



George Stephenson High School

Converting to an Academy & Joining a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) Frequently Asked Questions

Why are we looking to become an Academy?

1. What is an academy?

Academy schools are state funded schools in England which are directly funded by central government (specifically, the Department for Education) and independent of direct funding and control by the Local Authority.

Academies were initially established through the Learning and Skills Act 2000. However, the number of schools converting to academy status only really started to gather pace following the passing of the Academies Act 2010. There are now over nearly 10,000 academies in England and whilst the government is no longer requiring all schools to become academies by 2030 their aim is still that all schools will eventually become academies.

As of July 2024: 50% of schools are academies or free schools (40% of primary schools and 82% of secondary schools)

2. Are all academies the same?

No. There are many different types of academy. For example, some schools have become academies independently, others have joined together with other schools to form a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) whilst others have joined larger MAT groups, often known as academy chains. Different academies have a variety of school improvement and governance arrangements. Schools are no longer allowed to convert as single academy trusts.

3. Why are we considering converting to an academy now?

We are currently state funded via our Local Authority. The current educational climate is changing and many schools nationally are choosing to take advantage of academy status. We are not obliged to convert to an academy and can continue to be maintained directly by North Tyneside Council. However, across-the-board cuts in central government funding to local authorities in recent years has led to reduced local budgets and cuts to local services. These cuts are continuing and it is possible that the requirement to further cut local budgets and spending over the next few years may ultimately impact on the ability of the Council to deliver its core services, including supporting school improvement.

North Tyneside is an outlier in terms of Academisation within the secondary estate and it has been apparent that schools are starting to have conversations and recognise the direction of travel. The benefits of Academisation laid out in the rationale document mean that it is sensible to convert and join the PELE Trust so that we are at the forefront of growth rather than tagging on and losing the opportunity to shape direction. If we were to delay too long, the likelihood is that the DfE would direct us towards specific MATS rather than us being able to select as we currently are.

4. Are any other schools in our local area involved with the trust?

John Spence Community High school has recently joined the Pele Trust along with Duchess Community High School and Ponteland High School. There are currently five primary schools.



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What day-to-day challenges will happen?

5. Will a move to academy status mean a new name for the school?

No. The school will continue to be called George Stephenson High School and there is no intention to change the name of the school.

6. Will a proposed new academy have a new uniform?

No. Parents will not need to buy a new uniform.

7. What will be the impact on our children with special needs?

There will be no change to the level of support provided. The school will continue to recognise that every child is different and has the right to be included as a valued, respected and equal member of the school community.

8. Will the school hours be any different as an academy?

Although it is highly unlikely that the school day will be changed, it is the decision of the MAT Board to decide this as they have the power to do so. This decision is usually delegated to the school specific 'academy committee/ council' of an academy, so there is no real change from our authority in this regard. As is the case now, parents would be consulted prior to any change in school hours, although no change is envisaged.

9. Will pupils' education be disrupted by a transition to academy status?

No. When an academy is approved to go ahead, it will do so with minimal disruption to the staff and students. Most of the changes will take place behind the scenes with support from a dedicated team.

10. If we move to being an academy will this change what is taught?

Academies are exempt from having to follow the National Curriculum however we would continue to offer the full range of National Curriculum subjects. OFSTED continue to inspect academies and their handbook for inspection is the same one as used in any other school. In other words, it is highly unlikely we would change what pupils are taught.

We would also not be subject to a centrally controlled Trust curriculum. Each school in the Trust delivers a curriculum that reflects their context and ethos.

What will this mean for our School finances?

11. How is an academy funded?

Currently, in maintained schools all revenue funding goes directly to the Local Authority. The Local Authority (LA) takes a proportion of the money from the school budget to provide essential services to the school and the rest is delegated under the Local Management of Schools. Schools can, and do, buy additional services from the LA and other providers. As a result, some schools currently depend upon the local authority for many services such as school improvement, HR, finance, etc.

Academies receive a similar level of per-pupil funding as maintained schools, plus funding to meet additional responsibilities that are no longer provided for them by the Local Authority (LA). With a MAT, the money that would have been provided to the LA to run the school is provided directly to the MAT. The MAT will retain some of the budget in order to provide services to the academy. Local authorities fund their core services in a similar way.

12. Does this improve on current funding arrangements?

Converting to an academy will not be to our detriment financially, although there may be the potential for some financial gain due to the increased buying power across the MAT and the



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opportunity to compare and contrast services centrally to ensure we are obtaining the best value for money. However, any decision is not motivated by money.

Funding is available to cover the costs of the conversion process itself, which is provided by central government once the decision to convert has been approved. We may have opportunities to support other schools and to benefit financially from doing so. In addition, the MAT Board may have access to capacity funding from the Department for Education as well as opportunities to bid for capital funding on an annual basis.

