



Downe Primary School



The Pioneer Academy

Downe Primary School Q&A

Academy Conversion Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

This document has been specially prepared by the Governing Body to inform stakeholders about academies, MATs and the current intentions of the Governing Body of Downe Primary School. The questions are grouped into the following sections:

- General Questions about Academies
- Consultation and Decision-Making Procedures
- Downe Primary School
- Governance and Accountability Arrangements
- Impact on Pupils and Parents
- Miscellaneous Questions

GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT ACADEMIES

What is an academy?

Academies are schools that are state-funded and state-governed, but are not under the direct control of the Local Authority (LA) and so have more independence over what they teach, how they operate and how they spend their budget. All academies are charities and therefore are entirely non-profit making.

What is a multi-academy trust (MAT)?

A MAT is a group of two or more academy schools working in a legally agreed formal collaboration called an academy trust. The MAT is the legal employer for all staff and determines a number of common practices and procedures across the MAT, whilst still encouraging each academy to have its own individual identity. MATs are usually run by an Executive Principal (or similar title) with a Headteacher or Head of School in each member academy.

What is the position nationally on Academies?

The Labour government introduced the first academy schools in 2002. At the time, academies were only for long-term under-achieving secondary schools in inner city areas and for brand new secondary schools in areas where there was a shortage of high achieving schools. They were sponsored by charitable organisations such as religious bodies, or by entrepreneurs and companies. The Conservative-led coalition government moved quickly after the election in 2010 to offer academy status to all good and outstanding schools and introduced the free schools programme (legally a free school is an academy).

At the start of September 2015, over 5,000 schools had become academies and a further 782 had applied for conversion. This represents around two thirds of all secondary schools and about a fifth of primary schools.

In the Government Schools White Paper: Schools White Paper, Opportunity for All, sets out plans to make sure every child can reach the full height of their potential published on 28th March 2022 (and updated in May 2022), it says “ *By 2030 all children will benefit from being taught in a school in, or in the process of joining, a strong multi-academy trust, which will help transform underperforming schools and deliver the best possible outcomes for children.*”

CONSULTATION AND DECISION-MAKING

Whose decision is it whether or not we become an academy?

The decision to apply to become an academy lies with the school’s Governing Body. The decision to accept or reject the application lies with the DfE and the Regional School Commissioner for the area the school is in.

Is everything already decided?

No. Applying, or even having the application accepted in principle, does not automatically mean that Downe Primary School will become an academy. At any point up to the signing of the Funding Agreement, the Governing Body or the DfE could decide to stop the process. Downe Primary School Governors have looked though to secure the future of the school within the community and have worked tirelessly this year to look for ways to do this.

Who will the Governing Body be consulting?

The Governing Body will be consulting with all staff at the school, parents and various other stakeholders, local schools, and other community members.

How will you be consulting? How can I share my views?

You can also write to, or email, us at: admin@downe.bromley.sch.uk . Please put ‘Academy Consultation’ in the subject line in the email or on the front of the envelope, which can be delivered to the school office.

What will you do with any responses you get?

The responses will be reviewed by the Governing Body, and therefore will be a factor in the decision making process. Responses will be made to each question raised either directly, or added to the miscellaneous question section below.

The question I want to ask is not in this Q&A document. How can I ask my question and get an answer?

Questions can be submitted through email or by letter as described above.

Downe Primary School

Which academy trust does the Governing Body want to join?

Downe Primary School Governing Body is consulting to decide whether to join The Pioneer Academy (TPA). This conclusion comes after careful consideration.

Why do the Head Teacher and Governing Body think that it is in the best interests of the school to join a MAT? And why now?

