

CONVERTING TO ACADEMY STATUS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is an Academy?

Academies are classed as independent 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 that so many other local schools have converted, or 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. Sponsors are responsible for establishing the Academy trust, the governing body and the appointment of the head teacher. They come from a wide variety of backgrounds including businesses, faith communities, universities and individual philanthropists. Outstanding schools and academies may now also become sponsors themselves in order to help less able schools to improve.

Convertor 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. The Academies Act passed in July 2010 made it possible for all maintained

schools, primary, secondary and special, to apply to become academies, with schools rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted being pre-approved.

Will the school name change?

No. We are Goldenhill Primary and will proudly keep our name. The only change will be the removal of the word 'school' replaced with 'academy'. In the future the academy might at times additionally refer to their membership of the 'Societas Multi Academy Trust'.

Will the school uniform change?

Changes to school uniform will be the writing around the school badge; from Goldenhill Primary School to Goldenhill Primary Academy. However pupils can continue to wear the current jumpers and cardigans and replace these when they would normally do so. In response to suggestions from the school council we are introducing shirts and ties for all Key Stage 2 children from September 2016. Further details relating to these will be will released in the summer term.

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. The only exception might be an increase to 'front office' type staff (particularly in finance, or areas previously undertaken by the local authority) that might be needed to help manage increased workloads with the increased responsibility.

Will the school start to recruit unqualified teachers after conversion, as some academies have done?

We will continue to recruit only qualified staff as class teachers. But, as now, some part time staff will continue to provide expert tuition in areas such as sport and these people, as now, may not have a formal teaching qualification.

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. Staff pay will reflect market conditions.

Are we going to be part of a chain?

We will be part of a Multi Academy Trust (MAT). The school will be expected to be as autonomous as possible to retain its individual ethos and character. We will work together but this happens now and has been since September.

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 Societas Multi-academy Trust have their own budget and financial control. If another school joined the partnership then they would only do so if their financial position was strong.

Funding for SEN 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 SEN pupils. Whether we convert or not, there has been changes to the funding schools receive for each SEN 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 you be introducing any new charges?

No. There is no intention to charge in the future for anything that is currently free.

Will there be any change to the admissions policy?

We intend to keep with the current arrangements which are determined by the local authority. That means being very inclusive by welcoming children with disabilities and special needs, and giving preferential admission to siblings.

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) and we already have the power to change this if we wish. 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.

Governance structure

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 decision made and will wish to delegate as much of the decision-making as is sensible and efficient to individual schools governing bodies. Members will oversee the MAT and ensure that Directors are carrying out their duties. They would probably meet formally three times a year. These people 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 is the 'The Executive' of the trust which will consist of the Chief Executive Officer, Education Director and the Headteacher's from all schools. This group will made 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 much as it does now. Most decisions will be made at this level.

What are the estimated costs of conversion?

We don't yet know this for certain but 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. We intend to contract a third party project manager who has in the recent past conducted approximately a hundred successful Academy conversions, twenty eight of which have been in Stoke-on-Trent.

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](#).