

## **Sherington Primary School Future Directions**

### **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)**

If you have any questions which are not addressed below or there is something that you wish to be clarified, please let us know via [governorquestions@sherington.greenwich.sch.uk](mailto:governorquestions@sherington.greenwich.sch.uk) and answers will be incorporated below.

#### **1. What is an Academy?**

Academy schools are state-funded schools in England which are directly funded by the Department for Education and independent of local authority control.

#### **2. What is an LEA?**

The term LEA (local education authority) refers to a local authority (LA) in England and Wales which is responsible for education within its jurisdiction.

#### **3. What is a MAT?**

A group of academy schools can come together to form a 'Multi Academy Trust' (MAT). While the MAT has an overarching responsibility for the governance of its member schools, each school maintains its own local governing board with delegated responsibilities. A multi-academy trust (MAT) is a single entity that seeks to improve and maintain high educational standards across a number of academies through strategic collaboration.

#### **4. How are academies & MATs funded?**

Academies are publicly funded schools and get money direct from the government, not via the local council.

#### **5. Who runs an academy?**

Academies are run by an academy trust which employs the staff. Some academies have sponsors such as businesses, universities, other schools, faith groups or voluntary groups. Sponsors are responsible for improving the performance of their schools.

#### **6. What is the difference between a local authority school and an academy?**

A key difference is that academies are funded directly by central government, instead of the Local Authority. This allows academies to have more independence than other state schools over their finances, the curriculum, and teachers' pay and conditions.

#### **7. Would moving to a MAT make a difference to how our children are taught at Sherington?**

No. While academies do not have to follow the national curriculum (although it has to remain "broad and balanced") our starting point is that the Sherington curriculum would remain in the control of the School. Children would still be required to take national tests.

#### **8. What are the potential advantages of joining a Multi-Academy Trust?**

Academies have greater freedom in terms of curriculum, school times, term dates, and can decide how to allocate funds, for example for services such as cleaning and payroll. Sherington is not considering becoming a standalone academy. A MAT is able to benefit from economies of scale and procure services on behalf of its member schools, based on each school contributing an agreed percentage of funding. Human resources within schools can work across multiple sites, particularly

in a localised trust, which can help in addressing the recruitment challenges facing the teaching industry. Working in close collaboration with a variety of schools can lead to benefits from sharing good practice, peer review and challenge, and offer more varied opportunities for training and development to staff. When resources are pooled in a trust, it can be possible for specialist knowledge to be bought-in to support academic, extra-curricular and operational functions.

#### **9. Would the loss of Local Authority services be detrimental to Sherington?**

When a school joins a multi-academy trust it receives most or all of its required services through the MAT. For example, professional development could be organised across multiple schools, thus spreading the cost per school and training as many individuals as possible per session. Sherington already procures services from suppliers other than the LA in a number of areas.

#### **10. Is there a cost in moving to an academy model?**

A £25,000 government grant is provided to cover the transition costs of converting to an academy in order to join a MAT.

#### **11. Does funding drop or increase in an academy?**

Academies receive the same level of funding per-pupil as they would receive from the local authority, and may receive additional capital funding to cover services relating to the condition of the school estate that are no longer provided for them by the local authority.

#### **12. What are the disadvantages of joining a Multi-Academy Trust?**

A standalone academy school has increased independence over its funds and how the school is run. These same freedoms and choices are not likely to be afforded by a MAT. MATs tend to strive for corporate alignment, to a varying degree. If managed and governed poorly the MAT could run up debt and lack key expertise. This makes the choice of MAT, the quality of the school's senior leadership team, and the MAT's governance arrangements very important.

#### **13. How soon could Sherington join a MAT?**

While there is no fixed time frame the senior leadership team and governing body are looking to make a decision on what our preferred option is (whether to join a local MAT or remain as a Local Authority maintained school) in 2018. If we do decide that joining a multi academy trust is the right decision for Sherington a formal process will commence that will include a statutory consultation period accompanied by a period of due diligence and legal work that is likely to take at least 6 months.

#### **14. How would we choose which MAT to join?**

Any MAT that Sherington explored joining would have to align with Sherington's values and ethos, be financially sound, allow the school to maintain its independent character, and have strong local relationships. Any decision will be made on the basis that it must support the best outcomes for our children. We will need to be assured that looking several years into the future, joining a MAT would bring clear net benefits for the school's resources and for our pupils when compared to remaining with the LA.

