

Q&A RELATING TO MILFORD SCHOOL'S PROPOSAL TO JOIN LEO ACADEMY TRUST

1. What investment/resources will the school receive?

Milford School ("the School") is very fortunate in having excellent facilities when compared to many other small infant schools and fund-raising by the Friends of Milford School has enabled exciting projects such as the Octagon and the upgrading of the reception outdoor space which will commence over half term. Whilst the School is not currently looking for funding for any major projects, LEO does have a good track record of securing capital expenditure funding and it is expected that more capital expenditure funding may be available to the School if it joins LEO.

Areas where additional resources may be seen include:

- LEO has a fleet of minibuses which are available for schools to use
- LEO has in house catering to provide school lunches

However, the most significant resources that will become available to the school are:

- School improvement support
- SEND support
- "Back-office" support, freeing-up the School's staff's time to allow them to focus on the children
- CPD opportunities for staff

2. Do teaching staff maintain autonomy over the curriculum and planning?

MATs are now required to follow the national curriculum but, subject to that, LEO schools set their own curriculum.

A new national curriculum is due to be published in Spring 2027 and be taught from September 2028. As the national curriculum has not been updated in more than 10 years the changes could be significant. We would expect that LEO will provide guidance and assistance on implementing the new curriculum.

3. Will play based learning remain a focus?

There are no plans to change the approach to learning. At Milford School we deliver our curriculum through an 'Active Learning' approach, rather than a 'play-based' one, which means children learn by *doing*, exploring and talking about their ideas. Through practical, hands-on activities—such as, investigation, movement and collaboration—children are actively involved in their learning rather than passively listening.

4. Will our reception classes remain as 2 and not be merged in year 1?

The number of reception starters has been falling for a number of years due to falling birth rates but 2025 seems to have been additionally impacted by COVID with only 30 children

starting in reception. It is expected that there will be approximately 50 children starting in reception in September 2026.

When we were planning staffing for September 2025 we had expected reception starters to exceed 30 so we had to commit to staffing for two reception classes because, save for certain exceptional circumstances, class size cannot exceed 30. It was only late in the day that we found out that only 30 children would start.

Schools are funded based largely on the number of children, not the number of classes, whilst expenditure is largely based on the number of classes. Funding of the two current reception classes had to be met out of the School's reserves. If the current reception year was to remain as two classes it would cost the School an additional amount in excess of £150,000 over the next two years. This is money that the School does not have. The governors have decided that the right thing to do is to merge the two current reception classes in Year 1.

This will happen if the School does not join LEO. Whilst LEO could take a different view, it would be very surprising if they did not arrive at the same conclusion as the governors.

Permission is being sought to limit the pupil numbers for current reception cohort to 30 children for the next two years.

5. Will schemes such as monster phonics, white rose maths, talk for writing/drawing club stay the same?

There are no current plans to change but that doesn't mean that they won't. LEO encourages its schools to do what they think is best for their children. We fully expect LEO to challenge how we do things as they seek to help the School improve and having access to the other LEO schools will expose us to new ideas. Improving the quality of education is a key driver behind the proposal to join LEO.

6. Why is joining a MAT the best option for Milford School *now*, and what alternatives have been properly considered?

In recent years many schools have faced additional challenges as a result of falling pupil numbers, funding not keeping pace with costs, increasing demand for SEND provision and declining support from local authorities. This is particularly true for small infant schools. Collaboration with other schools is encouraged as a means of addressing some of these issues and the School's work with the GLP has been very beneficial but there is a limit to what that can achieve.

The School has made steady progress since the appointment of Sara Cox as headteacher in 2024. The Governing Body is strongly of the view that joining the right MAT will both help the School deal with the challenges it faces and continue on its trajectory of improvement.

The Governing Body carried out extensive research over an extended period in arriving at a decision to apply to join LEO. This involved carefully defining what the School was looking for in MAT and then identifying MATs which met that vision.

