

Additional information:

Converting to an Academy/joining a Multi Academy Trust (MAT)

Rationale and Frequently Asked Questions document

1. Why are we considering converting to an academy now?

We are currently state funded via our Local Authority and will continue to be state funded as an Academy. The current educational climate is changing and many schools nationally are choosing to take advantage of academy status. We are not obliged to convert to an academy and can continue to be maintained directly by Northumberland County Council. However, financially and strategically we would like to be part of a large Trust that benefits from scale of procurement and additional financial support.

In summary, the reasons we are considering converting to become an academy are:-

- A. Educational
 - a. Improve pupil progress and educational outcomes
 - b. Common approach to curriculum development and assessment across schools
 - c. Increased curricular and extracurricular opportunities
 - d. Common core policies and procedures
 - e. Continuation of the learning journey within academy trusts
- B. Financial
 - a. Joint procurement and purchasing opportunities
 - b. Improved retention of high quality staff within a Trust
 - c. Benefit from economies of scale
- C. To retain our own unique ethos within a family of schools
 - a. We will be working with schools that builds on strong existing relationships
 - b. We will be working with schools that share a similar outlook and ethos
- D. To take control of our own destiny
 - a. Reduce the risk of being left in a position in the future where we feel we need to join a large Trust without the opportunity to shape that Trust or retain any autonomy at school level.

Why are we looking to become an Academy?

2. What is an academy?

Academy schools are state funded schools in England which are directly funded by the central government (specifically, the Department for Education) and independent of direct funding and control by the Local Authority.

Academies were initially established through the Learning and Skills Act 2000. However, the number of schools converting to academy status only really started to gather pace following the passing of the Academies Act 2010.

As of June 2023 :

- 40.4% of primary schools are now academies
- 80.4% of secondary schools are also academies

3. Are all academies the same?

No. There are many different types of academy. For example, some schools have become academies independently, others have joined together with other schools to form a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) whilst others have joined larger Trust groups, often known as academy chains. Different academies have a variety of school improvement and governance arrangements.

4. Have all schools within the Alnwick Partnership been involved with this process?

Yes. All schools have been involved in the discussion and six other schools in our partnership, including three church schools, along with their Governing Bodies, have made their own decision as to what they believe is the best future for their own school community. As you will be aware from other correspondence, we are working with six other primary schools within the partnership who are also exploring academisation.

What day-to-day challenges will happen?**5. Will a move to academy status mean a new name for the school?**

No. The school will continue to use their own name.

6. Will a proposed new academy have a new uniform?

No. Parents will not need to buy a new uniform.

7. What will be the impact on our children with special needs?

There will be no change to the level of support provided. The school will continue to recognise that every child is different and has the right to be included as a valued, respected and equal member of the school community.

8. What will happen to school transport?

School transport will continue to run, for those eligible pupils, as it is now as part of the NCC school transport offer. This transport offer is universal, whether a school is an Academy or Maintained school.

9. Will the school hours be any different as an academy?

Although it is highly unlikely that the school day will be changed, it is the decision of the Trust Board to decide this as they have the power to do so. This decision is usually delegated to the school specific 'academy committee/ council' of an academy, so there is no real change from our authority in this regard. As is the case now, parents would be consulted prior to any change in school hours, although no change is envisaged.

10. Will pupils' education be disrupted by a transition to academy status?

No. When an academy is approved to go ahead, it will do so with minimal disruption to the staff and students. Most of the changes will take place behind the scenes with support from a dedicated team.

11. If we move to being an academy will this change what is taught?

No. Academies are exempt from having to follow the National Curriculum however we would continue to offer the full range of National Curriculum subjects. OFSTED continue to inspect academies and their handbook for inspection is the same one as used in any other school. In other words, it is highly unlikely we would change what pupils are taught. We know that a benefit of joining an academy is each school within the Trust delivers a curriculum that reflects their context and ethos.

What will this mean for our School finances?

12. How is an academy funded?

Trusts are not profit making organisations. It is in the Trust's interests that outcomes improve in all of their schools. Whilst some Trusts are run very differently to each other, we know that the values and vision that Pele Trust have are closely aligned with ours.

Currently, in maintained schools all revenue funding goes directly to the Local Authority. The Local Authority (LA) takes a proportion of the money from the school budget to provide essential services to the school and the rest is delegated under the Local Management of Schools. Schools can, and do, buy additional services from their LA and other providers. As a result, some schools currently depend upon the local authority for many services such as school improvement, HR, finance, etc. We also have to 'buy in' certain services from the Council despite us being under County Council control.

Academies receive the same level of per-pupil funding as maintained schools, plus funding to meet additional responsibilities that are no longer provided for them by the Local Authority (LA). With a Trust, the money that would have been provided to the LA to run the school is provided directly to the Trust. The Trust will retain some of the budget in order to provide services to the academy. Local authorities fund their core services in a similar way. If we were to proceed with Academisation we would have to negotiate the percentage of our budget that is assigned to the Trust in order to fund these services.