### **15. Has a decision already been taken?**

No – no decision has yet been taken. But we do expect to take a decision on our preferred direction by the end of the year. A decision to move to a MAT would then be subject to further financial checks and reviews.

### **16. Why now?**

The board of governors has an obligation to consider and plan for the school's future. The balance between schools supported by the LEA and those that are academies is changing. Over time this will leave the LEA with less resources. Making a decision to join a MAT now - on our own terms and in our own time - could enable us to shape and influence the development of that MAT. Joining a MAT may be a route to providing increased financial security for the school in the longer term, and could support the school's ability to recruit great staff and provide them with excellent development opportunities. We have reviewed our position in the past, and moving to academy status did not offer any advantages at that point. We are communicating with parents now so that you are aware of the possibility of change before any decision is taken, and have the opportunity to ask questions and raise any concerns.

### **17. Which MATs have we considered?**

We looked at four MATs operating locally together with the current LA model, and considered how each met the challenges we have identified for Sherington's future. We then focused down to 2 MATs with which to engage while we continue our close conversations with the LA, to understand the opportunities and risks that each offer for Sherington.

### **18. How will you take the views of parents on board?**

You are invited to a meeting on Wednesday 17th October at 9am, at which an independent education advisor will explain more about academies, and at which parents will have an opportunity to ask questions. We will also hold a series of drop in sessions, where you can come and talk to a governor if you have any questions or concerns.

3/10/18 UPDATE: there will now also be an evening meeting at 6pm on 17<sup>th</sup> October with the same speaker. Drop in sessions will take place after half term. Governors will be available for conversations in the playground before half term, identified by an orange "governor" lanyard.

ENDS INITIAL FAQ DOCUMENT

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The following questions were received from parents in the period between this FAQ first being posted and 1 October 2018.

**19. It seems that the main reason Sherington is considering becoming an academy is because of funding? If so, can you please advise if your actual level of funding is preventing from running the school as expected? Is the funding to make you feel more secure in next years to come or is because 'additional' funding will improve the running of the school? If so, can you please advise in what areas the funding will be use to improve the school/ children education? who enforces/ decides/ approves the budget expenditure?**

The scale of funding, its security and stability for the future and the manner in which funding is allocated and can be spent by the school are all important factors to consider. Unlike many, Sherington is forecasting a balanced budget to 2020, but this has been achieved by taking some difficult decisions as to how we allocate resources and reducing certain subsidies that we were once able to offer. It is important that we consider financial security beyond 2020. The school currently invests in a broad curriculum that enriches children's education beyond core subjects - our decision to maintain our excellent music provision is testament to that – and we want to be able to maintain that in the future. Decisions on school spending are made by the senior management team and overseen by a committee of governors.

**20.- From the school point of view, what are the differences advantages and disadvantages of becoming an Academy?**

Please see questions 8 to 12 above

**21. How will the school be accountable financially?**

As a Local Authority maintained school, Sherington is accountable to the local authority for its budget. As part of a Multi Academy Trust, the school would be accountable to the MAT in question and ultimately to the Academy Trust that oversees the MAT.

**22. Can you please advise if the conversion to an academy will have any impact on the children daily routine? I.e. would anything of the actual daily, weekly, term, yearly structure change?**

A school within a MAT has more flexibility in how it sets these structures than a local authority maintained school, so changes are possible if Sherington were to convert. However, the senior management team and governing body are not looking for any such changes and our expectation is that the daily, weekly and yearly routines would remain very similar.

**23. If we were to become an academy, would the curriculum change? Are you looking to introduce or remove certain subjects?**

Please see question 7. There is no current intention to introduce or remove any part of the curriculum.

**24. What are the considerations the school is having towards a "failing plan"? i.e. if Sherington becomes an academy and somehow becomes unsuccessful? What are the alternatives then?**

The current rules dictate that if a school converts to academy status it cannot then opt to return to local authority control at a future date. If the school were to convert, any problems in the future would need to be dealt with through the academy structure and by the senior management team and governors. The senior management team and governors, supported by the local authority, would deal with any future failures if they were to occur under a local authority maintained model.

