



## FAQs

### **What is an academy?**

Academies are state-funded, independent schools, held accountable by the Department for Education (DfE) by a legally binding Funding Agreement. They are independent of the local authority and receive their funding directly from central government.

Previously academies have tended to replace schools that had poor results and needed to improve. Under the Academies Act 2010, all schools are now able to become academies.

There is now a drive from the Department for Education for schools to form Multi-Academy Trusts.

Academies are still part of the community and serve children and families in a particular area. They retain the same responsibilities as any maintained school as part of the learning community.

### **What is a Multi-Academy Trust?**

A Multi-Academy Trust (Trust) is a group of academy schools who agree to work together, overseen by an overarching charitable trust, whose purpose is the advancement of education for the public benefit.

Trusts also help to support other schools.

### **What does the national educational landscape look like?**

Academies first began under the Labour Government and the current Government has expanded the process.

Roughly 61% of secondary schools are now academies and that number is increasing. Roughly 41% of primary schools in England are academies and this figure is growing.

Any new school will automatically become an academy via the 'free schools' process. Local authorities are not involved in the set-up of new schools as academies, nor are these schools accountable to them.

The Government recognises the value of a self-improving school system in which groups of schools work closely together to continuously improve. With the ongoing reductions in school funding, the cost savings of schools maximising economies of scale together is significant.

In the future it is likely that every school will be part of a Trust.

## **Why are we considering joining a Multi-Academy Trust?**

The Compass Partnership is a highly successful group of schools that has led to improved results for children, financial efficiencies, and exceptional professional development of staff. We have worked in partnership with Compass for some time now.

This is the opportunity to shape, control and future-proof our school. As an academy, we would have greater control of our school budgets and more autonomy over our curriculum.

Over the next few years there is going to continue to be a tightening of budgets, and we need to prepare for cuts to school funding. By being in a Trust we can secure greater opportunities for financial savings.

We have learned through our partnership that collaborative working with other schools can provide improved educational experiences for our own pupils through teaching and learning, an enhanced and engaging curriculum, staff development and opportunities for progression, streamlined services including finance, human resources, legal services, school improvement structures, and governance arrangements.

The Local Authority fully supports our decision to pursue becoming a Trust.

## **Why now?**

We want to shape and secure the best possible future for the children in our schools now, as well as those who will join our schools in the future.

## **Do staff have a say?**

We have met with the staff across our schools to explain why we are consulting on joining the Compass Trust, as well as to hear their questions about the process and what the implications of trust status would be. Staff will be kept updated throughout the process and will continue to have the opportunity to ask questions and share views.

## **Would our school change?**

We want to continue to be a great school where every child is valued. We do not intend to change except in ways that we think will improve the school even further. It is unlikely that the children would see much, if any, change, in their day-to-day school lives.

Whilst they are united behind a core vision and ethos, the schools in the Compass Partnership are all unique, and this is something that we would want to continue to preserve and celebrate in the future.

Academies have more freedom than other state schools over their finances, curriculum, length of terms and school days. We do not however intend to make any changes in these areas, and would consult with parents/carers, staff and pupils, if we did ever feel the need to consider making such changes in the future.

**Would the admissions arrangements change?**

By being part of a trust we would be responsible for our own admissions procedures. We would continue to follow the Admissions Code. If for some reason the Trust wanted to change its admissions arrangements in the future, consultation would be required. The Compass Trust has remained in-line with the Royal Borough of Greenwich's admissions criteria since its conversion to academy status in July 2017.

**Would the schools have to change their names?**

No.

**Would changes be made to the length of the school day and to term dates?**

No, we would not seek to make changes to the length of the school day or to term or holiday dates. If this was something that we felt in the future could benefit the children we would consult with staff, parents/carers, and the children themselves.

**Would changes be made to the school's religious designation?**

No this would not change for the schools.

**Would the Free School Meals policy continue to be observed?**

Yes.

**Would changes be made to the curriculum?**

Academies do not have to follow the National Curriculum, however over the past few years Compass have adapted the National Curriculum to follow values. Compass Partnership schools already have outstanding curriculum frameworks that are recognised by Ofsted.

**Would academy status affect the SEND provision?**

No, SEND services would stay the same and we would continue to provide SEND services in the way we do now.

**What would the changes mean for staff?**

Staff would not notice significant changes in their everyday working lives. They already experience and champion the benefits of partnership work and those opportunities would grow. Professional development would further expand and there would be a greater range of opportunities for career progression.

