



## ACADEMY SCHOOLS

### *Questions parents frequently ask*

**Q. What is an academy?**

A. An academy is a school with no local links to the community or the council, but funded by the taxpayer.

**Q. If a school becomes an academy and wants to change back, is that possible?**

A. No. A decision to become an academy is irreversible.

**Q. Will there be any changes to the catchment areas or admissions?**

A. Academies are their own admissions authority and, therefore, set their own admissions policies. They are at present required to abide by the admissions code. The government intends to remove the arrangements for monitoring admissions and there is already evidence that academies' intakes are not representative of their local community.

**Q. What impact does academy status have on special educational needs (SEN) provision?**

A. All academy funding agreements should include details of their obligations regarding children with SEN. An academy is expected to behave as if they were a maintained school in meeting the needs of children with SEN. However, the record shows that academies have a higher exclusion rate than other types of school. In addition, further expansion of academies will undoubtedly reduce the coverage and effectiveness of local authority support for SEN provision as funding is reduced in order to divert funding for centralised services to the budgets of academies. The government is currently consulting on major changes to SEN provision which will further weaken the role of local government support services in this area.

**Q. Once a school becomes an academy, what can parents do if they are not happy with any decisions made?**

A. In the first instance, as now, parents can complain to the school. However, there are often fewer parent governors to complain to. Academies are not part of the local authority and, therefore, if parents are not satisfied or are unhappy with the outcome, they cannot complain, as they can now, to the local council to ask them to intervene on their behalf. Effectively, when a school becomes an academy there are no local avenues of complaint.

**Q. Does becoming an academy mean that the school will get new buildings and facilities?**

A. The government is making no provision for academies to have new buildings or new facilities.

**Q. Will the Academy have the same school term/school holiday dates and school day timings as all other local schools that continue to have links with the council?**

A. Academies can set their own term dates and school day timings without consultation with parents or the local council.

**Q. Will there be additional costs for parents?**

A. Academies are not allowed to charge fees for pupils to attend the school. However, there may be hidden costs by academies introducing, for example, new school uniforms or charging

for certain activities and use of resources. Also, unlike maintained schools, academies are able to charge whatever they like for school meals and refreshments.

**Q. The headteacher at my child's school has said s/he wants the school to become an academy. Can the headteacher make that decision?**

**A.** No. A headteacher has no power to determine alone whether a school becomes an academy. The decision rests with the governing body and if the school is a voluntary aided or controlled school, with the relevant additional voluntary authorities.

**Q. Is the school required to consult parents about becoming an academy?**

**A.** The governing body of the school makes the decision about the school applying to become an academy. Schools are legally required to consult before becoming an academy. It is important that the voices of parents and the local community are heard on such a crucial and irreversible decision, and we would encourage parents to do everything they can to influence the governing body's decision.

**Q. How can parents make their views known about the school becoming an academy?**

**A.** Parents who wish to make their views known should contact the parent governors and the Chair of governors requesting that a full consultation with all parents takes place. The governing body should be asked to give details of the pros and cons of converting the school to academy status. A public meeting should be sought to provide everyone with an interest in the future of the school the opportunity to discuss the proposals. The local community may wish to call for a ballot on whether the school should apply for academy status. If the governors fail to engage in meaningful consultation with parents or the local community, then you should protest to your local council, your local councillor and your local MP.

**Q. Will becoming an academy mean that educational standards will be raised?**

**A.** There is no evidence that being an academy school raises standards. Academy schools have no better record of educational achievement than any other type of school. Some have a far worse record.

**Q. Will there be more money for my child's education if the school becomes an academy?**

**A.** The government has confirmed that academy status should not give schools a financial advantage. The school will be allocated its share of the money that is currently held by the local authority to make provision across all schools for pupils with a whole range of special needs, pupil support, education welfare and school transport.

Once the money is allocated to the school, it will have to make provision to replicate those important services previously provided by the local authority. It may find, if, for example, it has a significant number of pupils with special needs, that it has insufficient funds to match the provision previously provided by the local authority.

It is likely that your headteacher will say that the school will get extra funding by becoming an academy. You should treat statements like this with great caution. In the first case any apparent financial advantage will be for one year only as the government will be introducing a completely new funding formula for schools in 2012. Also, you should check the sums – what about the costs of all these support services that were previously provided by the local authority and for which the academy will now be liable?

And what about the safety net provided by the local authority, for example, in the event of a fire or a flood (as happens to too many schools each year). As things are, your local authority would find you new accommodation and sort things out – if your school is an academy you would be on your own in these circumstances.

To: members of the governors / Trustees

Re: Consideration of Academy status.

In considering the possibility of converting to an academy we would appreciate you taking the following facts into consideration:-

The invitation for every school to become an academy flies in the face of public opinion. An Ipsos-MORI poll found that 96 per cent of parents want a good local school run by local councils

All of the independent evidence confirms that academy schools do not deliver better educational outcomes for pupils, cost more money, and create widespread inequality and social segregation.

Independent research and evaluation provides no evidence that academies are better than other schools in raising educational standards. In fact, the overwhelming evidence demonstrates that non-academy schools are more likely to be identified by Ofsted as 'outstanding' schools.

There is no additional money to support new buildings or refurbishment to existing buildings for schools that become an academy.

The school will also be responsible for buying in services from the local authority out of their budget.

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All the main teacher unions (ATL, NASUWT, NUT) and support staff unions (GMB, UNISON, UNITE) are opposed to the academy schools policy and are working together to oppose it.

The local authority provides an important safety net for schools, supporting them particularly when schools encounter deficit problems with their budgets, financial management problems, and support for schools and the workforce in terms of responding to such matters as staff health and welfare, maternity

The National Audit Office (NAO), the Government's spending watchdog, published a report on academies that noted that the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals – a key measure of deprivation – fell from 45.3 to 27.8 per cent between

2002-03 and 2009-10 (The Academies Programme, NAO, September 2010). It further noted that: "The gap in attainment between more disadvantaged pupils and others has grown wider in academies than in comparable maintained schools."

Any short term gain for schools converting is likely to involve significant losses in the long term. The Government wishes to ensure that, in the longer term, academies are funded on a comparable basis to other schools and is reviewing funding arrangements to bring this about. It has also said that academies' funding will be reduced as a result of the Government's programme of spending cuts.

For more info. Follow links

Nasuwt -

<http://www.nasuwt.org.uk/InformationandAdvice/NASUWTPolicyStatements/PolicyStatement1/index.htm>

Nut - <http://www.teachers.org.uk/academies>

From NASUWT and NUT members at Collegiate High school