

CONVERTING TO ACADEMY STATUS FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is an Academy?

Academies are classed as 'independent' /autonomous state schools, which have the freedom to determine their own policies on such things as the curriculum taught, school hours, term dates and staff pay. This is enabled by the Academies Act 2010. Primary, secondary and special schools are all able to apply to convert into an academy and are accountable to the Secretary of State - not the County Council. Academies are managed by their own Academy Trust and are not the responsibility of the Council. Academies are given directly the money what would have been given to the Council so academies can choose how to spend the money.

Who decides which schools convert to an academy?

The decision for any school to become an academy rests with its governing body.

What is the primary driver of a move to convert to Academy status?

Given the government's stated intention that all schools should be academies by 2020 and that so many other local schools are currently in the process of converting, the governors consider that if we do not initiate this change, it is increasingly likely that the future may be taken out of our hands. This could mean that remaining maintained schools are forced to become academies or are placed as lesser partners in established Multi Academy Trusts. If that happens it would result in a total loss of control over the future of the school and this is not a risk the governors will take.

We wish to become a convertor academy. How are convertor academies different from sponsored academies?

Sponsored academies are usually set up to replace under-performing schools with the aim of improving educational standards and raising the aspirations of, and career prospects for, pupils from all backgrounds including the most disadvantaged. Outstanding schools and academies may now also become sponsors themselves in order to help less able schools to improve. Converter academies are not required to have a sponsor, and we would not intend to seek one. Converter academies are successful schools that have chosen to convert to academies in order to benefit from the increased autonomy academy status brings. They were introduced in 2010 as part of the Coalition government's plan to broaden the academy programme and eventually enable all schools to become academies.

Will the school name or uniform change?

No. We are St Philip's CE VC Primary School and we will proudly keep our name. In the future the academy might at times additionally refer to their membership of the 'Palladian Multi Academy Trust'. There will be no change to the school uniform.

Will any staff leave?

No. There are absolutely no plans for anything like this to happen. In fact, a major drive to form our MAT is to provide better CPD (continuing professional development) and enhanced career opportunities for all our staff.

Will staff levels change?

Moving to Academy status will not dictate the number or make-up of staff. Decisions on staffing depend on need as well as the resources available.

Will the Terms and Conditions of staff change?

There is no intention to change Terms and Conditions. Staff would officially be employed by the Multi Academy Trust and their existing employment rights would move across under the TUPE rules and thus be protected. We anticipate remaining with the teachers' staff pay scales as currently recommended by the LA & unions.

Are we going to be part of a chain?

We will be part of a Multi Academy Trust (MAT). St Philip's will be expected to be as autonomous as possible to retain its individual ethos and character. The MAT will be like a mosaic of schools each with their own identity the MAT will not become a 'melting pot' however, over time some similarities may appear for example we will all share one pay policy and HR provider.

As a partnership of schools will you have increased purchasing power?

Yes, it's probably the case that a group of schools will be able to obtain better value when negotiating contracts for services essential for running a school, such as insurance, accountancy, HR, Payroll, broadband and other internet and IT services.

Would our school's budget be used to bail out a new MAT member school if it was in financial trouble?

No and no decision will ever be taken that might jeopardise that. All schools within The MAT have their own budget and financial control as they currently do, but this will come direct to the trust – not via the LA. The Trust will top slice 5% (as the LA currently do to enable them to provide statutory services – hospital school, maternity leave etc..)

Funding for SEND is not currently ring-fenced. How does converting to an Academy affect that?

Converting to Academy status does not, of itself, mean there will be changes to the arrangements for supporting SEND pupils. Whether we convert or not, there have been changes to the funding schools receive for each SEND child. That necessitates a very flexible use of the resources to ensure we continue to support fully those children, whatever form the additional support needs to take. Converting to Academy status may provide benefits in this area through, for example, the sharing of expertise and support in exceptional cases, and we expect the availability of psychologist observations and on-site therapy to continue as now.

Will there be any change to the admissions policy?

In the same way as maintained schools, all academies are required to adopt clear and fair admission arrangements in line with the admissions law and the School Admissions Code. When a school converts to become an Academy, it will be the admission authority and is responsible for its own admission arrangements. This will mean little change for some schools such as foundation or voluntary aided schools which are already self-standing admission authorities. But for community schools and voluntary controlled schools, the Academy will need to manage its own admissions process. It will involve periodic consultation and regularly publishing the Academy's admission arrangements.

Will there be more exclusions as an Academy?

No. Academies have to follow the exact same government guidance and law on excluding pupils. This includes reporting exclusions to the Local Authority.

Will the curriculum change?