The Governing Body believes that now is the right time to join a MAT because:

- The challenges that schools face, as described to above, are not going away
- Sara Cox has now been in situ for two years which is important for two reasons:
 - Sara has got the school to a position where MATs can see its potential. MATs are selective about which schools join them
 - Because the headteacher's understanding of what would be best for the School is a critical element of the Governing Body's assessment of which MAT to join, it was important that Sara had been able to fully develop that understanding
- It makes sense to join a MAT before revisions to the national curriculum and an expected Ofsted visit in the next two years
- There is a window of opportunity – good MATs will at some point stop recruiting new schools. We have been fortunate to have held discussions with a number of such MATs but there is no guarantee we could do so in the future.

7. What evidence do we have that this MAT improves outcomes specifically for EYFS and KS1 children?

It is impossible to say with certainty that a MAT improves outcomes for EYFS and KS1 as many factors can impact on such outcomes.

However, this is the attainment data for LEO schools can be found on pages 9 and 10 of the [annual accounts](#)

Out of 8 schools inspected by Ofsted after joining LEO;

- 4 improved their grading
- 4 maintained their previous grading - 2 of these were "good" and 2 were "outstanding"

8. What powers will our local governing body keep, and what decisions will move to the trust?

Governing bodies have responsibilities rather than powers and currently these are statutory responsibilities. In a MAT these responsibilities primarily sit with the board of trustees who oversee the operation of the entire MAT and its schools. An academy within a MAT does not have a board of governors but many MATs put in place what they refer to as local governing bodies. In LEO these are referred to as "academy committees". Each MAT has a document called the Scheme of Delegation which sets out the responsibilities for the various parties –

the members, the trustees, the Chief Executive Officer, the head teachers and the academy committees. Details can be found [here](#).

[LEO Scheme of Delegation](#)

[Terms of reference for academy committee](#)

The responsibilities for an academy committee are narrower than for the current governing body – for example finance and head teacher performance will be dealt with centrally within a MAT.

9. What are the financial risks for a small infant school, including top-slicing (please can you share the %) and use of our reserves? Overall how do the Governors see the financial aspects impacting the school?

Currently the school pays an amount to the local authority to cover certain central services. This is referred to as de-delegated funding. If a school joins a MAT it no longer pays this to the local authority. In addition the local authority will charge for additional optional services that schools may request – such as payroll and HR support. When a school is in a MAT it will typically get these services from the MAT and therefore will no longer pay the local authority. In simple terms the funding that a school attracts is the same whether or not it is in a MAT (although MATs, including LEO, are often able to access additional capital funding. This is partly due to the fact that the MAT assumes responsibility for the school building i.e. if the school needs a new boiler it should currently be funded by Surrey County Council but if the school joins LEO it would be LEO's responsibility). However, MATs do not receive additional funding to cover central costs so these are ultimately borne by the schools. This is why the size of the MAT is important as this gives it economies of scale, stronger purchasing power and the central costs are shared by more schools.

Many MATs charge their schools an amount each year to finance these central costs. This is often referred to as "top-slicing" and different MATs calculate this in different ways. LEO takes a different approach and uses an approach known as General Annual Grant (GAG) Pooling. Under GAG pooling the MAT receives all of the funding for its schools centrally and then allocates funding to each school. This approach makes sense because the trustees of the MAT have responsibility for all of the schools in the MAT and the children and staff in those schools. This allows the trustees to take a more pragmatic approach than the local authority 'silo' approach where a school suffering financial pressure due to falling pupil numbers is likely to be told to just cut costs.

The school does not anticipate having reserves if it joins LEO in September.

The main financial risk is that a MAT becomes insolvent. However, as MATs are set up as limited companies they are required to publish annual accounts that have been audited. In doing so the trustees are specifically required to look ahead and consider whether the MAT is a going concern.

The governors' working assumption is that joining LEO will, in direct terms, be financially neutral. However, in the longer term it is believed that being a LEO school will make the School more attractive to parents which will increase pupil numbers and make the School more sustainable.

10. What is the financial status of the LEO Academy Trust?

LEO's 2025 audited accounts are available [here](#).

11. What is their long-term strategy?

LEO currently has 12 schools. Including Milford there are three schools currently looking to join LEO. LEO sees that as approaching the optimum size and does not expect to expand much beyond that.

12. How will SEN provision be managed for pupils at Milford School?

No fundamental change is expected but the School will benefit from additional support from LEO.

13. Will staff remain on existing terms and conditions (including pension)?

Staff terms and conditions are protected under The Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 (TUPE).

