



ACADEMY SCHOOLS

Questions parents frequently ask

Q. What is an academy?

A. An academy is an independent school funded by the state.

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 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. The Academies Act requires schools to undergo a consultation exercise before governors make the decision to convert to academy status. 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 school will have no additional money. It 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.

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

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

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.

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. Whilst academies cannot choose their intake, there is some evidence that academies' intakes are not representative of their local community. All academy funding agreements should include details of their obligations in regards to 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.

Q. Will parents have more influence with academy schools?

A. All available evidence shows that in existing academies the governing body becomes smaller as a result of either reducing parent governors and staff representatives. During the debate on the Academies Bill, ministers made a commitment that academies will now be required through their funding agreement to have at least two parent governors, but this can be many less than currently. There remain concerns that academy governing bodies will not follow the stakeholder model of governance as in maintained schools. In many existing academies, governors have not been elected but were appointed by the sponsor. Elsewhere, the governing body no longer has any power: all decisions are made by the trust board.

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, academies are not part of the local authority family of schools and, therefore, if they are not satisfied or are unhappy with the outcome, parents cannot complain, as they can now, to the local authority or their local councillor to ask them to intervene on their behalf. Any complaints about the academy would have to be raised with the Secretary of State for Education.

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 the academy still work with the local council?

A. Academies are independent schools and not maintained by the local authority. The whole basis of application for academy status is to encourage schools to break the link with the local council.