

Academies

All you need to know



Background information

Academies are independent schools funded directly by the Government. We have no powers of intervention in academies. Academies are entirely responsible to the Secretary of State for their performance. They also employ their own staff, manage their buildings and can set their own admissions policies. These three freedoms are not unique to academies – church, foundation and trust schools have the same powers.

Academies were first introduced by the Government in 2000 as a way of targeting extra resources at schools serving the most disadvantaged communities to accelerate their improvement. On changing to become an academy the school was closed and reopened, often being rebuilt or refurbished at the same time.

Sponsors

Originally each academy had a sponsor. The sponsor is an organisation such as a business or charity which takes responsibility for the academy. The sponsor's role is significant. It appoints the governing body, oversees the management of the academy and is responsible for its performance. The role of the sponsor has been the subject of much debate in the media, particularly around the influence of the private sector in education, although no sponsor can make a profit from supporting an academy.

Academy Conversion

The Academy Framework changed under the Academies Act 2010. The new act allows any school that is performing well to apply to convert to become an academy. It is expected that good schools which become academies will sponsor other schools that are not performing well. Primary and secondary schools that are below the Government's minimum standards are expected to become sponsored academies - either sponsored by another school or by a charitable or corporate sponsor. Within this framework, many schools across the country are now converting. The conversion process takes around 3-4 months and is led by the school's governing body. The school must consult its community before being given the go ahead.

Academies in Sheffield

Sheffield has three academies set up under the previous system of sponsored academies - Park and Springs Academies that are sponsored by the United Learning Trust, and Parkwood Academy which is sponsored by Edutrust Academies Charitable Trust (EACT).

Yewlands Secondary school became an academy in September 2011 and is the first Sheffield school to convert under the new system. A number of other Sheffield schools are in the process of converting and many are considering whether academy status is the right way forward.

Sheffield's Approach

In the light of the academies agenda, we are developing new ways of working together with all Sheffield's schools. We are clear that our role is to be the advocate of children in Sheffield and to act as guarantor of excellence in education. Recognising that schools are increasingly autonomous, we have developed a new partnership through our City-Wide Learning Body (CWLb). Membership of the body is open to all types of schools, and brings with it a common commitment to serving the children and families

of Sheffield by delivering a world-class education. The City-Wide Learning Body unites all Sheffield schools in the common purpose of raising standards, ensuring fair access and supporting the needs of our most vulnerable children.

Our 'asks'

We have also asked schools that are converting to become academies to make a number of individual commitments. These are:

- to consult thoroughly and hold a parental vote to confirm that the governing body has a mandate to convert to an academy
- to adhere to Sheffield's policies on admissions, exclusions and inclusion
- to join the City-Wide Learning Body (CWLb)
- to include parents and local community representatives on the governing body and allow staff to be members of a union
- to allow community use of the school buildings and land and retain spaces that have been designated for special purposes, such as integrated resources for children with special needs.



Frequently Asked Questions

Q Who decides whether my school should become an academy?

A The governing body is responsible for taking the decision about whether to apply for academy status and the Secretary of State decides whether to accept the application.

Q Do schools get any financial advantage from converting to academy status?

A Academies get funded at the same rate as other schools, but they also receive their share of the funding

normally held by local authorities for providing central services such as support for children with special needs. This amounts to £100 per pupil. However, academies will normally spend most of this money in buying back those services.

Q What if it all goes wrong and my school doesn't succeed as an academy?

A The Secretary of State has given a commitment that he will not allow academies to continue to underperform. A new sponsor would be found.

Find out more

To find out more information about academies please go to www.sheffield.gov.uk/academies

To find out about how as a parent you can have your say on the services that affect you and your family, including schools and education, visit www.sheffield.gov.uk/parentsassembly



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