PULL Factors:

Converting to an academy and joining TPA would be positive with a number of benefits and improvements because:

- Building on the achievements of our children to deliver higher standards and increase outcomes for all
- Flexibility and creativity to design a curriculum best for our children designed to be engaging, relevant and appropriate
- Freedom to share best practice with other like-minded schools to ensure best practice is shared to all staff
- Increase staff opportunities to ensure we recruit the highest quality of staff, and provide CPD & career progression opportunities to retain them
- Keep responsibility of school finances within our organization, as part of a MAT we could use our greater buying power to negotiate contracts and services that achieve much better value for money than each school negotiating individually. This means that more of the school's funding can be focused upon teaching and learning.
- It would enable us to build stronger relationships and partnerships with key local educational organisations.
- It would enable our quality of education to extend beyond the pupils who attend Downe Primary School because being an academy would allow greater sharing of resources and expertise.
- This is a unique opportunity to join a strong Primary focused MAT
- Joining TPA can improve the important transition from the primary phase to the secondary phase of a child's education.
- Joining TPA would not prevent us from working in partnership with the LA or other local schools. We would be able to continue that relationship in the areas that we consider most beneficial for the school

PUSH Factors

There are several factors that are pushing us towards academisation:

1. The number of academies is steadily growing and government policy is now again focused on all schools joining MATS by 2030.
2. School funding has reduced over the lifetime of the present Parliament. The Institute for Fiscal Studies estimates that funding per pupil will fall by about 8% over the next 4-5 years which means that further collaboration and sharing of resources with other schools will become even more important.
3. Continuing reductions in Local Authority budgets means schools must find alternative sources of support that the LA is no longer able to provide.
4. The current Foundation Trust we are a part of cannot provide the support the school needs to continue to provide the education for the children of Downe Village & surrounding areas.

IMPACT ON PUPILS AND PARENTS

Will my child's education at Downe Primary School be better or worse?

When the Governing Body considered all of the options that are available to Downe Primary School, the principle concern was to recommend a strategy that would provide the best outcomes for current and future pupils. The Governing Body is convinced that converting to an academy and joining TPA will offer children a better education than that which would be available through any other strategy, including doing nothing and remaining under LA control.

Downe Primary School has an excellent record of recruiting, developing and retaining high quality staff. As part of TPA, there will be a larger, but still tight-knit, group of staff who can share ideas and collaborate on initiatives. In an ever tightening financial situation, we will be better placed to make sure our financial and other resources are targeted on improving the education of our pupils.

My child has special educational needs. I am concerned that this might mean changes for the worse.

The motivation for the proposed changes is securing and improving the standard of education that the school is able to provide to all children. The Governing Body is not aware of any reason why the educational experience offered to any group should not be maintained and improved through joining TPA. There is no reason why children with special educational needs should experience negative changes. All academies must comply with the legally binding Code of Practice on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and that is the 'safeguard' that all pupils and parents will continue to have.

What will change if we become an academy and what will stay the same?

The educational experience for children would continue to improve through initiatives that are developed or supported by the teaching staff at Downe Primary School, supported by the expertise, networking and best practice being part of TPA will bring.

There are no plans to change the school uniform or any other day-to-day arrangements, although inset days would be coordinated across TPA.

Will it be harder for local families to get their children into Downe Primary School?

Conversion to an academy should not influence the admissions process because all academies have to comply with the legally binding Code of Practice on School Admissions in exactly the same way as state maintained schools. Academies are still required to comply with the relevant codes in respect of admissions, exclusions and special education needs.

In terms of administering the application process for school places, the school will almost certainly continue to use the LA services for admissions.

GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY ARRANGEMENTS

How are MATs governed and run?

Downe Primary School has the opportunity to join an academy trust that is already established and one that brings a commitment to excellence, quality of leadership and vision to the running of other primary schools including a similar small school to Downe Primary within a 5 mile radius. This means that TPA would support the school in becoming an academy without the need for the school to establish a separate Charitable Trust and a Limited Liability company. The school would have a local governing body committed to providing challenge and support to the school senior leadership team, but this would be accountable to the Trust.

How are the accountability and the competence of the MAT assured?

Academies are still very accountable. Although they have more autonomy than schools under the control of the LA, they arguably have higher levels of accountability.

The Chief Executive Officer is accountable to the Board of Directors/Trustees and to the DfE through the Regional Schools Commissioner. The Board of Directors must report annually to the Members and must publish annual accounts as well as a report on their stewardship of the MAT over the previous year.

Individual academies are subject to Ofsted inspections and, under the regulations governing inspections, the MAT itself can also come under the scrutiny of Ofsted. If standards in any of the academies within a MAT are falling, the MAT can be challenged and scrutinised by the DfE through the system of Regional School Commissioners.