We will retain the reserves that we have due to our prudent financial management.

What will this mean for Teachers and Staff?

13. What are the Terms and Conditions for staff?

On conversion to academy status teachers and staff employed by the school will transfer with the same terms and conditions, via a formal TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment) process. In addition, conversion will not affect any union memberships.

14. Who will employ teachers and staff following conversion?

At present teachers and staff are employed by North Tyneside Council or governing body. Following conversion, teachers and staff will be employed directly by the PELE Trust. For the avoidance of doubt there will be no church involvement in the recruitment of any staff apart from in the event of the need to recruit a new Headteacher of any church school.

15. What about pay and conditions?

Teachers' pay and conditions will remain and as such salaries will remain the same. Support staff pay grades will remain the same, but are likely to move to Northumberland banding. Comparisons show that there is very little difference between roles and grades meaning that it is extremely unlikely that wages would decrease during any future restructure. This would be the same if we were to restructure our support staff as a maintained school.

16. Will the MAT employ non-qualified teachers?

All class groups of pupils will be registered to a qualified teacher, as is the case in schools currently.

17. Will the Board of Governors have less authority and control?

The current school's Board of Governors will be referred to as either an Academy Committee (with delegated powers) or an Academy Council (with fewer delegated powers).

The composition and powers of the Academy Committee/Council is set out in the 'Scheme of Delegation' which allows the MAT board to delegate responsibilities. There will continue to be (elected) parent representatives on the Committee/Council (as at present), together with NTLT and a Staff representative as well. The MAT may appoint additional people, such as representatives provided from the local community, and may step in if the Academy Committee is not performing its duties effectively.

What will this mean for standards?

18. Does PELE Trust have the capacity to raise educational standards?

The Trust has its own school improvement capacity for those schools choosing to join and with the majority being good schools that improvement will be generated from across Trust schools rather



than by centralised function.

19. How will an academy raise achievement?

The structure of the PELE Trust, as with any MAT, is designed to challenge and support schools in equal measure. The Trust will intervene rapidly in schools that are underperforming or on a downward trajectory based on OFSTED criteria. A flexible approach is woven into the approach meaning that support may be for a specific area rather than wholesale.

What are members, directors and academy committees and are there any implications of forming a 'mixed MAT?'

20. How will the MAT be structured?

The PELE Trust is a mixed MAT as it combines community schools and church schools. Does have implications at member level, but has little real impact on the day to day running or direction of the Trust.

The standard company structure for multi-academy trusts is five Members who are similar to shareholders in a company; there is then 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 responsibility for appointing the majority of Directors. They 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.

The current Trust is made up of 4 community schools and 2 church schools. In a mixed MAT, three of the five Members who sign the company documents will have links to the Church and the company documents will be based on template documents agreed nationally between the Department for Education and the Church of England. Two (of the three Church Members) will be nominated by the Diocese whilst the third Member will be an agreed appointment between the Diocese and schools. The other two Members are appointed by the Trust Board. One of these Members is the Chairperson of the Board of Directors.

The Trust has a very small group of Members (5 in total) who are named for legal purposes but don't have a great deal to do with the daily running of the school. The MAT Board of Directors has overall responsibility and accountability in law for the performance, site and overall running of the Trust and the schools. A local Academy Committee/Council sits beneath this and supports the Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team to implement strategic decisions. Neither the Members, Directors nor Academy Committee/Council representatives are paid positions (except the CEO of the MAT who receives a salary as usual).

21. Role and basis for appointment of Directors

The core governance functions of the 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 Trust Board of Directors (who are also charity trustees).

Directors are 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 students within the trust. Ultimately the members have the power of appointment and removal of the majority of directors but as part of this Trust the Members will sign a Members Agreement making it clear that appointments will be based on skills.



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22. How are Academy Committees established?

The local Academy Committees/Councils set up for the schools within the MAT reflects the ethos of that school and responsibility would be given to the local Academy Committee/Council to protect that ethos. There will be the opportunity for parents to be elected to these local Academy Committees/Councils and so maintain an input into the governance of their school. However, as mentioned above, it will also be the responsibility of the Trust 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.

23. What will happen to the school's land?

As a Foundation School, our land and assets are currently in trust with the North Tyneside Learning Trust. Upon conversion land and assets would transfer to the PELE Trust. For the avoidance of doubt there would be no transfer of community school land to the Church as a result of the schools becoming part of the Trust. Any land transferred to the MAT whether by lease or transfer could not be used for other purposes without Secretary of State consent and would be likely to be subject to certain conditions such as reinvestment into educational purposes.

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