

Tynedale Community Learning Trust Frequently Asked Questions – Academy Status

Our school is consulting with our parents, carers, students, staff, trade unions and the local community on the proposals to convert to 'Academy' school status and form a multi academy trust (MAT) with likeminded schools. To learn more about what this will mean for you, your child and the wider community, we have provided over the next few pages, some questions and answers about Academies. The closing date for responses is **7th July 2017** and details of how to respond are also included.

What is an academy?

Academies are publicly funded, independent schools, free from local authority control. Funding is received directly from the Department for Education, instead of the Local Authority, giving the school more control over its spending and decision making.

Originally, underperforming schools were turned into academies to help the school improve rapidly, however in 2010 the Government extended the opportunity to convert to academy status to all schools that are successful and performing well, and as a result, there are now over 6,000 academies in the country.

An Academy Trust is a charitable trust run by a board of directors. Academies are expected to work with and support other schools, including lower-performing schools.

So, what is different?

Academy Trusts have additional responsibilities and freedoms that 'maintained' schools do not enjoy. These include:

- Freedom from Local Authority control;
- Freedom from following the National Curriculum;
- Ability to change length of term and school days;
- Greater control over school budgets;
- Freedom to spend the money the Local Authority currently spends on behalf of the school.

Why are the Governing Body and Leadership Team of the schools considering Academy status?

The Government signalled their desire to see all schools move to academy status to enjoy greater freedom and flexibility in how they can deliver education. Like many other schools both locally and nationally, our school has looked at the benefits and freedoms Academy status can bring and feel it is something we should explore.

Do converting schools need to have a sponsor?

Schools that are performing well such as ours are not required to have a sponsor.

Why are we considering being part of the setting up of a new Multi- Academy Trust?

Effective collaboration can benefit everyone. Through the sharing of good practice, shared resources and training opportunities and future economies of scale we can further improve the provision for our learners. The government is still committed to all schools being part of a MAT and we want to have a say in the ethos and values of the MAT that we are in. We truly value the 3-tier system. We believe that, in our rural context, it best serves the

needs of our learners and we want to be a part of a MAT with other schools that also want to remain 3-tier.

Have you considered joining an existing Multi Academy Trust?

Our Governing Bodies have investigated many options. Our reason for academising is to further improve educational outcomes for our children and support our local communities. We have assessed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and risks of each option identified and have concluded that forming a new Multi Academy Trust supports our aims and offers the greatest opportunities to continual improvement.

Who will sit on the Board of the Multi Academy Trust?

Some of the existing governors drawn from each school in the partnership are likely to sit on the new Trust Board (Board of Directors). In addition, each school will have a Local Governing Body who will continue to ensure that the needs of each school are monitored closely.

What about working with other schools?

Our school already has strong partnerships with other local schools. We are therefore very interested in models that allow us to build on these partnerships through academy status. For this reason, we are seeking to form a multi academy trust comprising of the following schools:

Corbridge Middle School;
Highfield Middle School;
Mickley First School;
Ovingham C of E First School;
Ovingham Middle School;
Prudhoe Castle First School;
Prudhoe Community High School;
Whittonstall and Broomley Federation of First Schools; and
Wylam First School.

This will allow us to continue the strong and established partnerships we already have, provide better opportunities for our learners and save money by benefitting from economies of scale. We shall continue to build and strengthen our existing school partnerships with schools outside the proposed MAT.

What are the implications of a Church School being involved?

This 'mixed MAT' model means that 'The Tynedale Community Learning Trust' will comprise of 9 community schools and a church school. Within our new MAT the community schools will remain as community schools, and the church school as a church school. The structure of The Tynedale Community Learning Trust will allow for more formalised, collaborative working whilst allowing the individual characteristics and ethos of each school to continue. By forming a 'mixed MAT' we will also be allowing any other school the opportunity to join us in the future.

The MAT has a very small group of Members who are named for legal purposes but don't have a great deal to do with the daily running of the school. The MAT Directors Board has overall responsibility and accountability in law for the performance, site and overall running of the Trust and the schools. A local governing body sits beneath this and supports the Head teacher and Senior Leadership Team to implement strategic decisions.

Neither the Members, Directors nor local governing body are paid positions (except the CEO of the MAT who receives a salary as usual).

What do the Members do?

The standard company structure for multi-academy trusts is five members who are similar to shareholders in a company, there is then also 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 the power to appoint the Directors and amend the company documents. The Members 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.

What is the proposed make up of our Members Board?

In our proposed MAT a representative of the Bishop of Newcastle and a representative of the Newcastle Diocesan Education Board will be members along with a member agreed between all of the schools and approved by the Newcastle Diocesan Education Board as a result of discussions. There would then also be the chair of the Board of Directors (who is not appointed by the church) and another member chosen and agreed by the schools and with no connection with the church.

Role and basis for appointment of Directors

The core governance functions of the Multi-Academy 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 multi-academy trust Board of Directors (who are also charity trustees).

Directors will be 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 learners within the trust. One of the appointed directors will be nominated as a 'church' director. Ultimately the members have the power of appointment and removal of the majority of directors but as part of this MAT, the Members will sign a Members Agreement making it clear that appointments will be based on skills.