The Academies Financial Handbook governs the financial conduct of academies and the MAT. Budgets and accounts have to be submitted to the Education Funding Agency. The accounts have to be audited externally by independent auditors. Annual accounts and all details of directors have to be submitted to Companies House.

What happens when the present governors and senior staff move on?

The Governing Body believes that by joining TPA, we would be joining the kind of organisation that capable staff will also want to join. The Governing Body believes that there will always be a strong pool of talent and experience on which to draw. There are specified periods of office for all the directors/trustees and any member of the Local Governing Body, with clear rules about how replacements are appointed.

In the case of senior staff, being part of a larger MAT means that there would be a larger pool of staff who are already experienced in our way of working and already share our ethos and who would potentially be able to step up to fill any vacancies. New staff would, of course, be appointed on the basis of ability.

MISCELLANEOUS QUESTIONS

If Downe Primary School becomes an academy, how will it affect other schools?

Downe Primary School's decision to academise and join TPA is not likely to affect other local schools, most of which in Bromley are already academies and this decision is also supported by the Local Authority. It is possible that other local schools might express an interest in joining TPA.

How will becoming an academy affect the school's finances?

Academies receive their entire budget directly from central government from the Education Skills and Funding Agency rather than receiving their funding from the LA. An academy is then free to choose how to purchase services. Academies are therefore responsible for securing best-value in the procurement of a wide-range of supplies and services. A MAT is funded by a contribution of a certain percentage of the participating schools' budgets. As larger organisations, MATs should be able to realise economies of scale that lead to savings for individual schools, through such activities as joint purchasing and procurement.

Will the school be in a more secure financial position as an academy in TPA ?

When the Governing Body assessed options available to Downe Primary School, an improved financial position was one of the principal concerns; however, to ensure that the chosen strategy was feasible and sustainable, the financial implications were investigated and continue to be thoroughly examined.

The Governing Body expects the school to be in a better financial position as a result of becoming an academy and joining TPA. The costs incurred while converting to an academy are compensated by a conversion grant.

What will be the impact on the staff?

One of the 'freedoms' afforded to academies is the right to set their own terms for staff pay and conditions. Understandably this is, and has always been, an issue of great concern for all teaching and support staff and their unions.

The Governing Body wants to make it clear that we fully recognise and appreciate the enormous effort and commitment of current Downe Primary School staff in contributing to the school's success and our pupils' outcomes. The concerns and welfare of our staff have been very much to the fore throughout the Governing Body's deliberations.

It is quite clearly in the best interests of Downe Primary School and our pupils, in particular, to continue to have motivated, contented and engaged staff and this remains a priority for the Governing Body throughout this process.

What is TUPE?

All qualifying staff would transfer from the employment of the LA to the employment of TPA. Qualifying staff are generally those who have contracts of employment at a converting school on the date of conversion to academy status. This transfer takes place within the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 (TUPE) for staff transfer, which ensures that staff retain all of their existing rights, terms and conditions and pension arrangements, including continuity of service. The pension arrangements for staff would be unaffected by the transfer.

The TUPE Regulations provide that the current employer's rights and obligations arising from a contract of employment existing on the date of transfer shall, by reason of such transfer, be transferred to the new employer.

Staff are able to respond to the consultation as part of the academisation process, including a meeting for all staff to discuss their views. In addition, there will be a further formal consultation process (involving trade unions) as stipulated by the TUPE regulations.

Land and Buildings

The land and buildings of the school are leased to the Academy Trust for 125 years at a rent from the Local Authority and the academy would be responsible for the land and buildings (and reliant on the Secretary of State for capital funding)

Does Ofsted inspect academies?

Yes, in exactly the same way as for maintained schools.

How can the Secretary of State intervene in an academy?

The Secretary of State has the ability to terminate the Funding Agreement for each of the schools within the Academy Trust if specified situations, predominantly if a school is eligible for 'special measures' or 'requires significant improvement' following an Ofsted inspection, student

performance unacceptably low, there has been a serious breakdown in the governance or management of the academy, or the safety of pupils or staff is threatened. In this situation the Secretary of State would be able to enter into a Funding Agreement with another Academy Trust to take over the governance and management of the academy.