

Academy Conversion Frequently Asked Questions

1. How many academies are then in ODBST, and how many are there planned to be?

ODBST is currently formed of five schools (Chesham Bois CofE Primary School, Thomas Harding Junior School, Great Horwood CofE School, Padbury CofE School and St John's CofE Primary School Lacey Green). One further school has permission to join the MAT and several others are in the process of making their application to the Department for Education to join. It is envisaged that, eventually, the Trust may grow to as many as 30 schools, however, this will be determined by demand from schools within Bucks and with the permission of the Department for Education.

2. In light of the removal of 'enforced' academisation, is it still a requirement or expectation that schools will have to convert?

Although the government has decided to no longer impose a deadline for schools to become an academy, or to have the process in place to become an academy, by 2020, it is still advocating that all schools become an academy. In the most recent government paper, "Schools that work for everyone", the Department for Education states:

"It remains the Government's ambition that all schools ultimately benefit from the autonomy and freedom to innovate and to meet the needs of their community that academy status brings, and we will be supporting schools to make this transition." (Schools that Work for Everyone, Government Consultation Document, September 2016, p7)

3. What will happen to local links and partnerships that our school already has?

These will continue. By joining ODBST it does not preclude us from being part of local partnerships which are for the benefit of the school.

4. How long does it take for a school to become an Academy?

Most schools are able to convert to academy status in around five-nine months after achieving the initial approval to proceed from the Department for Education.

5. Do schools need to consult before converting?

Yes. All schools are required to carry out a consultation but it is up to each school to decide whom and how to consult. There is no legally specified length of time for the consultation and schools have flexibility in how it is conducted. We are currently consulting with parents, staff, local schools and the local community.

6. How is the governing body consulting with stakeholders?

An information evening is being held on Wednesday 21st March 2018 at 6:30pm to answer any questions. Following the conclusion of the consultation, at their next meeting, the Governing Body will consider the feedback received throughout the consultation period and take a vote on whether to proceed with a change to academy status. Parents and other interest parties will be informed of the decision after then. We will continue to communicate and consult through a variety of methods to ensure that everyone is kept up-to-date and all views are considered.

If parents, staff and the community have additional questions to ask, they should email the school. Responses will be provided as soon as possible, or if it is a general comment, it will be considered by the governors.

7. What does the conversion process involve?

The key steps we must take are as follows:

- The Governing Body formally agrees to consult on becoming an academy and within which MAT;
- Secure approval, in principle, from the Diocese and the land trustees to convert to academy status;
- Obtain the Secretary of State's initial consent by securing an "Academy Order";
- Carry out the necessary consultation and decide to proceed;
- Agree a supplementary funding agreement with the DfE and ODBST;
- Ensure that the school site is made available to the Academy Trust via leases and/or supplemental agreements;
- Ensure that financial systems are in place to manage funding;
- Transfer, renew or procure new contracts, service level agreements and licences and purchase insurance as appropriate;

- Transfer under TUPE all contract arrangements for staff. This is a formal legal consultation process which is separate from the consultation with all stakeholders. This would not start until after the vote by the Governing Body to apply for academy status;
- Agree and transfer surplus balances held by LA to the academy;
- Ensure appropriate admissions policies are in place.

8. Will the school have to change its name or uniform?

No, with ODBST there is no requirement for us to make any changes to the school name, logo or uniform. Should we decide to convert to academy status there is no plan to change the school name or the uniform requirements.

TEACHING AND THE CURRICULUM

9. Will the school be able to set its own curriculum?

Academies can offer a more flexible curriculum, but they are required to provide a 'balanced and broadly-based curriculum'. The teaching of English, Maths and Science would, of course, remain central and as a church school RE would be important. The teachers and governors will work with ODBST to implement the curriculum to best meet the needs of its pupils using the freedoms available to it.

10. What would happen to SEN provision?

We would continue to provide the same support for pupils with a statement of special educational needs and indeed the funding for this element continues to be provided by the Local Authority. The Local Authority retains its responsibility for statutory duties, obligations and procedures remain in place when a school converts to academy status.

11. Will academies be free from Ofsted inspections?

No, academies remain fully under Ofsted's inspection arrangements.

PERSONNEL

12. What happens to all of the staff?

All staff are entitled to transfer, under TUPE regulations, to the Academy with their same terms and conditions as at present.

13. Can academies alter the pay and conditions of employees?

When a school converts to a new academy, employees are entitled to transfer under the same employment terms and conditions. There is a legal process to go through, which is called TUPE, whereby staff maintain existing pay, conditions and length of service. Any alterations can only be made as they would have been by the Council (for example, changes to pay and annual leave negotiated with employee's representatives). This position will continue unless and until the contract of employment is varied with the agreement of the employee.

It's important to note that there are no plans to alter the pay and conditions of staff. Of course, any changes made nationally would apply.

14. How will union membership (NUT, NASUWT, Unison, etc) work?

Union recognition would remain as it currently stands; all employees are entitled to be part of a union.

15. Do we have enough support staff to cope with the change of status?

As we are proposing to join ODBST, many of the additional tasks associated with conversion and academy status are met by the Trust. It is not anticipated that further support staff would be required. However, the Governing Body would keep this under review.

16. Would we be able to buy services such as HR and payroll more cheaply if the school was not buying from the local authority?