**25. Does it cost to become an academy? What would be the estimated costs of conversion?**

Please see question 10 above.

**26. If it was decided to become an academy why are you considering a Multi- Academy Trust and not a Sole Academy, an Umbrella Trust or Collaborative Partnership?**

At the start of this process we looked at all possible options for the future of the school. These options were then further considered based on their ability to address three ongoing challenges identified for Sherington (the first two of which are in the top three challenges identified across all schools in England for 2017/8). These challenges are: Financial sustainability and stability; Recruitment, retention and development of high quality staff; and a sustainable school model in a changing environment. We followed a staged decision-making process, undertaking initial research and drawing on informal discussions as well as on the personal experiences of the SLT in academisation before deciding that the options most likely to be in the best interests of the school were to remain as a local authority maintained school or join a MAT.

**27. It seems to be a growing concern that once the school becomes an academy, and because of their 'freedom' on the choice of curriculum, the school could potentially concentrate on certain areas/ subjects and leave others to the side. It goes towards more or grammar schools and leave art and music for example to the side. Is this something that has been discussed? If so, what would it be subject the school will be concentrating on?**

Please see question 7. There is no current intention to introduce or remove any part of the curriculum.

**28. As per the above, if the school is pushing towards an area could potentially create an unbalance within the classroom where more academic children will thrive and some other may not. If this was to be the case, what would the school propose to have in place for those children that may need additional support?**

Sherington is a school where children of all abilities can thrive. Maintaining that ethos is absolutely central to our decision-making process.

**29. How would SEN students be catered for and can you give an assurance that current levels of SEN support and behaviour support staff would be maintained?**

The availability and quality of SEND support and behaviour support are important factors in the decision-making process. The school is determined to provide the very best support for those with special educational needs, to those with disabilities and to those from any background and of any ability.

**30. Would becoming an academy have any impact on those children with additional needs or disabilities?**

Please see question 29 above

**31. Will pupils have to take a selection test by aptitude?**

No – neither of the options being considered would involve this.

**32. What are the safeguards for vulnerable students?**

The quality of safeguarding of vulnerable students in the local authority model and MAT model will be an important factor in the decision-making process. All schools must follow the Department for Education's statutory guidance "Keeping Children Safe in Education".

**33. I keep hearing about 'exclusion' and how very strict rules get implemented once becoming an academy. Is this something contemplated by Sherrington?**

Not all academies or MATs have the same policies and rules. Questions on exclusion policy would need to be raised with an individual MAT.

**34. Will Sherrington exclusion policy be the same as other local schools if becoming an academy or will change?**

Please see question 33 above

**35. If Sherrington becomes part of an Academy Trust it is my understanding the the school staff can be asked to go/ transfer to another school to 'help' with some of issues at other academies. Has this been taken into account? In the case of a - Multi-Academy Trust) Will Staff be required or have the option to move between schools?**

Most MATs actively encourage the sharing of best practice across different schools and some operate models in which some staff are shared by schools in order that specialists can be made available. This is an issue that would need to be discussed in detail with a potential MAT. Under the current LA model, Sherrington teachers or leaders could be seconded to other schools by mutual agreement to provide support, staff are also obviously free to move to other schools to pursue their careers.

**36. Will the staff stay the same or are any other planned departures?**

We're not able to guarantee that staff will stay the same, whichever model we pursue. No departures or new staff have been tabled as part of the early discussions about potential academisation.

**37. Will the terms of employment for staff change?**

MATs set the terms of employment for their staff, and this will be a consideration in our decision making process.

When a school transfers from local authority to academy status, its staff will automatically transfer their terms and conditions to the academy under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 (TUPE). Transferring employees retain their continuity of service.

**38. Will teacher representatives be included on the governing body? If not, how will teachers' views be represented?**

If we remain a local authority maintained school, then we will continue to have staff representation on the governing body. It is also common practice among MATs for staff to be represented on the Governing Body. How precisely this is arranged is decided by individual MATs and is an important area for the senior management team and governing body to explore.

### **39. How will parents' views be represented?**

Whether we remain a local authority maintained school or move to academy status, parents will be represented on the governing body and Sherrington will continue to work hard to engage with parents and carers.

