

Academy Conversion: Frequently Asked Questions for Parents/Carers

Q. What is an academy?

An Academy is a state school that is run by an Academy Trust. The Academy Trust enters into an agreement with the Secretary of State for Education that sets out its responsibilities and accountabilities for the effective running of the Academy. The Academy is funded directly by the Government not through the Local Authority. The Trust is given charitable exemption, which means it must operate much like a charity.

Q. What is a Multi Academy Trust (MAT)?

Within a MAT, all schools are governed by one academy trust. The MAT has a board of directors which is accountable for all the academies in the trust. In effect they run like mini-Local Authorities providing support services and driving forward school improvement in those schools. Each academy in the trust has its own Local Governing Body which are also known as Local Academy Committees.

Q. What is the difference between academies and maintained schools, between academies and free schools and between stand-alone academies and Multi Academy Trusts (MATs)?

Academies are publicly funded independent schools that are able to set their own pay and conditions for staff and have freedom to determine their own curriculum. Academies exist in a number of forms including free schools and sixth form colleges. An academy can either be a stand-alone school or part of a MAT.

Q. How is an academy funded?

Academies are funded directly by the Education Funding Agency (part of the Department of Education). This means that academies receive 100% of their grant (rather than a proportion of these funds being diverted to the Local Authority) and are free to choose how to spend it, as long as it is spent on improving the education of its pupils.

Q. Do schools need to have a sponsor to become an academy?

If a school or academy is underperforming and needs an intervention strategy, then to become an academy it will require a sponsor. Sponsors require approval from the Department for Education to support an academy or group of academies. If on conversion the school intends to start a MAT to support other schools, then it will have to have a sponsor.

Q: What are the benefits of being an academy?

A significant benefit of joining a MAT is the ability to collaborate and share expertise across the Trust to further enhance our existing educational provision. Children can benefit from a wide range of specialist staff; a particular feature of the Prince Albert Community Trust is that it employs many qualified and experienced teachers who share expertise across the Trust. This allows schools to deliver both a broad curriculum and a range of enriched extra-curricular activities to children across all the schools.

Q: How will joining a MAT affect staff?

All staff employed by the respective school at the point of conversion will automatically transfer to the new academy on their current pay and conditions. Although academies have more freedom to amend those pay and conditions in the future, any change to pay and conditions would need to be consulted upon with staff representatives.

Teaching staff would also benefit from having greater opportunities for career developments and training. Members of staff could choose to work in different schools with a MAT to support school improvement or as career development opportunities.

Q: When can schools be forced to convert to academy status?

The law requires schools which have received an 'Inadequate' rating from Ofsted to become academies. Schools which have received two or more consecutive ratings below 'Good' may also be converted into academies.

Under the Academies Act 2010, the Education Act 2011 and the Education and Adoption Act 2016, once a school is placed in a category of special measures or serious weaknesses by Ofsted, it will automatically become 'eligible for intervention' (as set out in the Education and Inspections Act 2006).

For schools in this situation, the secretary of state is required to issue the school with a directive academy order, requiring the school to academise and be supported by an academy sponsor.

Are there any disadvantages to becoming an academy?

The Trust would be directly liable for matters such as insurance, employment liabilities, pensions, health and safety, and, property maintenance. However, academies receive more funding from central government to help them meet these additional costs, and in any event, an established MAT already deals with these matters for all of its other academies it supports.

Once the school has converted, there is currently no route to revert back to being a maintained school under local authority control – academy conversion is a permanent change. If the school was underperforming in the future, the Secretary of State may have the power to force the school (as an academy) to transfer to a different academy trust. However, in those circumstances, it is likely that the Secretary of State would have the power to intervene even if the school remained a local authority maintained school.