

Alma Primary School

Academy Conversion Questions and Answers Document

Possible conversion to academy status Questions and Answers

The following questions and answers provide more information about what academy status means and what the implications would be for our school.

The Q&A are divided into sections:

- What is an academy?
- How is an academy different from a Community school?
- Costs for setting up a MAT
- How would the academy be governed?
- What is the rationale for exploring academy status?

What is an Academy?

An Academy is an independent state school, funded directly from central government rather than through Enfield 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

How is an academy different from a community school?

An academy has several differences to a community school, including:

Admissions

Each academy is responsible for setting and implementing its admission's policy and for prioritising applications. An academy must continue to operate within the requirements of the National School Admissions Code in the same way as maintained schools, including full participation in the local coordinated admissions scheme administered by the local authority;

Land and Buildings

The land and buildings of the school are leased to the Academy Trust for 125 years at a peppercorn rent from the Local Authority and the academy would be responsible for the land and buildings (and reliant on the Secretary of State for capital funding);

Curriculum

An academy has to offer a broad and balanced curriculum for students of differing abilities, including Maths, English, and Science, but it does not have to follow the National Curriculum;

Employment

The Academy Trust becomes the employer of school staff, rather than the local authority. Academies also have freedom to set new terms and conditions for future staff, although Alma Primary School intends to retain the current nationally and locally agreed Terms and Conditions for existing and new staff;

Funding

The academy receives its existing school budget and also its share of the funding that is retained by the local authority for maintained schools;

Governance

In a multi-academy trust, a single trust is responsible for a number of academies. The MAT consists of the members and trustees. The governing body will be renamed the Local Governing Board (LGB). The main focus of the LGB will be teaching and learning.

Costs involved in setting up a MAT

Each school will receive a £25,000 grant from the Department for Education (DfE) if its application is approved. This grant is towards the detailed exploration of academy status and if the school decides to proceed, the implementation costs.

How would the academy be governed?

The governance of the trust will be comprised of directors and a board of trustees who will act to ensure the core purpose of the trust is adhered to at all times. **In our trust these will all be unpaid roles.**

- There will be no less than three and no more than five founding Trust Members who will be responsible for the future appointment of the trustees and the replacement of founding members as necessary. They will meet once a year.
- There will be no less than five and no more than nine Trust Directors who will have specific expertise in Teaching & Learning and Finance as well as in other areas. Trust Directors will not be paid and will meet at least once a term.
- Initially, there will be a representative from each school on the Trust Board. This representative, once elected to the board, will always act in the best interests of all the children in the MAT. The trustee board will have two committees - Teaching & Learning and Resources.
- The founding members and members of the interim board have been selected by the Headteachers of the three schools. Alma will have a Local Governing Body and they will have delegated responsibilities to oversee the running of the school with a focus on teaching and learning. Parents will be represented on the Local Governing Body.
- Governance is likely to change as the process develops and other schools join us in the MAT - with schools having a representative at director level. Headteachers from all schools will be able to sit on the Executive Board.

What is the rationale for exploring academy status?

The primary focus of every school is on providing the highest possible quality education for all pupils. The rationale for exploring academy status is that:

- Academies have greater independence to make decisions in the best interests of their pupils.
- The national context for schools continues to promote the proposal for schools to convert to be academy. Growing numbers of local schools are setting up their own MATs or have joined established MATs.
- Academies have greater freedom to personalise the curriculum to suit the interests and needs of each pupil.

- Academy status would provide additional resources to the school. While some of this would be required to operate the academy and replace services that are currently provided by the Local Authority the remainder would be available to improve outcomes for all pupils.
- School finances are increasingly stretched with all schools in the country facing real terms cuts in our budgets. As an Academy we would benefit from an additional £77.00 per pupil which is currently topped sliced to run central services in the LA. This would support us to maintain the quality of provision that we already provide at Alma, with a firm commitment to ensuring better outcomes for all of our pupils.
- Access to grants for capital projects and school improvement funds are all going through the academies route. Academies have access to 'Conditional Improvement Funds to support capital works or refurbishment. Applications can be made for funding for 2 capital projects each year.
- The recruitment of teachers is a growing concern. As a MAT we would be able to offer career development opportunities for existing staff ensuring that we retain the very best teachers.
- We know that we have the capacity with staff across the schools we work with to support other schools to improve outcomes for all children in Enfield.
- Greater financial control with centralised financial systems across the MAT will result in efficiency savings. Pooling resources amongst schools and being able to commission services and goods on a larger scale, rather than individually, will result in budget savings.
- Establishing long term partnerships - shared accountability can lead to better progress and attainment for pupils and help each school meet rising expectations as resources and expertise are shared
- Sharing the cost to fund specialist expertise to provide richer curricular and extra-curricular activities.

Risks considered and actions taken

1. No one will want to join us: *We have already been approached by other schools who are interested in the MAT model we are proposing.*
2. Non- teaching staff pension deficit: *The local authority has agreed that all MATs will not have to pay lump sum deficit payments but instead will continue to pay the LAs pooled employer contribution rate.*
3. Schools wanting to join the MAT may have a deficit budget; *due diligence would need to be taken to ensure any risks are mitigated.*
4. The costs for setting up the MAT could be higher than the payment received from the DfE: *We have looked at the recent costs for setting up The Ivy Academy which are published on the school website under 'governing body minutes'. This shows that for the 2 schools they received a grant of £50,000 with costs totalling £36,800.*
5. We could wait longer to see what happens with other local schools; *With the growth of Academies in the local area we could find ourselves in a position of having to join another MAT rather than establishing our own with our own ethos and ideology.*
6. Parents will be opposed to us setting up a MAT; *There has been opposition locally in other schools setting up MATs, however many of our parents have children who already attend Secondary academies. We will consult with parents and explain our rationale. Documents will also be published on the school website and we will signpost parents to these documents.*