

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **1. What is a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT)?**

A MAT is the structure that allows more than one school to work together under an academy trust. It has one overall board of directors which runs the trust, with each school having its own local governing body.

The MAT gives schools the chance to share knowledge and teaching and learning. It gives the schools within the Academy trust the opportunity to make collective decisions about contracts with strategic partners thereby releasing more time and money for teaching and learning.

## **2. What are the advantages of becoming an academy?**

Becoming an academy means that our school would have greater freedom to innovate and raise standards. We would have much greater freedom around the delivery of the curriculum, using our budget to work with the best partners available. Each of the five schools have worked very hard individually at creating a curriculum which is relevant to the pupils and community and which meets the needs of all the pupils. We want to continue developing that curriculum whilst taking on board what we consider to be the best parts of the National Curriculum. We would still be subject to Ofsted inspections and the pupils would still be prepared for SATs in the same way as they are now.

## **3. Would the school receive more money as an academy?**

Academies receive the same level of per-pupil funding as maintained schools receive from the Local Authority, but they also receive an additional amount which is currently retained by the Local Authority to pay for some of the services they provide for all schools within the Local Authority. However, from this 'additional' money we would still have to purchase some services which are currently provided by the Local Authority. The Government states that becoming an academy should not bring about a financial advantage or disadvantage to a school. The main change is that academies have greater freedom over how they use their budgets. As an academy we would, therefore, have more freedom to buy the services we need from a range of providers and obtain best value for money and the best quality services. We do believe that the greater flexibility and the ability to innovate would mean there is likely to be more money to invest in the school for the benefit of the pupils.

## **4. Why should our school consider becoming an academy?**

In the rapidly changing educational landscape, we believe the greater freedoms and flexibilities available to the school as part of a MAT offer the best opportunities for the school to continue delivering outstanding pupil progress. However, becoming part of a MAT gives the opportunity for control over all of our budget, greater freedom over what and where we spend the money and the ability to pool that decision making and spending with a group of like-minded schools.

The Government's earlier policy, prior to the announcement that ALL schools would become academies by 2022, strongly encouraged schools to convert to academy status and provided funding to assist with the cost of doing so. As 'Good and 'Outstanding' schools, we were all in the fortunate position to make this decision at a time and in a manner of our choosing. The Governing Bodies of each of the five schools agreed, therefore, that our schools needed to engage actively with this issue when it would be advantageous to do so.

## **5. How accountable are academies?**

Academies are subject to inspections by the school inspectorate Ofsted, in the same way as other schools are. Academies' SATs results will continue to be published as at present, alongside those of other state schools in league tables. Academies are accountable directly to the Secretary of State for Education.

## **6. Would conversion to academy status affect the school's admissions policy?**

Although a MAT is the admissions authority for the academies it operates, rather than the Local Authority, this has no real impact on admissions when the criteria on admissions (and appeals on admissions) remain the same. This is because the allocation of places would continue to be administered by the Local Authority for us as a local school. Academies are subject to the same admissions codes as other state schools, which set the rules for fair admissions.

## **7. What about the way in which our school is governed? Would that change?**

Yes and no.

Yes, in that legally the MAT would have responsibilities for the governance of the school.

No, in that the current governing body would continue to exist and be called a **Local Governing Body** (LGB) and the MAT would delegate to the **Local Governing Body** responsibility for virtually all tasks required for the running of the school. The arrangements by which responsibilities are passed to the **Local Governing Body** and the head teacher would be set out in a document called the Schemes of Delegation. The Schemes of Delegation gives these powers to the **Local Governing Body**; however the Trustees/Directors will be called to account by the DfE on financial issues, performance, and effectiveness of leadership. Therefore, within the Scheme of Delegation, there will be an acceptance of a right to intervene if a school requires support.

## **8. Would staff remain the same after conversion?**

All current permanent school staff at our school would transfer to employment within the MAT and there are no plans to change the staffing structure at any of the schools. The governing bodies of each of the five schools are committed to continue to recruit and retain high quality staff and will support existing staff through the transition and beyond, if the school does become part of the MAT. We all intend to work alongside and maintain open dialogue with all staff and unions and their representatives throughout this process.

## **9. Would staff pay and conditions change?**

When a school becomes an academy, all members of staff are entitled to transfer to the Multi Academy Trust under their existing employment terms and conditions – on academy conversion their terms and conditions of employment are legally protected by something known as the TUPE regulations. Thereafter, the MAT Board, which will govern the academy, may consult with staff and their union representatives on changes to these terms and conditions, for example to enable the academy to operate over different term times or change the length of the school day.

## **10. What does the process of becoming an academy entail?**

Initially, schools register their interest in becoming an academy online with the Department of Education (DfE). A school then completes and submits an application to become an academy to the DfE and notifies the LA of their decision. When the Secretary of State for Education, and the Regional Schools Commissioner approves the school's application to convert, they issue an Academy Order.