14. How will the Governing body be appointed and how will parent voice be represented?

The academy committee will have 6 members - the principal (headteacher) plus 2 parents (elected by parents) and 3 co-opted members (appointed by LEO which in practice means in consultation with the principal and existing members).

15. If this MAT turns out not to be right for our school, what are the realistic exit options and consequences? Trusts are notoriously difficult to exit, often involving discussions with the Secretary of State.

Leaving a MAT is very difficult - generally something needs to have gone very badly wrong - which is why we have taken time to make sure we make the right decision.

16. Why did other schools in the GLP decide not to join a MAT?

We are not aware of specific reasons, but each school's circumstances are different. Some GLP schools are church schools and their ability to join MATs is more restricted – for example they would not be able to join LEO at the present time.

17. What are the current issues with the GLP that constitute moving to the MAT? Particularly as feeder schools are part of this group.

There aren't any issues with GLP. Joining a MAT and working with GLP are not mutually exclusive. Whilst the relationship with GLP would become less formal (Milford would no

longer be a founder member) LEO has encouraged Milford to continue collaborating with GLP schools where it makes sense to do so.

18. With the housing expansions planned for Milford, is relevant expansion of the school being considered as part of the MAT review?

The governors consider the long-term pupil number forecasts prepared by Surrey County Council annually which currently do not appear to show significant impact from new housing.

19. What are the expected timelines for this process should it go ahead?

The earliest that Milford could realistically join LEO would be 1st September 2026. A school can join a MAT at any time during the year so long as it is on the 1st of the chosen month.

20. How was the decision made to choose LEO Academy and what other MATs were considered ?

The Governing Body has carried out extensive research in arriving at a decision to apply to join LEO. This involved carefully defining what the school was looking for in a MAT and then identifying MATs that met that vision.

A large number of MATs were considered. This started with the DfE database showing all of the MATs in England and details of the schools that belong to them. This was narrowed down based on location, size of MAT and stage of education and input from governors and staff who were aware of particular MATs. Extensive work performed by GLP was also very helpful in identifying potentially suitable MATs.

A lot of information can be obtained from MAT's websites as they are required to publish certain documents. In particular:

- Audited annual accounts which as well as giving an indication of financial position include a trustee's report which gives a picture of what is happening in the MAT
- Scheme of delegation which indicates how centralised the MAT is and what responsibility is left with the schools
- Description of governance structures and details of members and trustees

Many MATs are looking to attract new schools so the websites often contain additional information which can be helpful in getting a sense of the ethos of each MAT.

Some MATs were eliminated from consideration where conversations with chief executives and chair of trustees indicated that the MATs did not believe there was a good fit. These tended to be larger MATs which were geographically focused. Enquiries were also made of headteachers or governors of schools in potential MATs.

The Chief Executive Officer of short-listed MATs met with a governor working group which included the headteacher. This was particularly valuable as this identified clear differences between some of the short-listed MATs and this helped the Governing Body obtain greater clarity on what was really important to Milford School.

LEO was asked to make a presentation to the Governing Body and governors also visited a school that had recently joined LEO. The Governing Body subsequently decided to apply to join LEO.

No final decision has been taken by either the School or LEO. DfE approval is also required. Both the School and LEO are continuing their due diligence process to gain a fuller understanding of each other.

21. It would be good to understand what practically would change. The ideas and overview feel relatively theoretical and it would be good to understand (as much as possible as I am aware one of the key points is *more* flexibility) but if for example the children have 3 hours of outdoor time and this then extends to 4 hours. A bit more 'measurable' perhaps.

The School is always looking to improve and that will remain the case whether or not the School joins LEO. No specific changes have been planned. If the School joins LEO then LEO will have control of, and be responsible for, education at Milford School. A key attraction of LEO is that the LEO model allows the headteacher significant discretion to do what is right for the children and provides support to enable that to happen.

22. A frequent opinion I'm hearing from both current and prospective parents (including myself) is the improvements in after school care the school would benefit from.

LEO has extensive experience in both nursery provision and after school care and these are areas where it is expected the School will benefit from joining a LEO. LEO is keen to work with the School and The Orchard to make sure that high quality nursery provision and after school care is available.

