

# Camblesforth Community Primary School

Headteacher: Mrs Maria Butler BA (Hons) QTS, NPQH

Chair of Governors: Mr Ian Fenton



<http://www.camblesforth.n.yorks.sch.uk>

Mill Lane  
Camblesforth  
Selby  
YO8 8HW

Tel: 01757 618249

Fax: 08442 511260



[admin@camblesforth.n.yorks.sch.uk](mailto:admin@camblesforth.n.yorks.sch.uk)

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Dear Parents,

Education in this country is changing. The government is committed to an academy-based education agenda that allows greater freedoms for schools in a position to accept them, which they believe gives governors and Headteachers more of an incentive to provide excellent education opportunities for children.

Over half of all secondary schools in England are now academies and more than ten per cent of primary schools have also converted to academy status. The take-up amongst primaries is lower, because traditionally primaries have fewer staff and are less likely to have the capacity to handle the complex business affairs of running a school on their own. This has been particularly true in North Yorkshire.

It is also true that the level of Local Authority support for schools has reduced over the past few years, primarily as a result of central budget reductions. Services which, historically, were provided free of charge are now only delivered if the school determines to take out an agreement with county, at extra cost to the school. This has, essentially, driven schools to be more autonomous financially, whilst still being accountable to North Yorkshire for delivery of services to budget.

Additionally, schools have had to become more interdependent and have joined forces together in clusters or alliances. For many years, Camblesforth was a member of the Selby Small School Cluster, an informal liaison of local primary schools which disbanded and formalised under the acronym "RAISE". Camblesforth has been a member of the RAISE teaching alliance, centred on Whitley and Eggborough Primary School, for over a year now, and has also had informal links with the Selby Learning Alliance – a group of schools located in and around Selby.

Some schools are converting to academy status and then joining forces with like-minded schools so as to offer economies of scale, peer support and staff development opportunities, all ultimately for the benefit of the children and young people their organisations serve.

In York, a number of schools have already become academies; some have already formed multi-academy trusts (MAT) with other schools. One of these multi-academy trusts is named Ebor, and whilst based in York, it already has member schools in North Yorkshire, including the new Staynor School in Selby.

To do nothing is an option, but in these changing times, with less support from the local authority because of cost savings imposed from central government, it is not perhaps a realistic option if we want to continue to look at ways to improve our school. It is, or should be, the ambition of every Headteacher and governor to always want to do things better: there are always areas for improvement.

During the Autumn term of 2015 Mrs Butler and I had the opportunity to attend a meeting with members of the Ebor MAT and were sufficiently impressed that we invited representatives of Ebor to meet with staff and governors

at school. The Headteacher and members of Camblesforth staff have also been invited to attend Ebor meetings, and I have attended their governance board meeting.

Following much discussion and with the support of the Headteacher, the governors of Camblesforth Community Primary School decided to formally seek conversion to academy status as a member of the Ebor MAT. Further discussions have taken place, including several between me and the Department for Education, and the DfE have also been in touch with the Headteacher to obtain information relating to the school performance and financial position. There continue to be informal discussions with staff at Ebor.

Throughout our discussions with Ebor we discovered that they share our values and ethos and we believe they are a good 'fit'. Following our conversion they will handle core business activities such as payroll, HR and site management, leaving teaching and learning – our real passions – to us, with support as appropriate.

I am pleased to be able to inform you that the DfE have decided, in principle, to allow our conversion to academy status with Ebor. We envisage that conversion will take place during the summer break 2016.

It is not yet a final decision as there has to be a due diligence exercise carried out at the school to ensure that there are no hidden issues which could cause Ebor or the school difficulties in the future. There also have to be a series of legal agreements drawn up between Ebor and the Local Authority.

The governors and staff firmly believe that this move is definitely in the best interests of the pupils and staff of Camblesforth and will help us to build solidly on our good Ofsted inspection last year.

The governors and Headteacher also intend that Camblesforth will continue to work with the local schools partnerships whilst ever they continue to add value to the school.

We intend that, in the very near future, we shall hold open events for parents, at which you will be able to express your opinions, share any questions or concerns with us, and we or representatives from Ebor will do our best to answer them to your satisfaction.

Ebor have produced a magazine, copies of which are available at school, to help you understand more about the organisation that we may eventually join. You may also find out more by looking at their website [www.eboracademytrust.co.uk](http://www.eboracademytrust.co.uk)

I know that the prospect of change can be worrying for many people but I want to reassure you that the governors have taken this decision after due consideration in the best long-term interests of the school.

Please take receipt of this letter as the beginning of a four week consultation period to establish whether or not there are any material reasons not to proceed with the conversion. Following the end of that period (21<sup>st</sup> March 2016) governors will convene to consider any responses received.

The next steps will be communicated to you very soon, but I wanted to share this with you once we knew that the DfE was content for us to proceed.

Ian Fenton, Chair of Governors, Camblesforth Community Primary School