A school must consult with parents, staff and all other stakeholders about its proposal to become an academy. The school's governing body will take account of any issues raised during the consultation process before making its final decision about whether to convert to an academy. Only when the resolution to convert has been passed by the governing body is a funding agreement entered into between the academy trust and the Secretary of State for Education.

**11. Do schools have to cover the cost of conversion to academy status?**

The DfE pays a flat-rate grant of £25,000 into the school's bank account after an academy order has been issued to cover the costs of conversion.

**12. What else would change at your school?**

There will be very little that obviously changes in the day to day running of each of our schools. Keeping all that is special about each of our schools whilst allowing us to continue to grow and develop is one of the drivers for an academy conversion. Academies are required to follow the laws and guidance on admissions, special educational needs and exclusions, as in maintained schools. Academies have to ensure that the school will be at the heart of its community, collaborating and sharing facilities and expertise with our schools and the wider community. The governors of each of the five schools are committed to retaining our existing names within the new Multi-Academy Trust structure. There are no plans to alter school uniforms and, importantly, we expect continuity of all staff.

**13. Is the funding received by the MAT ring-fenced for each school or do schools within the MAT have to compete/bid against one another for the funding?**

The funding received by the MAT for each school is directed in the same way as it is for the LA. The amount is calculated by the Department for Education using the LA per pupil formula. It comes directly to the MAT and is called the General Annual Grant. The General Annual Grant (GAG) funds for all schools are calculated and come through to the MAT together. Normally, of course the distribution of the GAG to each school is as indicated but there might be particular occasions when it is to the benefit of all of the schools within the MAT to contribute to a central fund for a specific purpose. There is no competition or bidding between schools in the MAT.

**14. Is money raised by the PTA/PFAs of our schools kept by our school or is it available to be used generally by the MAT?**

Normally this would happen however there might be particular occasions for example when schools pool resources together i.e. shared Mini Buses. The MAT Board must oversee all accounts in case there are any irregularities as the Multi-Academy Trust bears the responsibility for this, not the individual school. If we became a MAT there would continue to be a dialogue between the school and the PTA/PFA to agree how money raised by the PTA/PFA is spent in supporting and developing the individual school and collectively the MAT.

**15. Please can you explain in more detail the reporting structures and areas of responsibility for Members, Directors/Trustees and Local Governing Bodies**

The extracts below in italics are from the National Governors' Association/BrowneJacobson publication "Introduction to Multi Academy Trusts" and describe the various roles within a MAT.

*"The members of the academy trust have a very hands off role in terms of management of the academy trust. The members' role is to monitor the performance of the trust and hold the trustees to account. In reality, the members will*

meet rarely (for example once a year to approve the auditors and the accounts), although they do have an important role in appointing persons to the central MAT board. Under the current model articles a member of staff (including the head teacher) cannot be a member.”

The **directors** have “specific legal responsibilities including:

- making sure the academy trust complies with the law and its governing document, e.g. regard must be had to guidance released by the Charity Commission, as well as the requirements in the funding agreement, articles of association and the Academies Financial Handbook;
- acting responsibly, in the interests of the academy trust;
- exercising independent judgement;
- managing any conflicts of interest;
- exercising reasonable care and skill - using relevant personal knowledge or taking professional advice where appropriate;
- promoting the academy trust’s success.

While most MATs have some sort of local governance at individual academy level, the actual responsibility and authority delegated to these local committees differs hugely from one MAT to another. Some MATs have chosen to establish **local governing bodies** that function in much the same way to a maintained school governing body. These local governing bodies will have local governors on them that may be appointed or elected.”

Prior to making a final decision about whether to become part of the MAT, each school will agree what decisions will be delegated to our local governing body (this agreement is known as the Scheme of Delegation). It is the intention of all involved that the Scheme of Delegation will delegate to the local governing body of our school as much decision making responsibility as is possible. This principle has been agreed between all schools forming the MAT but the detail of the Scheme of Delegation has yet to be agreed.

#### **16. Will Ofsted inspect individual schools or the MAT as a whole?**

Ofsted will inspect individual schools and, from comments made by Michael Wilshaw, the head of Ofsted, it is anticipated that this will continue to be the case for the foreseeable future.

#### **17. If we resolve to go ahead, when will the conversion happen? Will it be this academic year?**

If we decide to form the Multi Academy Trust, , the earliest date for conversion is 1<sup>st</sup> September 2016. It is likely to be in this academic year if we decide to proceed.

#### **18. Would forming a MAT reduce diversity and parental choice in education in our area?**

No. Diversity in education means having a choice of schools. Real choice comes from having schools with different characters – each of our schools have a very special character and are schools at the heart of our local communities. This has developed over a long period of time. We believe that by becoming a MAT and working collaboratively, this special character will be respected and allowed to develop.