### **40. How will the Local Authority be represented?**

If we remain local authority maintained then we will continue to have a local authority appointed governor on the governing body, although LA Governors must govern in the interests of the school and not represent or advocate for the political or other interests of the local authority. The LA will be the organisation to which the school is responsible.

If we were to join a MAT the arrangements for liaison with the local authority would be decided by the MAT.

LAs retain overarching responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children and young people in their area.

### **41. Will the sponsors have a majority on the governing body?**

This would be a question for us to put to a specific MAT

### **42. How will parents' and stakeholders' views be taken into account when a decision is made about an Academy?**

Ultimately, the decision to remain a local authority maintained school or move to join a MAT is the responsibility of the senior management team and governing body. We're currently in an informal period of consultation so that parents can find out as much as they would like about the possible options and can help the SMT and GB to consider important questions. If the decision is taken to go down the academy route then a process of due diligence would begin, and there would be a formal period of statutory consultation with parents.

### **43. Can you confirm what percentage of people opposed to the Academy it will take to stop the proposal going ahead?**

As described above, the decision to remain a local authority maintained school or move to join a MAT is the responsibility of the senior management team and governing body. The views of parents are hugely important and will help the SMT and GB in their deliberations, but ultimately the SMT and GB must decide on a course of action that they believe is in the best interests of the school.

### **44. Will the Academy have an anti-bullying policy as Sherrington does now?**

By law, all state schools must have a behaviour policy in place that includes measures to prevent all forms of bullying among pupils.

### **45. What structures will be in place for dealing with a conflict between a teacher and a student? Will there be a withdrawal/behavioural unit?**

The precise arrangements here would be determined by a particular MAT

**46. Will the existing head teacher be appointed head of the new school? If a new principal is appointed how will they be appointed/by whom?**

As set out under question 36 above, no staff departures or new hires have been discussed as part of the deliberations around the potential change of status. The hiring of a new head would be a matter for the MAT or for the Governing body under the local authority maintained model.

**47. Who will own the school building and land?**

There are different models for how academy trust holds land, dependent on a range of specific local factors, for example a MAT may lease the land on a long lease for a peppercorn rent. This is a complex issue that we will need to take specialist advice on.

**48. How would the relationship with the Local Authority change?**

There will be no change in the relationship if the school remains a local authority maintained school. If the school were to join a MAT then the local authority would no longer be the organisation to which the school is responsible.

The local authority retains overarching responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children and young people in their area.

**49. Would there be changes to the admissions criteria? And sibling admission criteria in particular?**

This is a question for us to put to a specific MAT.

**50. If it was decided to become an academy, what is the timeline?**

We hope to have made a decision in principle to remain as a local authority maintained school or become an academy by the end of the year. Should this decision be to join an MAT, then this would be followed by a period of due diligence and a formal consultation with parents.

**51. Is the consultation process a vote on whether to proceed?**

No, the consultation process is not a vote. Please see question 42 for more details on consultation and engagement with parents.

**52. Is the decision already made?**

No. Please see question 15.

**53. Would the name of the school change? What about the uniforms?**

If the school remains a local authority maintained school then we have no plans to change the name or the uniform. Sherington would only join a MAT in which it was clearly able to maintain its own identity and the name of the school and the uniform are important parts of that.

**54. Would you retain school terms as they are at the moment or would you consider changing the terms throughout the year?**

Please see question 22

ENDS FAQs update 4<sup>th</sup> Oct DOCUMENT

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The following questions were received from parents in the period between the 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> October 2018.

**55. Another parent told me that in academies teachers can be moved to other schools within the academy trust. This helps ensure schools that are having possible issues get good teachers in to help. Is that true and do the teachers have any say in where they are based?**

The terms of employment for staff will be an important consideration in our decision-making process. We would expect the employment location for teaching staff to be the school not the trust. Please see question 35 above.

**56. What support do you currently get from the local authority and what services do you buy in from elsewhere? What is the quality of this support? What does this support cost in terms of the top slice taken by the LEA?**

Services we currently receive from the LA paid for on an annual basis include payroll, HR and legal, occupational health, education psychology, speech & language, school improvement and performance analysis. Our bursarial and governor services (clerking and training) are supplied by others, and for the last few years much of our training and development has been delivered through the Inspire Partnership of schools.