ODBST will procure some services on behalf of schools in the Trust and will be able to negotiate better deals for a group of schools. The Governing Body will be able to procure services from a wider range of providers (and can continue to buy some services from the Local Authority – where they are still available).

17. How do the staff feel about conversion as part of ODBST?

Staff are being fully involved in the discussion regarding conversion. Meetings for staff with representatives from ODBST are being held to answer questions both about the process and being part of the Trust. The views of staff are held in the highest regard by the governors and school leaders. Ensuring that all viewpoints are listened to and all concerns addressed is a critical part of the conversion process.

ADMISSIONS

18. What are the admission requirements for schools converting to become academies?

No changes are proposed to the admissions criteria or catchment area. Becoming an academy will mean that we become the admissions authority, which will mean that in future the school will set its own admissions arrangements. However, if any changes are proposed in the future to admission arrangements there would be a full consultation prior to any changes being made. We will continue to publish our admission arrangements on our website well in advance of each academic year.

The Local Authority retains responsibility for co-ordination of admission arrangements for entry into Year R.

FINANCE

19. What is the financial impact of becoming an academy?

There are two aspects to the financial impact of academy conversion – the impact on how an academy is funded, and the impact on the amount available to spend (additional costs or potential savings).

a. How are academies funded?

Academies receive the same level of per-pupil funding as they would receive from the Local Authority as a maintained school. Most school funding will come directly to the multi-academy trust (MAT) from central government and is then passed on to the academy after a proportion is retained – the amount retained and how that is managed differs from MAT to MAT. Most of the funding is received in monthly instalments, and so managing cashflow is a new and important responsibility for both MATs and their academies. SEN and Early Years funding still comes to the academy directly from the local authority.

b. What extra costs are there?

All MATs must retain some proportion of its academies funding to pay for the staff and resources they need to provide services and support to their academies – this is often referred to as a service charge, retention or top slice. The amount retained will vary from MAT to MAT as will the level of service provision.

c. What savings can be made?

- Some local authorities such as Buckinghamshire retain an amount of school's funding under the heading of de-delegation – this no longer happens after conversion.
- The amount payable by the school for non-teaching staff's pensions contributions will differ from the LA rate – in the case of Buckinghamshire there is currently a saving of 3.6%
- Some costs previously met from the school's budget may be paid for from the service charge. Some examples are subscriptions, IT licence fees and school improvement support.
- The larger the MAT the greater the opportunity to negotiate discounts from suppliers which can then be passed on to academies, such as via energy bills and staff absence insurance packages.

20. Does the school have to cover the full cost to convert to an academy?

No. The Department for Education currently pay a flat-rate grant of £25,000 and the conversion will not impact on the school's normal budget. ODBST will cover costs required for the conversion if they exceed £25K.

21. Will there be a capital fund or a specific grant for insurance to cover for emergencies in academies?

Academies are required to cover insurance at specified minimum levels of cover. ODBST will ensure that the necessary insurance is in place through the Government's approved insurance scheme (Risk Protection Arrangement).

22. Who would own the land and buildings?

The land and buildings remain in their current ownership but are made available to the Academy via a 125-year lease and/or a supplemental agreement.

23. Will we retain the existing financial systems?

The financial system will change to better reflect the requirements of an Academy trust and meet the company accounts requirements.

24. How would we get a capital building project carried out?

ODBST will be part of a pooled capital funding scheme co-ordinated through the Oxford Diocese, who are awarded an annual allocation from the Department for Education for schools. This is allocated to schools based on the condition survey, which is updated as part of the conversion process.

The school will continue to receive an annual devolved formula capital (DFC) allocation for small capital projects as we do currently.

GOVERNANCE

25. Who owns and runs the company?

There are four Members (i.e. the owners of the company) who have been appointed by the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education, these are: **The Right Rev. Bishop Steven Croft**, a representative of **The Oxford Diocesan Board of Education** (corporate body), **Maureen Lomas** and **Peter Norman**.

The Members have appointed five Trustees to the Board, who are responsible to the Department for Education for the effective running of the company. The Trustees are: **The Right Rev Bishop Alan Wilson** (the Chair of the Board), **Rev. Cannon Rosie Harper**, **Michael Phipps**, **Steve Edgar** and **Kirsteen Roberts**. **Fiona Craig** is also a Trustees (an ex officio role as the Diocesan Director of Education), as is **David Cousins** (an ex officio role as the Chief Executive Officer).

The Oxford Diocesan Bucks Schools Trust is a private company limited by guarantee, registered in England (No.10943040), and is an exempt charity. No one can make any money from the company. Its registered address is Church House Oxford, Langford Locks, Kidlington, Oxfordshire. OX5 1GF.

26. What are the expected changes to the Governing Body?

On the day of conversion, our Governing Body would cease to operate and a new Local Governing Body will be established in its place, as a committee of the Board of Trustees (LGB). With the consent of the Governors, they are transitioned to the new LGB, who will be responsible for the day-to-day operational matters in the school, in line with the current Governing Body, but with a few new added responsibilities.

27. Will the change to academy status change the demands on Governors, and how will we find the right governors with the necessary skills, experience and time?

Being part of ODBST means that the Board of Trustees will have the necessary range of skills required at a strategic level in line with the requirements under the Companies Act and the roles and responsibilities of the LGB Members will not be any more demanding.

Recruiting and retaining governors with key skills and experience remains a key task for all schools and ODBST are committed to supporting governors in their role through training and advice.