

## Frequently asked questions about academy conversion

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

### GENERAL QUESTIONS

*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.

Academies are self-governing.

*What is the main motivation for converting to academy status?*

National curriculum: Academies do not have to follow the national curriculum as long as the curriculum remains 'broad and balanced'. This will provide us with greater flexibility to determine what best suits our children.

Financial budgets: Academies receive funding directly from central government instead of via the local authority. This will include money that would previously have been held back by the local authority. An academy may also accumulate funds from private sources should it choose to.

Admissions: Academies are responsible for drawing up their own admissions criteria in line with the Admissions Code and SEN Code of Practice (the law). Academies are required to cater for children of all abilities (unless they were already selective).

Length of terms and school days: Academies are free to set the length of its terms and school days.

Pay and terms of conditions of staff: The academy is responsible for agreeing levels of pay, conditions of service, staffing structures, career development and appraisal. However all existing staff transfer from the local authority under legislation known as TUPE regulations which will protect their current conditions.

*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.

*Does becoming an academy change the relationship with local 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 local schools and the wider community.

*As an academy, will we still work with the local authority (LA)?*

Academies are independent of the local authority. However, we wish to continue working the LA, other local schools and local partners where it is beneficial to our learners.

## **GOVERNANCE**

*How does governance work?*

The Gallery Trust has a board of Trustees who are ultimately responsible for the work of the Trust and the academies. However, each of the schools retains its local governing body who work with the Head Teacher to check the academy is making good progress.

Each governing body should have parent/carer representatives and a staff governor. The academy Head Teacher is always a governor for the time they are employed in that role.

The governing body sets the vision for the academy in line with the overall commitment of The GalleryTrust.

The governing body also set the academy budget and improvement plan for approval by The GalleryTrust.

The governing body has delegated powers from the Trust Board including the management of finance and property and the appointment of staff. The schedule of delegation is the same across each of the academies within the Trust.

## **FUNDING**

*What will happen to our school's funding?*

The Department for Education meets the running costs for an academy in full. Academy funding is calculated on a like-for-like basis with local authority schools. 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, i.e. it has to break-even.

*How will the school be accountable financially?*

An academy is governed by the rules and regulations for charitable trusts, e.g. we will be required to produce and file accounts. There will be robust systems with an audit conducted by an external independent auditor.

*Does it cost to become an academy?*

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

## **EMPLOYMENT AND STAFFING**

*Will the staff stay the same?*

When a school converts from a local authority maintained school to a new academy, all permanent staff are entitled to transfer to it under the same employment terms and conditions.

*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. However, it is essential that the academy is able to respond to the changing curriculum requirements and educational demands. This may therefore require consultation with staff and trade unions, once the academy has been established, on changes to terms and conditions of employment. This would be necessary if, for example, the Trust wished to introduce a particular organisational change to the academy's term dates, or if curriculum demands and the need for improved educational outcomes required a different leadership and organisational structure.

*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 usually 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. Staff can opt out of either if they wish to make alternative provision.

*What happens if the headteacher leaves?*

The academy trust will work with the academy governors to appoint a new headteacher/principal.

## **CONSULTATION**

*Will you consult with staff, community and parents?*

Yes, as part of our approach to project management for any new academy, we are consulting with all key stakeholder groups during the transition phase. This will include the sharing of our plans and an opportunity to gather feedback and suggestions, as well as addressing any questions or concerns. A letter has been sent home and is on our website, giving details of the consultation process.

## **ADMISSIONS**

*Will the school remain a community special school?*

Yes – We are moving to this trust in order to provide high quality, inclusive education for local children.

## **THE NEW ACADEMY**

*Will the school need to change its name?*

It is unlikely that the school will change its name; unless there is a compelling reason for this. Usually the school will simply call itself 'academy' rather than 'school', e.g. Mabel Prichard Academy.

*Can the academy work with the council and other schools?*

Yes. 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?*

There are no plans to do this and even if we changed to 'Mabel Prichard Academy' we would simply phase in the name change on the new uniform as we have done with the recent change of logo.

The Department for Education website contains a wide range of information about becoming an academy. In particular the website has a FAQ section which can be found at:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/academies/primary/faqs>