Legal Protections of unique school character

Each of the schools and the church are fully committed to ensuring each school's own unique ethos and character is protected, ie that the community schools cannot be turned into church schools 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 the community schools within the proposed MAT. As well as a Members Agreement making it clear the appointment of directors will be based on skills, the Department for Education template funding agreements (which set out how funds are paid to the MAT) offer further protections. These state that the MAT must maintain the non-religious character of a community school. To do otherwise would breach the funding agreements and hence risk losing the MAT's funding from the Secretary of State. The Company documents also make it clear that the MAT board must protect the individual ethos of any school within the MAT and this is the responsibility of all directors.

The local governing bodies, set up for the schools within the MAT, maintain their existing representation and are able to protect to protect the ethos of the school. Parents are elected to these local governing bodies and so maintain an input into the governance of their school. However, as mentioned above it will also be the responsibility of the MAT

board of directors overall to ensure it protects the individual ethos of each school within the MAT (whether church or community) in accordance with the company documents and the Members should also be assured this is happening.

Would community schools continue to be community schools?

Yes, it is a non-negotiable requirement that community schools remain community schools and that church schools remain church schools if they become an academy.

Does this mean that my child will have to stay in a MAT school all the way through their education?

No, parents/carers will still have the freedom to choose where they send their child, at any stage of their education. Existing catchment areas for schools will remain unchanged. We would always work with any other schools in the area to ensure a smooth transition at any stage should this be the case. Established relationships outside the MAT will continue to grow and be developed for the benefit of the children within the new MAT.

Does it mean more money?

Academies are funded in a similar way to other schools however, becoming an academy would open up additional capital funding opportunities for us to explore. Forming our MAT will allow us to achieve savings through the sharing of services and resources across the academies within the MAT. The best value protocols currently in place in our schools will be further developed in order to improve the quality of provision at a much more competitive cost. Economies of scale will be sought.

Will admissions arrangements change?

The Academy Trust would be responsible for setting the admissions arrangements for our school but there is no proposed change to the existing policy for admissions. It should be stressed however, that the admissions criteria must have regard to the national Admissions Code of Practice.

When would the school change to become an Academy?

Schools can change to Academy status within 3-4 months of consulting with parents and carers. It is for our Governing Body to decide whether the school should apply for Academy status. In addition, the Diocese must also give permission for the church school to become an academy and there exists a rigorous application process to ensure that the religious ethos of the church school seeking to become an academy is protected. If we go ahead, we would aim to open the new MAT on 1st January 2018.

What does it mean for staff?

All staff would transfer their employment under TUPE legislation from their current employer, to the new Academy Trust. We are also consulting with our staff to seek their views and offering reassurance that terms and conditions would remain the same as an Academy.

How will it affect my child's education?

The conversion to academy status will not mean any changes for learners; parents and carers. The Chief Executive, Headteacher and Board of Directors would have more flexibility around protecting our successful curriculum and ensuring that we have high quality support services for all our children. We will be free to deliver and/or commission

our own support for children with additional and special educational needs.

What will happen to the uniform?

Our Governing Body does not intend to change the uniform

Will the name of the school change?

Our Governing Body does not intend to change the name of our school and is strongly committed to retaining the identity of our school within the Multi Academy Trust.

Will the times of the school day and holidays change?

Our Governing Body has no plans to change the times of the school day or the terms dates. Any future changes would be subject to extensive consultation with parents and carers.

Are academies still accountable for their performance and are performance targets set?

Like all schools, academies are in the first instance accountable to the learners they serve and their respective parents / carers. Academies still have to meet government performance targets concerning progress of all children across all key stages, and will still be inspected by Ofsted. Although Academies can innovate and change the curriculum, they still must ensure students leave having achieved their full potential across a broad and balanced range of subjects.

What services would remain under the control of the Local Authority?

The Local Authority would still have responsibility for a number of services including:

- Home to school transport
- Assessing learners' needs (SEN)
- Coordinating school admissions
- Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)

What are the potential benefits for our school within our new Multi Academy Trust (MAT)?

The main benefits of academy status include:

- Ensuring all learners make better than expected progress, raising their aspirations and preparing them to be successful in a modern world.
- Staying in control of our own destiny and preserving the unique identity of our schools.
- The MAT model provides for a more formalised approach for our schools, with the opportunity to secure more tangible benefits as a result of being a single employer etc.
- Ability to access capital funding via the Condition Improvement Fund, which is only available to academies.
- Removal of the requirement to follow the National Curriculum allows for greater flexibility and creativity when planning the school curriculum.
- In establishing a MAT, we are responding to the Government's policy for providing school-to-school support.
- In forming a MAT, we are better able to respond to the budget pressures all schools are facing and will continue to face due to cost pressures exceeding levels of income, by securing economies of scale.
- The opportunity to offer more formalised support to other schools will provide professional development opportunities for staff, which will assist with the retention of high quality staff and succession planning.

- We will be better able to respond to any future reduction in LA services by developing our own capacity to meet the needs of our learners, or commission our own specialist support services e.g. to support learners with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND).
- We may make a saving on our current insurance costs by joining the Academy Risk Protection Scheme.

What additional responsibilities will academy status bring?

- Additional financial and legal responsibilities as a result of forming a company limited by guarantee.
- The newly formed Multi Academy Trust would employ our staff.
- The Academy Trust would be responsible for admissions.
- The Academy Trust would enter into a 125-year lease for the land currently owned by the Local Authority. For any church school, the Diocese own the buildings and the Academy Trust enters into a “supplemental agreement” with the Diocese to protect the use of the buildings. We already have responsibility for the cost of maintaining the land and buildings.

Have your say

- Complete the response form;
- Attend a drop-in session;
- Wider information on the Academies programme is available on the Department for Education website at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/academy-conversion-process>