13. Does this improve on current funding arrangements?

Converting to an academy will not be to our detriment financially, although there may be the potential for some financial gain due to the increased buying power across a Trust and the opportunity to compare and contrast services centrally to ensure we are obtaining the best value for money. However, any decision is not motivated by money.

Funding is available to cover the costs of the conversion process itself, which is provided by the central government once the decision to convert has been approved. We may have opportunities to support other schools and to benefit financially from doing so. In addition, the Trust Board may have access to capacity funding from the Department for Education as well as opportunities to bid for capital funding on an annual basis.

What will this mean for Teachers and Staff?

14. What are the Terms and Conditions for staff?

On conversion to academy status teachers and staff employed by the school will transfer with the same terms and conditions, via a formal TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment) process. In addition, conversion will not affect any union memberships.

Teachers pay and conditions will remain and as such, salaries will remain the same. Support staff pay grades will remain the same.

15. Who will employ teachers and staff following conversion?

At present teachers and staff are employed by **Northumberland County Council/the Governing Body**. Following conversion, teachers and staff will be employed directly by a Trust.

16. Will the Board of Governors have less authority and control?

The current school's Board of Governors will, in future, be referred to as either an Academy Committee (with delegated powers) or an Academy Council (with few delegated powers).

The composition and powers of the Academy Committee/Council will be set out in a formal 'Scheme of Delegation' which allows the Trust board to delegate responsibilities. There will continue to be (elected) parent representatives on the Committee/Council (as at present), together with Foundation and a Staff representative as well. That said, the Trust may appoint additional people, such as representatives provided from the local community, and may step in if the Academy Committee is not performing its duties effectively.

What will this mean for standards?**17. Does the Trust have the capacity to raise educational standards?**

Yes. The key factor in the decision making process in joining any potential Trust will be based on the school improvement offer.

18. How will an academy raise achievement?

The whole structure of a Multi Academy Trust is designed to challenge and support schools in equal measure. Trusts will intervene rapidly in schools that are underperforming or on a downward trajectory based on OFSTED criteria.

What are the implications of joining a 'mixed Trust?'**19. How is a Trust structured?**

The standard company structure for multi-academy trusts is five Members who are similar to shareholders in a company; there is then a Board of Directors (essentially governors) who are responsible for the strategic running of the trust. The Members sign the company documents for the company (which set out its core purpose, i.e. provision of education etc.); they also have responsibility for appointing the majority of Directors. They should attend one annual general meeting each year and sign off the audited company accounts. The Chairperson of the Board of Directors should also be a Member of the company to ensure a link between the two layers.

Sometimes Trusts can be made up of community schools and church schools, which means that certain governance structures need to be in place as part of the proposed Trust so that we can include all schools; this is often referred to as a 'mixed Trust'.

In a mixed Trust, three of the five Members who sign the company documents will have links to the Church and the company documents will be based on template documents agreed nationally between the Department for Education and the Church of England. Two (of the three Church Members) will be nominated by the Diocese whilst the third Member will be an agreed appointment between the Diocese and schools.

The Trust Board of Directors has overall responsibility and accountability in law for the performance, site and overall running of the Trust and the schools. A local Academy Committee/Council sits beneath this and supports the Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team to implement strategic decisions. Neither the Members, Directors nor Academy Committee/Council representatives are paid positions (except the CEO of the Trust who receives a salary as usual).

20. Role and basis for appointment of Directors

The core governance functions of a Trust, (i.e. setting the direction of the Trust, holding the headteachers to account and ensuring sound use of finances) are carried out by the Trust Board of Directors (who are also charity trustees).

Directors are appointed on the basis of the skills they can bring to the trust board as it is essential that this is made up of skilled individuals to ensure the success, both academically and financially, of the trust and the best outcomes for the pupils within the trust. Ultimately the members have the power of appointment and removal of the majority of directors but as part of this Trust the Members sign a Members Agreement making it clear that appointments will be based on skills.

21. Legal Protections of unique school character

We are fully committed to ensuring this school's own unique ethos and character is protected, i.e. that a community school cannot be turned into a church school, and vice-versa. However, as part of our proposals we have also carefully looked at the formal legal protections available to ensure the continued individual unique character of our school within any proposed Trust. To do otherwise would breach the funding agreements and hence risk losing the Trust's funding from the Secretary of State.

22. Do schools maintain their community or church school status?

Yes.

23. What would happen to the school land?

Any land transferred to the Trust whether by lease or transfer could not be used for other purposes without Secretary of State consent and would be likely to be subject to certain conditions such as reinvestment into educational purposes.

24. Will you listen to feedback we are giving here? Will it affect the outcome?

At the end of this consultation, there will be a meeting of the governors of the school to hear the feedback that has been received during the process. Governors will then make a decision as to whether or not to express a desire to become an Academy to the Regional Schools Director. This decision will only be made at this point.