



## Frequently Asked Questions – Academy Conversions

### Stephenson Memorial Primary School

The information in this fact sheet is intended to help answer the questions which may arise when schools are considering academy status and has been produced in conjunction with SMART Multi-Academy Trust. This information cannot in any way replace the informal conversations and formal consultation that takes place during the conversion process.

#### **What is an academy?**

An academy is an all-ability school that is directly funded by central government and independent of direct control by local government. Academies are inspected by Ofsted under the same framework as maintained schools. Academies are self-governing.

#### **What is a Multi-Academy Trust?**

A Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) is a charitable company limited by guarantee which is formed to oversee a group of schools which are academies. The MAT is the employer of staff and holds the land and buildings of each academy in Trust.

#### **How does governance work?**

Governance in academies can vary and this is driven by the Board of Trustees of the MAT who are ultimately responsible for the work of the Trust and the academies that are members. The Board decide what responsibilities they are delegating to local governors, and it can cover areas such as progress and achievement, community relations, property, finance, staffing and pupil welfare. Any responsibilities delegated to a local governance structure is through a document called a Scheme of Delegation

#### **Why does our school have to join a MAT?**

Schools which are judged to be 'Inadequate' will receive an academy order from the Department for Education and will have to make arrangements to join a MAT as soon as they can.

If schools are judged by Ofsted to be 'good' or 'outstanding' they do not have to join a MAT if they don't want to. Some are choosing to join MATs because of the benefits this brings but good and outstanding schools all have different reasons for joining or not joining a MAT.

#### **How long does an academy conversion take and how will the process affect the day-to-day running of the school?**

This will usually take 6-9 months. The day to day running will not be affected as planning and meetings to enable the conversion to take place are mainly out of the school day.

#### **What is the role of the MAT Chief Executive Officer (CEO)?**

They are the Accounting Officer for the Trust and the strategic lead for the whole Trust. The CEO is the key contact for the Regional Schools Commissioner and the DfE and acts as the point of first contact to ensure schools are not distracted from their core purpose of teaching and learning.



**The priority for our school is the education of pupils. How will you ensure that the academy formation does not distract us from this?**

Part of the work of the school and MAT will be to carry out 'due diligence' exercises which will make clear what extra support to convert may be needed. SMART Multi-Academy Trust will work with us to ensure we can continue to focus on the teaching and learning and progress of children. It's important that all schools are open about the amount of support they might need to enter and go through the process.

**What are the reasons schools consider converting to academy status?**

- To shape the provision to meet the future needs of children, families and communities based on a local and collaborative proposal of working together and building on existing good practice
- To remain in charge of their own destiny as the government has a goal to encourage all schools to be academies or working towards academy status
- The Local Authority (LA) capacity is reducing and, in some cases, disappearing. Pooling the resources of a number of schools means a Trust can re-create some of the services once received from the LA
- To develop the expertise of all staff to further improve effectiveness and outcomes for children
- To generate financial efficiencies to invest back into the classroom for the benefit of the children

**What parents and carers need to know**

- The school is not proposing to change its character and will continue to look, feel and be the same as it is now
- There will be a School Leadership team and Governing Body in the academy.
- The school will not change its admissions policy.
- Children with special needs will continue to receive additional support in the way they do now.
- Our local schools will continue to work very closely together for each other as well as your children, and will be provided with more support to help them become even better.
- The multi-academy trust arrangements will share some central services across the schools which will help them be more efficient and make sure that funding is focused on teaching, learning and support for children.
- The multi-academy trust will work very closely and co-operatively with local partners, including other schools, community groups and organisations, and the local authority.
- SMART Multi-Academy Trust was established in 2016 and currently runs 8 schools in Newcastle upon Tyne, providing wide ranging support and educational opportunities for pupils in the area.



### **Is an academy like a business?**

No. A business makes profit for its shareholders. An academy is a charitable trust which cannot make profit. It does report annually into the public domain on financial and academic performance.

### **Who makes the decision to become an academy?**

If schools are judged by Ofsted to be 'good' or 'outstanding' they do not have to join a MAT, however schools are choosing to do so because of the benefits this brings. Good and outstanding schools all have different reasons for joining or not joining a MAT. If a school is sponsored due to its Ofsted category, then the Department for Education propose a sponsor and the Trust Board agree to undertake due diligence and subsequently for a school to join the Trust as a member academy.

### **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.

### **Will there be any changes to the Curriculum?**

No, the work we have done with our curriculum will continue. We will continue to ensure that what we teach is relevant to our pupils and their specific needs and continues to be broad and balanced.

### **Does becoming an academy change the relationship with local schools and the community?**

No. Academy funding agreements state that they must ensure that we will be at the heart of its community, collaborating and sharing facilities and expertise with other local schools and the wider community. By being part of a MAT there is further support to ensure that we achieve our aims.

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

Academies are independent of the local authority. However, we wish to continue working with the LA, other local schools and local partners.

### **What about funding?**

The Department for Education via the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) meets the running costs for an academy. 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 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 must break-even.

### **How will the school be accountable financially?**

An academy is governed by the rules and regulations for charitable trusts and company law, e.g. we will be required to produce and file accounts and trustees cannot be paid. There will be robust systems with an audit conducted regularly by an external independent auditor.



### **What functions would remain the statutory responsibility of the LA?**

- Home to school transport
- Education psychology, SEND statementing and assessment
- Monitoring of SEND provision
- Prosecution of parents for non-attendance
- Assigned SEND resources for pupils/students with rare conditions needing individually tailored provision
- Provision of specialist facilities for a student who is no longer registered at a school

### **Who will be responsible, and pay for assessments of pupils/students with additional needs?**

The LA retains the same statutory responsibility for students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in academies as they would for a maintained school. We would continue to work closely with the LA to ensure that our SEND pupils are well provided for and to ensure that the LA meets their statutory commitments with regard to pupils.

### **Does it cost to become an academy?**

Yes. There are legal, financial and project costs associated with becoming an academy. The government gives each converting academy £25,000 to contribute towards these costs. For sponsored schools they also receive a grant towards supporting school improvement.

### **Who will own the school building and land?**

The academy trust will either hold the freehold or enter into a 125-year lease for the land and buildings.

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

Yes, we will consult with all key stakeholder groups during the transition phase. This will include the sharing of the academy trust's plans and an opportunity to gather feedback and suggestions, as well as addressing any questions or concerns. A clear consultation will take place.

### **Will the school remain non-selective?**

Yes - academies are non-selective schools. Academies are required to follow the law and guidance on admissions, SEND and exclusions as if they were maintained schools. It is the aim of the Trust to ensure that our academies provide high quality, inclusive education for all local children.

### **Will the school need to change its name?**

We will not change our name unless there is a compelling reason during consultation to do so.

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

Yes. Where possible and appropriate, the academy will buy back services from the local authority. 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?**

No. SMART MAT encourage the individuality of each school therefore there are no plans to change the Uniform or current logo.