

# Converting to an Academy - Frequently Asked Questions

## WHY ARE WE LOOKING AT BECOMING 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.
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 groups and organisations, often known as academy chains. Different academies have a variety of school improvement and governance arrangements.
3. **Why are we considering converting to an academy now?** The current educational climate is changing and many schools nationally are choosing to take advantage of academy status. Many schools wish to make the move now to determine their own destiny and to make the changes when it is right for their own school.

We have been in discussion with Leading Learners Multi Academy Trust about joining their Trust and Governors feel that now is the right time to take this forward.

## 4. **What is Leading Learners Multi Academy Trust?**

Leading Learners Multi-Academy Trust was founded by the leaders of Tyldesley Primary School in 2016, with the vision of providing a supportive platform for schools in the local area and beyond.

We are currently a family of nine primary schools, based across the Greater Manchester, Yorkshire, and Wirral region. We are united in a mission to help children find a path where they can explore their talents, grasp opportunities, and determine their own futures. Giving each and every one of them chances and choices is at the heart of what we do.

Ensuring there is a careful balance between autonomy and standardisation through collaboration is key to our philosophy. We want schools to retain their unique character, whilst ensuring they are ambitious for all children through implementation of our robust systems and processes.

Our Trust values are:

- Pride
- Community
- Ambition
- Resilience
- Integrity

You can find out more about the Leading Learners MAT at <https://www.leadinglearnersmat.co.uk/About-our-trust/>

## 5. **Are any other schools in our local area that are academies?**

Yes, there are a number of academies in our region. However, all academies are different in the same way that every school is different.

6. **What are the advantages of Academy Status?** In addition to the advantages mentioned above, as Governors and Headteacher of Brookdale, we believe that the opportunity to work with new partners and schools, working together to ensure standards across the Trust are consistently high, is an exciting new proposition. However, we will continue to actively work with all local schools and current partners, ensuring the best of both worlds. Leading Learners Multi Academy Trust has made it clear that academy status will not change the things that

work so well for our school but will help us make improvements where we wish to for the best of our pupils and community.

7. **What are the disadvantages of Academy Status?** As an academy, there are a number of additional responsibilities placed on the school in terms of financial management and reporting. It is expected that, on a day-to-day basis, the pupils and their parents and carers, teachers and staff will not notice the difference when we become an academy. There will however be additional workloads for members of staff in the school office. Leading learners Multi Academy Trust recognise the additional pressures and will provide the school with a significant amount of support from specialists who will be able to pick up the majority of this additional work.

## **WHAT DAY-TO-DAY CHANGES WILL HAPPEN?**

8. **Will a move to academy status mean a new name for the school?** No. The school will continue to be called Brookdale Primary School. Other schools that have chosen to become academies with the Trust have also chosen to retain their existing names.
9. **Will a proposed new academy have a new uniform?** No. Parents will not need to buy a new uniform.
10. **Will a proposed new academy still be open to the community?** Yes. There will be no change to the current provision and use of the school by different groups to hold events.
11. **What will be the impact on our children with special needs?** There will be no change to the level of support provided. Brookdale 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. If anything, all our pupils will benefit from the increased levels of support from specialist members of the MAT Team to our teaching and support staff.
12. **Will the school hours be any different as an academy?** This decision is delegated to the local Governing Board of an academy, so there is no real change from our local 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.
13. **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 from the Trust who have gone through this process before with other schools.
14. **If we move to being an academy, will this change what is taught?** We would be expected to 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. The academy would be expected to strive to be outstanding in the statutory OFSTED (section 5). In other words, there will be no change in what or how pupils are taught.

## **WHAT WILL THIS MEAN FOR OUR SCHOOL FINANCES?**

15. **How is an academy funded?** In maintained schools, all revenue funding (building funding is slightly different) 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, schools currently depend upon the Local Authority for many services such as school improvement, HR, finance, etc. This has led to a dual system where the LA has taken the lead on school effectiveness whilst the local Governing Board has focused on the distinctive and inclusive characteristics of the school.

Academies will receive the same 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 Leading Learners Multi Academy Trust, the money that would have been provided to the LA to run the school is provided directly to Leading Learners Multi Academy Trust. The Trust does retain some of the budget in order to provide services to the academy. Local authorities fund their core services in a similar way.

16. **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 (see below). 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 will also have opportunities to support other schools and to benefit financially from doing so. In addition, the MAT Board has access to capacity funding from the Department for Education as well as opportunities to bid for capital funding on an annual basis to improve building conditions.

## **WHAT WILL THIS MEAN FOR TEACHERS AND STAFF?**

17. **What are the Terms and Conditions for staff?** On conversion to academy status, teachers and staff employed by the Local Authority 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.
18. **Who will employ teachers and staff following conversion?** At present, Brookdale teachers and staff are employed by the Local Authority. Following conversion, teachers and staff will be employed directly by Leading Learners Multi Academy Trust.
19. **Will Leading Learners Multi Academy Trust employ Non-Qualified Teachers?** No! All class groups of pupils will be registered to a qualified teacher, as is the case in school currently.

## **WHAT WILL THIS MEAN FOR STANDARDS?**

20. **Does Leading Learners Multi Academy Trust have the capacity to support our educational standards?** The Trust has established its own school improvement capacity for those schools choosing to become an academy which includes a School Improvement Lead and regular use of educational consultants.

Collectively, the team is experienced and qualified to support and challenge schools in data analysis, teaching, behaviour, safeguarding, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, special educational needs and disabilities, and leadership and management. The school improvement package will include support and challenge for governance.

21. **How will an academy raise achievement?** The whole structure of Leading Learners Multi Academy Trust has been designed to challenge and support schools in equal measure. We would receive a number of days of school improvement support from the School Improvement Lead, irrespective of whether the school is outstanding or inadequate.

These visits are not inspections but an opportunity for senior leaders to benchmark their judgments through shared lesson observation, work scrutiny, analysis of data, supported self-evaluation and school improvement planning. Indeed, the outcome of these visits will confirm the development of the school.

Leading Learners Multi Academy Trust will intervene rapidly in schools that are underperforming or on a downward trajectory based on OFSTED criteria.