

Frequently Asked Questions - Academies

What is an Academy?

Academies are classed as independent state schools, which have the freedom to determine their own policies on such things as the curriculum taught, school hours, term dates and staff pay. This is enabled by the Academies Act 2010. Primary, secondary and special schools are all able to apply to convert into an academy and are accountable to the Secretary of State - not the County Council.

How is an Academy funded?

Academies are given directly the money what would have been given to the Council so academies can choose how to spend the money.

Who runs an Academy?

The academy is run by an Academy Trust. This is a legal body which operates as a charitable organisation and a company limited by guarantee. The Trust has a formal agreement, or contract with the Department for Education (DfE).

Who decides which schools convert to an academy?

The decision for any school to become an academy rests with its governing body. Before a decision is taken on academy status, the staff and parents whose children attend the school in question will be consulted on their views and opinions.

My child has special education needs. How can I be confident that they will be given the same level of support, attention and care?

The Academies Act 2010 requires Academies to follow the same statutory framework for special needs as local authority schools. Academies receive the same level of additional funding to support those children.

Are there different types of academies?

Yes. Schools can convert on their own, as 'single converters' or alternatively convert as part of a group of schools. We refer to these group arrangements as Multi Academy Trusts, Umbrella Trust and Loose Groupings.

Dependent on the type of group arrangements the school may still be governed at a local level. The amount of governance (decision making) kept at a local level and the degree of individual autonomy for the school will vary dependent on the nature of the grouped arrangement.

For example, a Multi Academy Trust decides the amount of individual autonomy given to each school in the group, whereas in an Umbrella Trust each school is an individual legal entity and will retain its own governance.

Will it make any difference to my child's education which of these models he/she attends?

No. All academies are there to improve the quality of your child's education. Our core business at Ravenscote is to provide an excellent education for all of our children and this will not change whether we become an academy or not.

Are there any rules relating to admissions that academies and maintained schools have to follow?

Yes. Academies have to follow the law for school admissions, special educational needs and exclusions as if they were a maintained school.

Are academies free from Ofsted inspection?

No. Academies are subject to the same inspection regulations as all maintained schools.

Do we have to cover the full cost to convert to an academy?

No. Total costs will vary from schools to school but the DfE will pay a flat-rate grant of £25,000 to the school's bank account. This may not cover the whole costs involved, but we hope that by expecting schools to contribute the remaining costs they will keep them to a minimum. To reduce potential legal costs the Department has produced model legal documentation which is available to download from their website.

What will the responsibilities of the governing body be?

The governing body will be responsible for establishing the academy trust. The academy trust (a charitable company limited by guarantee) will then enter into a funding agreement with the Secretary of State for the running of the academy. The academy trust (made up of members) has a strategic role in running the academy and will be responsible for appointing the governors (also known as directors or trustees) to the governing body of the academy. It is the governing body that manages the academy on behalf of the members of the academy trust. The key responsibilities are to:

- **ensure the quality of educational provision**
- **challenge and monitor the performance of the academy**
- **manage the academy trust's finances and property**
- **employ staff.**

Do we have to support another school?

Yes, as many schools are already doing. For outstanding and good schools with outstanding features, an essential part of converting to academy status is agreeing in principle to support another school to raise standards. Schools should include their initial plans in their application, and their named contact in the Department will discuss these with them. The process provides headteachers and governors the flexibility to decide the exact nature of this support as they will know what is best for their school and local area.

Over the past 9 months we have supported three different schools, locally and nationally to help raise standards. This work has enabled us to develop us as professionals and continue to drive up our own standards.

Will Ravenscote lose its character or ethos?

No. over the past few years we have continued to develop our ethos and school, becoming an academy would provide us with greater freedoms to retain our

distinctiveness and continue to provide high quality learning experiences.

Will becoming an academy impact on my child's progress?

No. Our school vision is focused on a drive towards exceptional progress for every pupil, becoming an academy would not change our aim for excellence for your child.

Will we get more money as an academy?

Academies receive the same level of per-pupil funding as they would receive from the LA as a maintained school plus additions to cover the services that are no longer provided for them by the LA.

The Government is clear that becoming an academy should not bring about a financial advantage or disadvantage to a school. However, academies have greater freedom on how they use their budgets, alongside the other freedoms that they enjoy.

Will we have to raise our own capital funding as an academy?

No. All schools, including academies, will be able to apply for Government capital funding. This is done through the Education Funding Agency.

How long does it take?

On average it takes five months to convert, it can take less dependent on how a school wishes to proceed and if there are any complicated issues, such as land.

How do I find out more about academies?

There are several ways you may find out about academies.

You can find out more information from the Department for Education - www.education.gov.uk/academies

What are the advantages of achieving academy status?

- Freedom to develop further a curriculum that meets the needs of all our pupils.
- Flexibility to direct funding to the specific requirements of our school.
- Direct and increased funding to preserve and develop the best of what we do as a school in challenging economic times.
- Converting to academy status may provide the best route for us to build on our many strengths and become an even better school.
- Being an academy offers greater opportunities to develop our staff and gain experience from supporting other schools, which will continue to improve our teaching and learning.
- We would keep all the features of the school that are valued so highly by our pupils, parents and staff but use the additional freedoms academy status brings to enhance our provision for all.
- Gaining academy status means we would be funded directly from government and provide us more freedom to spend our money as we choose. We would also become owners of our land and buildings. Other

freedoms, such as the ability to introduce some flexibility to staff pay and conditions would help us recruit and retain the very best people.

Are there disadvantages?

- Perception that ‘old-style’ academies were created to replace underperforming schools.
- Uncertainty about future government policy.
- Autonomy brings associated responsibility in areas such as asset management.
- Certain teaching unions and support staff unions are unhappy with schools leaving Local Authority Control.

Timeline:

Wednesday 21 st May	Full Governing Body decide to consult parents for their views before a final decision is made.
Thursday 22 nd May	Email is set up for parents and other members of the community to electronically send in views – questions will be addressed as they are sent and placed on the website. Email: wewantyourviews@ravenscote.surrey.sch.uk
Friday 23 rd May	Letter detailing consultation and FAQs sent to all parents and staff.
Monday 16 th June	Academy Consultation evening to parents to bring questions for the governors to consider 7.00pm – in the hall.
Tuesday 17 th June	Academy Consultation afternoon to parents to bring questions for the governors to consider 2.30pm – intervention room, please come to reception to sign in.
Monday 23 rd June	Consultation period closes.
Wednesday 25 th June	Full Governing Body meeting to vote on whether to convert or not, taking account of views gathered during the consultation.
23 rd May – 23 rd June	Staff, other schools and the local authority will be consulted.