We are in the process of clarifying exactly what services are provided and at what cost for both the LA and the MAT option, which will form the basis of a financial comparison.

As a Governing Body, we are obliged to ensure that school gets good value for money, this drives how we source key services, and we have been very pleased with the quality of the services we have opted to receive from third parties. We will continue to review the quality of all services received.

**57. What would be your biggest challenges in the coming years if you remain as a maintained school?**

Our key challenges lie in these areas:

- **Financial sustainability and stability:** between 2009/10 and 2017/18 total school spending per pupil in England fell by about 8% in real terms ([IFS](#)). According to the National Audit Office ([2016](#)) schools will plan for an 8% reduction in real terms per-pupil funding between 2014/15 and 2019/20. Staff costs are typically between 75% to 80% of a school's budget, which makes funding reductions of this scale extremely challenging. In addition, decisions made at a national level on teaching pay and conditions can significantly impact staffing costs at a school level and there is no guarantee that there will be a corresponding increase in school funding. For example the government have just [announced](#) that employer contributions for staff pensions will rise from 16.48% to 23.6% (a 43% increase) from September 2019 - the DfE has said funding will be available for 2019/20 to help meet additional costs, but has not committed to cover the full costs – this will have to come in part and then possibly in full from the school's existing budget. We are making good use of the Creation Station to generate revenue through the expansion of the afterschool club and trialling evening lettings, however this will not be able to fully address the funding challenges the school faces.
- **Recruitment, retention and development of high quality staff:** it is becoming increasingly hard to recruit good teachers, particularly in [London](#). We have also observed an increasing trend towards the use of [agencies](#) rather than staff applying to individual school adverts, which makes recruitment increasingly expensive. Sherington has an established career

development pathway that provides excellent opportunities and professional development for staff, however it is ultimately limited to the school setting, and constrained by the positions available in this setting.

- **A sustainable school model in a changing environment:** there have been significant changes to education policy in the last few years which primary schools have had to accommodate, for example a new National Curriculum, developing school specific systems for measuring pupil progress, adapting to new key stage assessments. The local authority landscape is also changing as the number of schools within MATs increases. We need to ensure that the school model for Sherington is resilient and has the capacity to accommodate and adapt to change.

These are challenges that apply to both the maintained and the MAT models, but we are seeking to determine whether in our specific local situation one model may be able to meet them better than the other.

#### **58. What MATs are you currently considering?**

Please see question 17 above. The two MATs under further consideration were Leigh Academy Trust (LAT) and the Compass Partnership. Following initial informal discussions, Compass have informed us that they are not looking to expand their MAT at this point in time.

#### **59. What are the features of the MATs' offers you are most interested in?**

Any MAT under consideration had to meet the following minimum criteria:

- Aligns with Sherington's values and culture
- Retains Sherington's identity
- Based on local relationships
- Has clear net benefits for school resources (financial, premises, and staff) and for pupils, looking to the future. Advances the school in some way.

Please see questions 26 and 57. The features of MAT offers we are most interested in relate to the ability to impact the challenges described in the response to question 57, for example whether it is possible to improve our financial position through economies of scale within a MAT, the ability to have a dedicated recruitment facility that would reduce our SLT workload and provide a better deal on agency fees, the ability to provide extended career opportunities and diverse CPD within a MAT.

#### **60. What do you know about the SEND provision of the MATs you are considering joining?**

See question 29. This is something that is important for us to find out more about.

#### **61. Why have parents been kept in the dark about this for the last year?**

We formed the working group to look at future options for the school at the Full Governors meeting in December 17. We undertook a period of research and exploratory meetings with MATs and the LA in the Spring term. The working group met several times in the Summer term to set out a framework to assess options against, and then to eliminate some options that did not meet our minimum criteria. The working group shared their findings at an additional full governors meeting in June which provided a challenge and review point, followed by an agreement on options to carry forward. There was a further full governors meeting at the start of term in September to plan out how to share our process with parents, gather views and answer questions. This was the point at which we felt we had clear enough information to share about the options we were looking at.

