



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 provision for children with SEN. An academy is expected to behave as if it 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 that if, for example, it has a significant number of pupils with special needs, 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 instance, 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.

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 reducing parent governors and staff representatives. Academies must have at least two parent governors, but this usually will be many less than currently. 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.