If parents have any concerns or suggestions regarding after school please do speak Sara Cox as your feedback is valued.

23. It is my understanding that LEO Academy has an emphasis on digital learning. While I appreciate the potential benefits of joining a wider trust, I would like to raise a concern regarding the use of digital devices and educational technology (EdTech) in the Early Years and Key Stage 1 classrooms.

I am not naïve about the importance of digital skills in the modern world, I believe digital literacy is a core competency children will need. However, I feel strongly that at this stage of development, children benefit most from direct interaction with their teacher, learning through observation, discussion, and hands-on activity. My priority is that my children

experience a *teacher-led environment* where the *adult holds and directs the learning*, rather than certain parts of the classroom being offset with technology use.

In particular, I would appreciate clarity on:

- ***LEO's policy on EdTech and digital device use in the Early Years***, including any age-based limits and the educational purposes for which devices are used.
- ***How teacher-led instruction remains the dominant mode of learning*** in Reception, Year 1, and Year 2.
- ***How the school ensures that sustained attention, handwriting, reading physical books, and social interaction are prioritized***, so that technology supplements rather than replaces human-led teaching.

The use of technology clearly has a place in the classroom. ICT/ digital learning forms part of the National Curriculum, and schools have a responsibility to prepare children thoughtfully for life in an increasingly digital world whether that is teaching about on-line safety or giving them the tools to successfully access the next stage of their education.

Our approach at Milford is already carefully balanced. We do not allow children to spend extended periods of time on screens, and our use of technology is purposeful and limited. In fact, many of our children are not particularly excited about the digital platforms we use, preferring hands-on, active learning experiences.

LEO shares Milford's commitment to ensuring that technology serves as a purposeful supplement to, rather than a replacement for, high-quality, teacher-led instruction.

To address the specific questions:

- In the Early Years and KS1, LEO prioritises "active" over "passive" screen time. Technology is used as a tool for specific tasks—such as using programmable toys, or creative apps to build confidence in phonics and storytelling—rather than for unstructured play. LEO uses [Seesaw as our main platform](#), where activities are created by the teacher with a specific goal or purpose in mind.
- The adults remains the directors of learning. Technology is integrated into the curriculum to *enhance* the teacher's inputs (e.g., using a tablet for interactive counting with growing confidence with an adult) rather than to "offset" or replace human interaction. LEO's "Occupy, Activate, Challenge" framework ensures children move beyond passive viewing toward active, supervised creation.
- Physical development, handwriting, and social interaction remain our primary focus. In Nursery and Reception, LEO explicitly prioritises the use of one-handed tools (scissors, pens) and fine motor skills. Digital tools are used to support these goals—for instance, using assistive technology to help a child access a text, build a sentence,

or working collaboratively on a digital project to build social oracy. LEO also has a high focus on online safety and digital well-being.

LEO believes this balanced approach ensures pupils become safe, responsible, and creative users of technology while maintaining the teacher-led environment essential for early development.

For further details, please see the attached [Technology in the Early Years](#) presentation and [our progression map](#) for Computing.

All schools use technology in the classroom. What LEO has done is put a lot of effort into making sure that it is done in the right way. In 2023 an independent report was commissioned to assess this:

<https://www.leoacademytrust.co.uk/2801/pedtech-impact-report>

It is not anticipated that joining LEO will significantly change the use of technology in teaching at Milford – it will still be down to the teacher in the classroom to make sure that technology is used to support the teaching, not replace it. What joining LEO will do is provide extensive experience on how technology can be best used to achieve that.

Q&A RELATING TO PREVIOUS CONSULTATIONS BY OTHER SCHOOLS JOINING LEO

Questions and Answers - Academy Conversion to LEO Academy Trust	
How do finances work in relation to local fundraising e.g PTFA	All money raised by the PTFA is retained by the charity and the school. Funds are ringfenced and are only to be used for your school.
Does the school still have access to an employee assistance programme	Yes, the Trust buys back in to an Employee Assistance Program
How does the school access services such as EP/SaLT/OT once they are part of the Trust? As there is a shortfall of services, would there be scope for accessing more AHP hours?	<p>Children will continue to have access to all of the statutory SEND services currently offered to you as a maintained school.</p> <p>In addition, LEO Academy Trust has developed its own LEO Inclusion & Wellbeing Hub which provides excellent provision to our schools to support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEND • Disadvantaged Pupils • Parents • EAL Pupils • Attendance • Behaviour • Safeguarding • An in-house team of specialists cover roles and responsibilities which include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust Mental Health Team • Wellbeing Woofers • Drama Therapy • Nurture Group • Family Support Workers • Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) <p>You can find out more about our inclusion services, on our dedicated website:</p>