Terms and conditions for existing staff would remain the same and pensions would transfer to the Trust (including pension contributions), who would become their new employer. Staff contracts and their terms and conditions would TUPE across from the Local Authority to the Trust.

**Would the Trust employ unqualified teachers?**

We already employ unqualified teachers across our schools through the Schools Direct programme, which is one of the routes to qualified teacher status. This enables us to train teachers before they are qualified who often go on to securing permanent teaching positions in our schools after they qualify. Through training in our schools we know that they are a good fit for us and that they understand and buy into our culture and ethos.

**How would the schools be funded?**

At present, we receive our funding from the Local Authority, which they receive from the Department for Education, and pass onto schools. The Local Authority allocates some of the money to cover the services that they provide to schools, such as admissions (this is referred to as the 'top slice'). The school also uses some of this money to 'buy in' some services provided by the Local Authority.

In joining the Compass Trust, the funding would come directly to the school from the Department for Education. The schools in the Compass Trust are responsible for their own budgets. They pay a contribution to the Trust to cover shared costs.

**Would the school continue to access services from the Local Authority?**

The school would continue to buy back a number of services from the Local Authority as we already do. We would also review those services that might be more efficient and better value for money from other providers, which is something that we do now as part of our annual budget setting processes.

**Who would own the school land and buildings?**

The schools would lease the land and buildings from the Local Authority.

**Who makes the final decision on whether the school converts to an academy?**

The Governing Body.

**Would other schools join the group and how would the decision be made to do this?**

Any decision on additional schools joining the Trust would be made by the Board of Trustees. We would expect other schools to join as time goes on and any school that joins would be expected to abide by our vision, ethos, and governance structure. They would also be required to contribute to and learn from the other schools in the group.

**Would a sponsor be appointed to oversee the schools now or in the future?**

No, this is a school-led process and we have existing expertise within our group to continue building on the journey that our school is on. Sponsors have been traditionally used where a school is deemed to be in need of making rapid improvement and is in difficulty.

**If the schools were no longer part of the Local Authority, who would they be accountable to?**

The Trust would be accountable directly to the Department for Education and our accounts would be audited on an annual basis by external auditors. We would be overseen by our Regional Schools Commissioner and would continue to be subject to Ofsted inspections.

If parents/carers had concerns about progress in the schools they would contact the Board of Trustees, who would investigate this. If they were unsatisfied with the outcome of this they would contact the Department for Education.

## **Who runs a Trust?**

The Board of Trustees is ultimately accountable for the Trust. The current Executive Headteacher and Headteachers would contribute to the leadership of the whole group under the leadership of the Board of Trustees.

Our Schools would continue to have its own Local Governing Body (LGB), whose responsibilities would be delegated to them by the Trust through a Scheme of Delegation.

The Trust Board sits above the Local Governing Bodies, essentially functioning as one board of governors, overseeing the local committees of the Board "the LGBs". They would be the main decision-making group and accountable for all schools within the Trust. The Trust consists of up to twelve Trustees, specifically selected for their skills, and tasked with ensuring the excellence of all schools and the delegation of powers to the Local Governing Bodies.

As with Governors, Trustees receive no remuneration for their function and serve as volunteers for our charitable endeavour. Trustees would be appointed from the LGBs as well as through a recruitment process to secure key skills on the Trust.

Above the Trustees sits the Members. Members function as founders and essentially 'shareholders' of the Trust, but absolutely no financial benefit would be obtained.

Members are responsible for the appointment of Trustees, and ensuring the success of the Trust at an annual general meeting.

## **What process have the Governors gone through in deciding to consult on conversion to academy status?**

The Governing Body voted to confirm that they would proceed with consultation on becoming an academy and joining the Compass Trust.

This is not a decision we have come to quickly; rather it is the result of the evolution of everything we have been through as a group of schools. We have undertaken a vast amount of research and training, as well as holding meetings with education advisers to explore the process of becoming a Trust.

At the end of the consultation period, the governors will analyse the consultation responses and then have a final vote on whether to convert.

## **Can schools withdraw from the conversion process?**

Schools are able to withdraw right up to the point that they sign the Funding Agreement. Once this is signed there is a legally binding agreement between the Secretary of State and the academy, and the termination process would require a long notice period.

## **What is the planned date for conversion?**

The proposed date for conversion is 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023.