

Frequently asked questions from stakeholders about academy conversions

The information in this fact sheet is intended to help answer some of the questions which may arise when considering conversion to academy status. This information cannot in any way replace the informal conversations and formal consultation that takes place during the conversion process.

What is an academy?

An academy is a school that is directly funded by central government and independent of direct control by local government. Academies are inspected by Ofsted under the same framework as maintained schools. Academies are self-governing.

What is a Multi-Academy Trust?

A Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) is a charitable company limited by guarantee which is formed to oversee a group of schools who are academies. The MAT is the employer of staff and holds the land and buildings of each academy in Trust.

How does governance work?

There will be a Board of Trustees who are ultimately responsible for the work of the Trust and the academies. However, they devolve much of the responsibility to the individual academies and their respective local governing bodies. Each academy has its own local governing body who work with the academy headteacher to check that the academy is making good progress and add additional challenge and scrutiny to the work of the school.

What is the main motivation for converting to academy status?

- We will remain in charge of our own destiny as the government seeks to encourage all schools to become academies.
- The Local Authority (LA) capacity is disappearing. Pooling the resources of a number of schools means we can re-create some of the services once received from the LA.
- To shape the provision to meet the future needs of our children, families and communities based on a local and collaborative proposal of working together and building on existing good practice.
- To develop the expertise of all staff to further improve effectiveness and outcomes for children.
- To generate financial efficiencies to invest back into the classroom for the benefit of the children.

What parents and carers need to know

- Each school will not change its character and will continue to look, feel and be the same as it is now.
- The Headteacher and local Governing Body will continue to run the school on a daily basis as they do now, and parents/carers will continue to be represented on the local Governing Body.
- The name of the school will not change, and the school will not change its admissions policy.
- The school uniform will not change.
- Children with special needs will continue to receive additional support in the way they do now.
- Our local schools will continue to work very closely together for each other as well as your children, and will be provided with more support to help them become even better.
- The multi-academy trust arrangements will share some central services across the schools, helping them be more efficient and make sure that funding is focused on teaching, learning and support for children.
- The multi-academy trust will work very closely and co-operatively with local partners, including other schools, community groups and organisations, and the local authority.
- The multi-academy trust will have a CEO, who will run the trust.

Is an academy like a business?

No. A business makes profit for its shareholders. An academy is a charitable trust, which cannot make profit.

Who makes the decision to become an academy?

The Governing Body.

Are academies bound by the same rules and regulations as other schools?

Academies are required to follow the law and guidance on admissions, special educational needs and exclusions.

Will the academy follow the National Curriculum?

Yes, but it would have more freedom to try different things in the curriculum and make sure that what is taught is relevant to our pupils and their specific needs. It must be broad and balanced.

Does becoming an academy change the relationship with local schools and the community?

No. Academy funding agreements state that they must ensure that we will be at the heart of its community, collaborating and sharing facilities and expertise with other local schools and the wider community.

Will the academy still work with the local authority (LA)?

Academies are independent of the local authority. However, we wish to continue working with the LA, other local schools and local partners.

What about funding?

The Department for Education via the Education Funding Agency (EFA) meets the running costs for an academy. Therefore, the academy will have a similar budget to that of its predecessor maintained school. With greater freedom to procure services from other providers and to realise cost efficiencies across the network, the academy will be able to make more efficient use of resources to support school improvement. Like other schools, an academy cannot run at a loss or agree a deficit budget. It has to break-even.

What does it cost to become an academy?

There are legal, financial and project costs associated with becoming an academy. The government gives each converting academy £25,000 to contribute towards these costs.

Will the staff stay the same?

When a school converts to a new academy, all permanent staff are entitled to transfer to it under the same employment terms and conditions. The process of conversion assumes 'as is' for staff and that they continue to teach the same classes as previously.

Will the terms of employment for staff change?

As part of TUPE arrangements, staff are entitled to transfer to the new academy under the same employment terms and conditions with your current substantive contract of employment in place. Currently, there are no plans to change this position.

What will happen with regard to staff pensions?

If you are a teacher in the current school, your pension will continue as part of the teacher's pension scheme, with the Trust continuing with the same employer responsibilities as the predecessor school. Non-teaching staff will be members of the local government pension scheme and the Trust will secure 'admitted body' status with the local pension authority to protect the pension rights of employees and take on employer responsibility, both for contributions and administration of the scheme.

Will you consult with staff, community and parents?

Yes, we will consult with all key stakeholder groups during the transition phase. This will include the sharing of our plans for the new academy trust and an opportunity to gather feedback and suggestions, as well as addressing any questions or concerns. A clear consultation will take place.

Will the school remain non-selective?

Yes - academies are non-selective schools. Academies are required to follow the law and guidance on admissions, SEND and exclusions as if they were maintained schools. It is the aim of the Trust to ensure that our academies provide high quality, inclusive education for all local children.

Are academies inspected by Ofsted?

Ofsted inspects academies in the same way as maintained schools.

Will the school need to change its name?

No. The title may eventually change from Primary School to Academy.

Can the academy work with the council and other schools?

Yes. Where possible and appropriate, the academy will buy back services from the local authority. The academy can work with any schools it wishes if this makes a difference to the education of the children.

Will there be a new uniform?

No. Uniform will be the same as it is now.

What date would the Academies open?

The proposal, subject to approval from the Department for Education, is for the academies to open on 1st January 2019 as part of the Steel River Academy Trust.

How can I find out more about academies?

Visit the website for the department of education on www.gov.uk and search for Academies on the home page.