Questions and Answers - Academy Conversion to LEO Academy Trust

	<p>LEO Inclusion</p> <p>LEO Family Support Workers Portal</p> <p>All of our LEO Inclusion services are fully funded by our operating model and are provided to all LEO schools free of charge. They are an essential way to support children who are either awaiting statutory assessment or a move to specialist provision. They also support other children with lower levels of need.</p>
Would the school have to change its name? If so, what to?	The only change is from School to Academy.
How are local governing boards constituted? What decisions are still taken by those boards (and what goes up to the Trust)? How many people sit on local boards?	<p>We call our governing bodies - academy committees. You will be responsible for all aspects of the Ofsted framework and providing oversight of the day to day running of the school.</p> <p>We have a dedicated governance website. You can find full details of our governance structure here:</p> <p>Governance Structure</p>
	<p>LEO Academy Trust is in a strong financial position. We currently have reserves of approximately £2.9m. Schools would not be expected to contribute towards any of the set-up costs associated with becoming any academy.</p> <p>Our Trust operates on the principle of GAG pooling. Like all other LEO schools, the school would add its GAG into our overall budget, with the Trust funding all ongoing costs and improvements. The School would have access to our annual capital allocation grant. This is typically around £600k per annum and is used to</p>

Questions and Answers - Academy Conversion to LEO Academy Trust

	<p>invest in buildings and facilities improvements across LEO.</p> <p>We publish our annual accounts on our website annually:</p> <p>2025 Annual Accounts</p>
<p>There are very high levels of both diagnosed and undiagnosed SEND and PP in our school, we have required a larger number of TAs and other vital roles such as full time SENDCO, ELSA and HSLW than an equivalent school. Will the Trust look to see how the school currently functions before proposing reductions in headcount?</p>	<p>We would work with the headteacher to ensure that all SEND and PP children have the support they need. This would be through the deployment of TAs, ELSAs and HSLW, the SENDCO, as well as our Trust Inclusion & Wellbeing package (see answer above) and our 1:1 Chromebook programme, complete with accessibility tools and assistive technology to support children with SEND.</p>
<p>We are fortunate in that we have a highly skilled and experienced workforce with particular strengths in SEND and Outdoor Learning (amongst other areas), would we have the opportunity to share this excellent practice throughout the Trust?</p>	<p>Yes.</p> <p>We ask, and indeed expect, that all schools share their areas of strength, expertise and specialisms to develop best practice across all schools in the Trust. We would value your experience in SEND, Outdoor Learning and other areas.</p>
<p>The 1:1 device model is an exciting model. How/when would staff be appropriately trained and when does the transition to this model typically occur in a converting school?</p>	<p>We would look to begin to provide staff with training and support as early as possible. This would be planned with the headteacher and could involve LEO funding an initial 1:1 pilot programme for some year groups ahead of conversion and then for all year groups from the date of conversion.</p> <p>At our Trust, all staff, along with all children in KS1 and KS2, are provided with their own Chromebook. Full training and support is provided on a regular basis for staff and parents.</p>

Questions and Answers - Academy Conversion to LEO Academy Trust

	<p>Children access our Digital Skills Curriculum from EYFS through to KS2.</p> <p>Our schools receive IT support from our in-house team, as well as from our managed service providers, Eduthing. We also offer our schools a comprehensive digital package to support teaching & learning:</p> <p>https://sites.google.com/leoacademytrust.co.uk/digitalpackage/home</p> <p>At the end of 2023, we published an impact report which evaluates our digital provision:</p> <p>PedTech Impact Report - LEO Academy Trust</p>
<p>What does the curriculum look like across schools in the trust? How much alignment is there between schools? What is the rationale for this?</p>	<p>At LEO Academy Trust, we have a culture where we celebrate 'diversity in approach; consistency in outcomes'. Each school follows its own curriculum, based on the needs of its own distinct community. All our schools follow the national curriculum. To ensure that every school follows an ambitious curriculum with strong pupil outcomes, we ask schools to align their curriculum with our LEO Curriculum Strategy and to build in opportunities to deliver our LEO Pupil Outcomes - a framework which encourages schools to go beyond the national curriculum when designing learning opportunities for our children.</p> <p>LEO Curriculum Strategy</p> <p>LEO Pupil Outcomes</p> <p>We support our schools to develop digital learning opportunities and provide all KS1 and KS2 pupils with their own Chromebook device. In</p>