**62. Will there be a chance to ask questions in person at the meetings on 17<sup>th</sup> October?**

Inviting questions in advance is something that many organisations do when there might be lots of questions asked. It gives us a chance to group or organise questions so that we can make best use of our time at each meeting. We want to ensure that all questions are asked and answered in whatever way people want to pose them. This might be via the FAQs on the school's website, by email or in person. Some parents may not wish to raise questions in a public forum and submitting questions in advance allows them to also raise their queries.

There will be an opportunity for questions from the floor at each meeting on Wednesday after we have responded to the questions submitted in advance.

We will continue to make members of the Governing Body available in the playground for informal discussions at drop off/collection. We will also be holding several drop-in sessions for parents and carers with governors after the half term break.

ENDS FAQs update 8<sup>th</sup> Oct DOCUMENT

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The following questions were received from parents in the period between the 8th to 14th October 2018.

**63. Why the need for such a quick decision?**

Please see questions 13 and 15.

**64. Why has this been hidden from us?**

Please see question 61.

**65. Academies do not have to employ qualified teachers, will this be something Sherington will embrace to save costs?**

Refer to <https://fullfact.org/education/unqualified-teachers/> . Since 2012 both LA maintained schools and academies can appoint unqualified teachers with special qualifications or experience regardless of the availability of qualified ones.

Policy in this area would be set by an individual MAT but Sherington is not driven by a desire to change employment practices. Questions 36, 37 and 46 above deal further with issues of staffing.

**66. Will the national curriculum be adhered to?**

Please see question 7.

**67. Who has proposed this change?**

No one has proposed that Sherington *should* change. What the Governing Body and Senior Management Team have done is to actively consider whether Sherington would be better served as a local authority maintained school or as a school in a MAT. If the Governing Body and Senior Management team are convinced that joining a MAT is the better option then the change will be proposed and a six month process of due diligence and consultation will follow.

**68. Will the head teacher stay on at the school?**

Please see questions 36, 37 and 46 on staffing matters.

**69. What is the motivation for the change? Funding is secure for 2 years so why not wait to see what the financial situation is nearer the time?**

Please see questions 16, 19 and 57 which describe why it is the responsibility of the Governing Body and Senior Management Team to take long term strategic decisions about the future of the school.

**70. What will be done to ensure teachers stay?**

Please see questions 36, 37 and 46 on staffing matters.

**71. I have heard that academies do not have to employ qualified teachers? Does the MAT that you are considering joining already do this and what is the policy they have adopted for the schools already in their MAT?**

Please see question 65. This will be a consideration in our decision making process.

**72. Have the school got any retention plans for current teachers? Many of whom I believe could consider leaving if we change.**

Please see questions 36, 37 and 46 on staffing matters.

**73. I have also heard that academies employ many NQT's as they do not have to pay them a high salary and many teachers don't want to work in an academy. Will we end up with an unbalanced skill mix of experienced versus inexperienced teachers? I believe Sherington has always had a good track history of recruiting good teachers so I don't understand how Academy status could be good for recruitment?**

Please see questions 36, 37 and 46 on staffing matters. Sherington does indeed have a good track record of recruiting and developing excellent staff across all levels of experience. However recruitment of high calibre staff is increasingly difficult, time consuming and expensive, please see question 57. We are considering whether Sherington would be better able to meet this and the other identified challenges as a local authority maintained school or as a school in a MAT. Our ability to retain control over how we spend our budget, including staff recruitment, is a key consideration in this.

**74. Do we know what MAT Sherington is planning to join?**

Please see question 58.

**75. As a possible choice for MAT has decided it is not looking to expand, (Compass) are you going to consider other options for a local MAT or limit this to your other original suggestion of the Leigh Academy Trust?**

Please see question 17 & 58.

**76. As the Leigh is a secondary-led trust, with origins not local to our community, how can you best ensure Sherington (as an outstanding, yet small in comparison to the very large secondaries in this trust) has a voice within this wide-spread organisation, with schools from very different communities and with very different needs?**

LAT is built around four strategic clusters, all within an easy commute of each other in North West Kent, Central Kent, Medway and South East London. LAT has 8 primary schools, 1 special school and 9 secondary schools. The South East London cluster has 3 secondary schools and 1 primary school (Eastcote Primary, off Shooter's Hill). Together with the Eastcote Primary, Sherington would play a part in developing the primary phase of the South East London cluster.