

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? Norley CE Primary School is a Church of England aided primary school. This means that we are currently state funded via our Local Authority, Cheshire West and Chester but operate within the Church school system. The Church school system is managed and developed through individual Dioceses, and each Diocese has a Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) which is a statutory body. There are currently 115 church schools in the Chester Diocese, some of which are already academies. The Diocese of Chester has established a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) called the Chester Diocesan Academies Trust (CDAT) to provide an academy option for its schools.

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 CDAT about joining their Trust and Governors feel that now is the right time to take this forward.

4. Are any other schools in our local area academies? Yes, there is a mix of schools locally who are academies or part of a multi academy trust. However, all academies are different in the same way that every school is different.

CDAT currently has eleven member schools: six are in Cheshire (Little Bollington, Brereton, Bosley St Mary's, Wybunbury Delves, Astbury St Mary's and Utkinton St Paul's), four in the Stockport/Tameside area (St Matthew's Stockport, St Paul's Stalybridge, St George's Hyde and Bredbury St Mark's) and one on the Wirral (Christ Church Moreton). All are CofE primary schools.

5. What are the advantages of Academy Status? In addition to the advantages mentioned above, as Governors and Headteacher of Norley CE Primary School, 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. Chester Diocesan Academies Trust has made it clear that academy status will not change the things that work so well for our school.

6. What are the disadvantages of Academy Status? As an academy, there are a number of different 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. Chester Diocesan Academies Trust will provide the school with a significant amount of support from specialists who will be able to pick up the majority of any additional work.

WHAT DAY-TO-DAY CHANGES WILL HAPPEN?

7. Will a move to academy status mean a new name for the school? No. The school will continue to be called Norley CE Primary School. Other schools that have chosen to become academies with CDAT have also chosen to retain their existing names.

8. Will a proposed change to academy status mean we have a new uniform? No. Parents will not need to buy a new uniform.

9. Will a proposed change to academy status still mean we are 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.

10. What will be the impact on our children with special needs? There will be no change to the level of support provided. Norley CE Primary 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.

11. 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 CDAT Board to decide this as they have the power to do so. This decision is usually delegated to the local governing body 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.

12. 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.

13. 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 both the statutory OFSTED (section 5) and the Church School (section 48) inspections. In other words, there may be no change in what or how pupils are taught.

14. Would there be an increased emphasis on religion and Christianity in CDAT academy? We would maintain our status as a Church School and the existing emphasis on our Christian values and ethos would not change. Church schools are also subject to the statutory (section 48) Church School Inspection and this also would not change.

WHAT WILL THIS MEAN FOR OUR SCHOOL FINANCES?

15. How is an academy funded? In maintained schools, including church 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 Diocese 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 CDAT, the money that would have been provided to the LA to run the school is provided directly to CDAT. CDAT 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.

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 School's Governing Body (as an aided 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.

18. Who will employ teachers and staff following conversion? At present Norley CE Primary School teachers and staff are employed by the school's governing body. Following conversion, teachers and staff will be employed directly by CDAT, but will still have Norley CE Primary School as their place of work.

19. What happens with teachers/staff pension? Pensions continue as they are now. The Trust is a member of the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) for teaching staff and the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) for support staff.

20. Will CDAT employ non-qualified teachers? All class groups of pupils will be registered to a qualified teacher, as is the case in schools currently.

WHAT WILL THIS MEAN FOR STANDARDS?

21. Does CDAT have the capacity to support our educational standards? CDAT has established its own school improvement capacity for those schools choosing to become an academy which includes an Education Officer and team of consultants.

Collectively, the team is experienced and qualified to support and challenge schools in areas such as, teaching and learning, the curriculum, educational standards, behaviour, safeguarding, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, Christian distinctiveness, special educational needs and disabilities, and leadership and management. The school improvement package will include support and challenge for governance and the team are able to draw on further support from the Diocese and National Leaders in Governance as appropriate.

22. How will an academy raise achievement? The whole structure of CDAT has been designed to challenge and support schools in equal measure. We would receive a number of days of school improvement support from a school improvement professional, 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. In addition, all of our staff would benefit from a wide package of professional development opportunities provided by the Trust.