Questions and Answers - Academy Conversion to LEO Academy Trust	
	EYFS, ChromeTabs (similar to iPads) are used to support learning across the curriculum.
How much autonomy do schools have regarding the hiring of new staff. Are school leaders able to negotiate salaries with new appointments or is this done central	The headteacher is responsible for the staff at the school. The trust will never move a member of staff from a school unless this is with the full agreement of both the headteacher and the employee concerned.
Are there opportunities to share costs across schools for bulk purchasing? Small scale e.g. exercise books and larger scale e.g. cleaning contracts?	<p>Yes.</p> <p>All purchasing is done centrally.</p> <p>The Trust employs a procurement manager who is tasked to ensure best value in all areas.</p>
Does the school need to change its values / vision to align with those of the trust?	<p>The school will not need to change its values or vision. The Trust has worked with your school. We feel our values and ethos are very aligned with yours.</p> <p>Our Trust Values are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perseverance • Respect • Imagination • Dedication • Encouragement <p>Our culture is firmly rooted in the belief that we are one trust and one TEAM:</p> <p>Together - We are all one team; we share the same Vision, Mission, Values, and Aims.</p> <p>Expectation - As one team, we have the same expectations of each other and our pupils. We believe in diversity in approach, but consistency in outcomes.</p>

Questions and Answers - Academy Conversion to LEO Academy Trust

	<p>Achieve - We collaborate, we support each other and we achieve together.</p> <p>Move Forwards - We are focused on the future and never stand still. Individually and collectively, we develop and grow. We are outward looking and always push the boundaries of what is achievable.</p> <p>You can find out more about our values and culture online:</p> <p>Our Mission, Vision, and Values - LEO Academy Trust</p>
Will there be/are there priorities for schools directed from the central team such as disadvantaged pupils or will schools focus their team and resources where the individual school needs are identified?	Schools in LEO continue to set their own annual priorities according to the needs of their own context, outcomes and community. The trust supports this process as required.
How much involvement does the central team have in Ofsted visits, meetings with external services.	LEO Academy Trust extensively supports its schools during Ofsted inspections. This includes building strong relationships from the start, providing dedicated members of staff on inspection day, and showcasing the Trust's collaborative approach. During an inspection, the CEO will attend team meetings alongside the Principal, or will delegate this responsibility to a member of the Trust's Executive Team. The CEO, Chair of the Trust Board and Chair of the local Academy Committee will represent the Trust's governance in meetings with the inspection team. While the Trust leads many aspects of the school's work, the school itself maintains control over its daily operations. More details can be found in our Scheme of Delegation.

Questions and Answers - Academy Conversion to LEO Academy Trust

Does the head teacher / chair of LGB meet regularly with other schools and is this a requirement / scheduled into the academic year

The headteacher will be part of the LEO Senior Leadership Team and will attend weekly virtual briefings and half termly, in-person, LEO Leadership Days

What is the mental health and wellbeing support provided by Leo? Does this include centrally funded support such as employee assistance support or does this come out of school's budgets / a choice for each school to provide

This is provided and fully funded by the Trust for both children and staff alike.

Does the central teams compare emerging themes nationally and locally to ensure schools are supported and are able to take a proactive approach to potential challenges such as SEN needs, support for parents (cost of living, parental mental health), vulnerable / disadvantage learners (in addition to PP)

Yes.

The Trust is part of various networks at a local, regional and national level.

Partnership work is a strength of the Trust and was highlighted for praise in an external review last week. I will be able to share the full outcome and report with you by the end of term.

Details of the type of review we received can be found here:

[Trust Peer Review | Challenge Partners](#)