

Converting to an Academy Q&A Document and Questionnaire

Why are we looking to become an Academy?

1. What is an academy?

Academy schools are state funded schools in England which are directly funded by 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. There are now over 5500 academies and whilst the government is no longer requiring all schools to become academies by 2022 their aim is still that all schools will eventually become academies.

2. 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 MAT groups, often known as academy chains. Different academies have a variety of school improvement and governance arrangements.

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

We are currently state funded via our Local Authority but operate within the Church school system. The Church school system is managed and developed through individual dioceses, and each Diocese has a Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) which is a statutory body. There are currently 57 church schools in the Diocese of Durham, some of which are already academies. The Diocese of Durham established its own Multi-Academy Trust called the Durham Diocesan MAT (DDMAT) last year in order provide an academy option for its schools.

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 Durham County Council. However, across-the-board cuts in central government funding to local authorities in recent years has led to reduced local budgets and cuts to local services. These cuts are unlikely to abate in the short-to-medium term. It is possible that the requirement to further cut local budgets and spending over the next few years may ultimately impact on the ability of Durham County Council to deliver its core services, including supporting schools within its boundaries.

This potentially raises the prospect that the school may, at some stage in the future, be forced to move from being a local authority supported school to an academy at short notice and at a time not of our choosing. This would be made worse by the fact that other schools within the local authority area would also be looking to convert, which would inevitably lead to confusion and uncertainty. Such a scenario would not be in the best interests of our children, parents or the school.

In summary the reasons we are considering converting to become an academy in the Durham Diocesan MAT are:-

1. Educational-the school effectiveness support being offered by the MAT will be more than we currently receive and will include an additional three days of practical support from a qualified Ofsted inspector (see para 19 below).
2. Financial- to take advantage of shared buying of services and increased negotiating power.
3. To retain our own unique ethos and reduce the risk of being left in a position in the future where we feel we need to join a large MAT without the opportunity to shape that MAT or retain any autonomy at school level.

4. Are any other schools in our local area academies?

Several other church schools across the Diocese of Durham are also part of the Durham Diocesan MAT.

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 be called Stanhope Barrington CE Primary School and there is no intention to change the name of the school.

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

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

7. Will a proposed new academy still be open to the community?

Yes. There will be no change to the current provision.

8. 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.

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 MAT Board to decide this as they have the power to do so. This decision is usually delegated to the school specific 'academy 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 from the DDMAT.

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

We would be expected to 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. The academy would be expected to strive to be outstanding in both the statutory OFSTED (section 5) and the Church School (section 48) inspections. In other words, there may be no change in what or how pupils are taught; except that the move to becoming an academy is designed to ensure sustainable, secure and rapid improvement.

12. Would there be an increased emphasis on religion and Christianity in a Diocesan academy?

We would maintain our status as a Church School and the existing emphasis on our Christian values and ethos would not change. Church schools are also subject to the statutory (section 48) Church School Inspection and this also would not change. If a community school were to join the MAT they would not be required to change their current ethos and values and would retain their own unique 'non-church' ethos.

What will this mean for our School finances?

13. How is an academy funded?

Currently, in maintained schools, including church 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 the LA and other providers. As a result schools currently depend upon the local authority for many services such as school improvement, HR, finance, etc. This has historically led to a dual system where the LA has taken the lead on school effectiveness whilst the Diocese has focused on the distinctive and inclusive characteristics of the school.

Academies receive a similar 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 DDMAT, the money that would have been provided to the LA to run the school is provided directly to DDMAT. The MAT will retain an agreed figure (usually 5%) of the budget in order to provide services to the academy including school effectiveness support, HR, governor support and finance support. Local authorities fund their core services in a similar way.

14. 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 the MAT 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 central government once the decision to convert has been approved. We may have opportunities to support and be supported by other schools and to benefit financially from doing so. In addition, the MAT 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?

15. 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.

16. Who will employ teachers and staff following conversion?

At present teachers and staff are employed by the local authority. Following conversion, teachers and staff will be employed directly by the DDMAT.

17. Will the MAT employ non-qualified teachers?

All class groups of pupils will be registered to a qualified teacher, as is the case in schools currently.

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

The composition and powers of the Board of Governors will be set out in a formal 'Scheme of Delegation' which allows the DDMAT board to delegate responsibilities to the Academy Council. There will continue to be (elected) Parents on the Academy Council (as at present), together with Foundation representatives and a Staff representative as well. That said, the DDMAT may appoint additional governors, such as governors provided from the local community, and may step in if the Academy Council is not performing its duties effectively. Our School and Academy Council have considerable freedom and responsibility to take commercial and strategic decisions without recourse to the Local Authority and this will not change substantially following conversion to an academy.

What will this mean for standards?

19. Does the MAT have the capacity to raise educational standards?

The DDMAT has its own school improvement capacity for those schools choosing to become an academy which includes a member of the Diocesan Joint Education team (including a current Ofsted inspector) and consultants with a proven track record and capable of working at the highest levels. The MAT will offer 3 days of school improvement partner support and 3 additional days of practical school improvement support every year.

20. How will an academy raise achievement?

The whole structure of the Multi Academy Trust is designed to challenge and support schools in equal measure. As stated above we would receive at least 6 days of school improvement support from a school improvement professional, irrespective of whether the school is outstanding or inadequate. This is more than we currently receive from the LA.

These visits are not inspections but an opportunity for senior leaders to benchmark their judgments through shared lesson observation, work scrutiny, analysis of data, supported self-evaluation and school improvement planning. Indeed the outcome of

these visits will confirm the development state of the school.

The MAT will intervene rapidly in schools that are underperforming or on a downward trajectory based on OFSTED criteria.