We currently teach to the National Curriculum (last amended September 2015). As an academy we are no longer bound by the National Curriculum. Nevertheless, we remain subject to SATs so would be wise to retain at least the core elements of the curriculum. Our main consideration is to continue with a 'broad and balanced' curriculum that helps us instil in children a 'lifelong love of learning'.

Will the term dates change?

All schools have the ability to set their own term dates. We currently work with our cluster schools and the local high school to try and provide term dates that suit both the needs of our children and parents. There is no intention to alter the current arrangements.

Will a parent's right to complain be affected?

No. If Academy conversion takes place there will be, as there is now, a complaints policy which gives an avenue for parents to complain. Every outside agency currently available to parents will remain unchanged.

What will the Governance structure look like?

The proposed structure of the MAT's governance has been agreed by the Department for Education. This structure will enable all schools equal voting rights in all decisions at MAT level and much of the decision-making will be delegated to the Local Governing Body. Members will oversee the MAT and ensure that Directors are carrying out their duties. They would probably meet formally three times a year. The Members are independent of all schools and provide a wide range of skills from education, legal and business backgrounds. The next level below the board of directors in the 'The Executive' of the trust, which will consist of the Chief Executive Officer, Education Director and the Headteachers from all schools. This group will make recommendations related to the operational and strategic working of the academy trust to the Board of Directors. The Local Governing Body for each school will still continue to include parent representation as it does now. Most decisions will be made at this level.

What are the estimated costs of conversion?

The DfE pays a flat-rate grant of £25,000 to a school after an Academy Order has been issued and this is expected to more than meet the costs of conversion. In exceptional circumstances support above this level may be agreed. To reduce potential legal costs the DfE has produced model legal documentation.

Can a school withdraw from the conversion process?

Schools are able to withdraw right up until the point that they sign the Funding Agreement. Once this is signed there is a legally binding agreement between the Secretary of State and the academy, and the termination would require a long notice period (seven years).

How do I find out more about academies?

There are several ways you may find out about academies. If your local school is considering conversion then you should expect to be consulted if you have a child at the school. You can find out more information from the Department for Education.

Can the school alter staff pay and conditions?

When a school converts from a Local Authority maintained school to a new Academy, staff are legally protected to transfer under the same employment terms and conditions.

Does the school have to hold consultation with staff?

Under employment legislation the current employer of school staff (which in our case is the Governing Body) will need to conduct a TUPE* consultation with all staff (both teaching and non-teaching) and the relevant unions as part of the staff transfer process. (*TUPE = Transfer of Undertaking – Protection of Employment)

If the school becomes an Academy, who takes responsibility for the pension arrangements of teachers?

Teachers working in an Academy fall within the scope of the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS), just as if they were employed in a Local Authority maintained school. As the employer, the Academy would be responsible for remitting contributions to the TPS and for all other administrative responsibilities that fall to employers who employ teachers who are subject to the Teachers' Pensions Regulations. Teachers' pensions, whose contact details are below, administer the Scheme on behalf of the Department and will provide you with full information about the role and responsibility of employers in relation to scheme administration.

Teachers' Pensions, Capita Hartshead, Mowden Hall, Darlington. DL3 9EE Telephone: 0845 606 6166 Fax: 01325 745789 Website: <http://www.teacherspensions.co.uk/>

If the school becomes an Academy, who takes responsibility for the pension arrangements of support staff?

Non-teaching staff at schools fall within the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS). As the employer, the Academy would be responsible for meeting the employer contribution. Academies are obliged to offer LGPS membership to staff. Unlike the TPS, there are a number of component schemes within LGPS, with the Local Authority acting as pension administrator. The employer contribution rate may differ from that payable by the LA. Academies mandatorily fall within the TPS and LGPS but it is open for an individual member of staff to opt out of the TPS or LGPS, as the case may be, if they preferred to make other pension provision for themselves.

How will the TUPE process work and what specific responsibilities does the school have?

A: The Governing Body is responsible for informing and consulting staff.

B: The Governing Body acts with due diligence and passes staff details to the Academy Trust.

C: The Academy Trust writes to each member of staff confirming that they will transfer under existing terms and conditions.

D: The Governing Body gives indemnity for the period staff worked for them, normally as part of the Commercial Transfer Agreement.

Does becoming an Academy change the relationship with other schools and the community?

No, Academy Funding Agreements state that they must ensure that the school will be at the heart of its community, collaborating and sharing facilities and expertise with other schools and the wider community.

Regardless of which academy group we join, it will always be our intention to retain good working relationships and partnerships with other local schools.

Will forming a relationship with a secondary school mean that our children will have to feed into that school?

No, parents will retain the right to choose a secondary school which they feel meets the needs of their children as they currently do – this freedom of choice will not change.