considered?

In a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT), the decisions about school budgets are often made by the central team and this could compromise the autonomy Birch Wood has previously enjoyed.

Again, this has been a key area for us to explore and seek assurances on. We will not join a MAT which then leads to fewer resources being allocated to Birch Wood. We have spoken to several headteachers of schools who have joined Discovery, including their special schools, and are reassured that the pupils at Birch Wood will continue to get the support, resources, therapies and curriculum which meets their needs.

## What are the risks being considered?

Could a MAT change key features of the school such as uniform, the curriculum, times of the day, term dates etc?

These have always been 'deal breakers' for us. We are aware that many national MATs do expect their schools to fall in line with all of these areas, however Birch Wood would retain all of the autonomy and decision making capacity we currently have in these areas if we were to join Discovery.

## What are the risks being considered?

What will happen with governance at Birch Wood if it joins Discovery?

The Birch Wood governing body would become a 'School Advisory Board'. The legal responsibilities for governance would reside with the Directors of Discovery. In practice this would mean that the Birch Wood School Advisory Board retains oversight of educational matters, whilst the wider trust takes on legal responsibilities for governance. The Discovery governance structure is available on their website if you would like to know more.

## What are the risks being considered?

Will any Birch Wood staff be made redundant because the role they currently fulfil will be taken by the Discovery central team?

This is another 'line in the sand' for us. We do not want to put out colleagues jobs at risk by joining a MAT. We have been reassured and seen evidence that no colleagues have been made redundant when schools have joined Discovery and where there has been additional capacity this has been distributed across the trust.

In practical terms this has meant that no one has lost their jobs, or been expected to work in an alternative school when they do not want to, or had to take a pay cut. Discovery have been explicit about this and have confirmed that no member of staff would be moved to another school unless the school in question has the capacity to allow this and the person in question wants to.

# Addressing Your Concerns

We understand the importance of safeguarding Birch Wood's unique ethos and operational independence. Discussions with Discovery and their partner schools, including special schools, have reassured us that:

- **Birch Wood will remain true to its values, standards and ENABLES culture**
- **Budgets will continue to prioritise pupil needs.**
- **Governance changes (to a School Advisory Board) will still allow us to focus on local educational priorities, while Discovery assumes legal responsibilities.**
- **Employees maintain their existing terms and conditions of employment post conversion and will have a separate TUPE consultation once a decision to convert has been made.**

# Share Your Views: Consultation Period

We value your input during this exploration phase. The consultation period begins Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> December and ends on Friday 10<sup>th</sup> January.

You can share your feedback in the following ways:



## 1. Online Consultation Meetings

- Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> December

## 2. Online Feedback Form

- Provide written feedback via an online form by Friday 10<sup>th</sup> January 2025, at 3pm:  
<https://forms.office.com/e/a14ZZxw1v4>

## 3. Individual Conversations

- Email our incoming Executive Headteacher, Phil Leaney, at [leaneyp@birchwoodschool.co.uk](mailto:leaneyp@birchwoodschool.co.uk) to arrange a discussion..

# Time for Questions

