

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Multi Academy Trust (MAT)?

A MAT is the structure that allows more than one academy to work together under an academy trust. It has one overall board of directors which runs the trust, with each academy having its own local governing body.

The MAT gives us the chance to share knowledge and teaching and learning between schools. It gives the schools within the trust the opportunity to make collective decisions about contracts with strategic partners thereby releasing more money for teaching and learning.

What is an Academy?

An Academy is an independent state school, funded directly from central government rather than through the County Council. A charitable company limited by guarantee (the Academy Trust) is responsible for the academy, and the Academy Trust signs the Funding Agreement (the contract) with the Secretary of State as part of the establishment of the academy.

Legislation requires that an academy has the following characteristics: that it offers a balanced and broadly based curriculum; that it provides education for students of different abilities; and that it provides education for students who are wholly or mainly drawn from the area in which the school is situated.

Becoming an academy means that we would have greater freedom to innovate and raise standards. We would have much greater freedom around the delivery of the curriculum, using our budget to work with the best partners available.

We would still be subject to Ofsted inspection and the children would still be prepared for SATs in the same way as they are now.

Would there be any external sponsors involved, like there are in the 'sponsored' academies?

No.

Is this privatisation?

No. The Academy Trust is a charitable trust and is not a profit-making organisation. The only objective of the Trust is to promote education for public benefit.

Would we receive more money as an academy?

Academies receive the same level of per-pupil funding as maintained schools receive from the LA, but they also receive an additional amount called the education services grant which is currently retained by the LA to pay for some services which the LA provide. However, out of this money we would have to purchase some services which are currently provided by the LA.

The Government states that becoming an academy should not bring about a financial advantage or disadvantage to a school. The main change is that academies have greater freedom over how they use their budgets. As an academy, we would therefore have more freedom to buy the services we need from a range of providers and obtain best value for money and the best quality services for the benefit of the children.

Why should we consider becoming an academy?

In addition to the fact that we believe the greater freedoms and flexibilities will enable us to raise educational standards, there are other factors which are pointing towards conversion to an academy. As central services provided by the LA are already considerably reduced and the services which we receive are much more limited than they were a few years ago, all schools are being urged to give serious consideration to pursuing conversion to academy status.

The Government's policy is to encourage conversion and they are currently providing funding to assist with the costs of doing so. The governing body therefore feels that we need to engage actively with this issue; if we wait and ignore the changes that are happening around us, we may lose our choices and have a model of academy conversion imposed upon us.

Nationally, the majority of secondary schools - 60%+ are now academies and there are already well over 2,000 primary school academies – about one in every ten primary schools and this figure is increasing month by month. The trend is for schools to convert as part of a MAT – more than two thirds of convertors last year did this.

How accountable are academies?

Academies are subject to inspections by the schools' inspectorate, Ofsted, in the same way as other schools are. SATs results will continue to be published as at present, alongside those of other state schools in league tables. Academies are accountable directly to the Secretary of State for Education.

Would conversion to academy status affect our admissions policy?

Academies are subject to the same admissions code as other state schools. This sets the rules for fair admissions. We plan to continue to use the authority admissions team to administer the process as we do now but we would be able to represent ourselves at appeals.

Would there be changes to the number of pupils admitted into reception each year?

No.

Would there be changes to the admissions over-subscription criteria of the school?

There are no plans to change the current over-subscription criteria. The admissions process and criteria will stay the same and be managed by the local authority as it is at present.

What about the way in which the school is governed? Would that change?

A new 'Academy Trust' would be established with a small number of Members (only 3 to 5) who have a substantial interest in and knowledge of the school and its local community. In addition there would be a committee of Trustees who would be a group made up of people with specific skills to provide the overall strategic direction of the MAT. Each school in the MAT would then have a Local Governing Body to oversee the day to day running of the school in the same way as they do now.

Would staff remain the same after conversion?

All current school staff would transfer to employment with the Multi Academy Trust (MAT) on academy conversion and there are no plans to change the staffing structure. The governing body is committed to continuing to recruit and retain high quality staff and will support existing staff through the transition and beyond if the school does convert to academy status.

Would staff pay and conditions change?

When a school converts to academy status, members of staff transfer to the academy trust with their existing employment terms and conditions under the TUPE regulations which means that their terms and conditions of employment and pension arrangements, including continuity of service, are protected on conversion. When Harrogate Grammar School became an academy, a commitment was made that staff terms and conditions would be no less favourable than they would be if staff were employed by the Local Authority and this assurance remains for all the schools in the MAT.

What does the process of converting to academy status entail?

Initially, schools register their interest in becoming an academy online with the DfE. A school then completes and submits an application to become an academy to the DfE. A school must also consult with parents, staff and all other stakeholders before a funding agreement is entered into between the academy trust and the Secretary of State for Education.

When the Secretary of State for Education approves the school's application to convert, they issue an academy order. An academy trust is then set up to operate the schools in the MAT as academies and enter into a funding agreement with the Secretary of State to run the academies. The MAT also employs the staff and owns the assets of the schools in the MAT and will enter into arrangements to enable it to occupy the school sites after academy conversion.

The final stage is the signing of the funding agreements with the Secretary of State for Education.

Do schools have to cover the costs of conversion to academy status?

No. The DfE pays a flat-rate grant of £25,000 into each school's bank account after an application has been approved and academy order has been issued. This grant is provided for the detailed exploration of academy status and, if the school decides to proceed, the implementation costs. There are costs relating to the legal conversion (i.e. setting up the Trust, preparing the lease and Funding Agreement, and the TUPE process) and other 'one-off' costs relating to preparing each academy for successful operation. To reduce potential legal costs, the DfE has produced model legal documentation.

What else would not change?

There will be very little that obviously changes in the day to day running of our school. Keeping all that is special about our school whilst allowing us to continue to grow and develop is one of the drivers for academy conversion.

Academies are required to follow the law and guidance on admissions, special educational needs and exclusions, as in maintained schools. Academies have to 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.

What services would remain with the local authority?

The following duties remain with the local authority and do not become our responsibility:

- education psychology, SEN statements and assessment,
- assigning SEN resources for pupils who require high levels of additional resource (this is a top- up to formula funding under a separate contract with the local authority),
- monitoring of SEN provision and parent partnerships,
- prosecuting parents for non-attendance,
- provision of pupil referral units for a pupil no longer registered at an academy.

What are the safeguards for vulnerable students?

Under the terms of the Funding Agreement (which is the contract between the Academy Trust and the Secretary of State), an academy has to act in exactly the same way as a maintained school in relation to Special Education Needs, behaviour, and exclusions.

What about the insurance costs an academy would incur to cover the significant risks posed by potential emergencies such as fire, flood, pupil accidents, major crimes etc.?

All academies are required to take out a wide range of insurances, often to levels specified by the DfE. The academy receives a grant equivalent to the cost of insurance from the DfE so it has no net effect on the academy budget.

Would the school day and school year change?

No.

Would the school name change?

No but we would become part of The Red Kite Trust Harrogate, a Multi Academy Trust.

Would the school uniform change?

No.

Where can I get further information?

The Department for Education website has information about academies, including an extensive set of themed questions and answers: www.education.gov.uk/academies