

Seaham High School Frequently Asked Questions – Academy Status

Our school is consulting with our parents, carers, students, staff, trade unions and the local community on the proposals to convert to 'Academy' school status and join Eden Learning Trust, which is a multi academy trust (MAT).

To learn more about what this will mean for you, your child and the wider community, we have provided over the next few pages, some frequently asked questions and answers about Academies. The closing date for responses is **5pm Friday 12th July 2019** and details of how to respond are also included.

What is an academy?

Academies are publicly funded, independent schools, free from local authority control. Funding is received directly from the Department for Education, instead of the Local Authority, giving the Trust and school more control over its spending and decision making.

Originally, underperforming schools were turned into academies to help the school improve rapidly, however in 2010 the Government extended the opportunity to convert to academy status to all schools that are successful and performing well, and as a result, there are now over 7,000 academies in the country.

An Academy Trust is a charitable trust run by a board of trustees. Academies are expected to work with and support other schools, including lower-performing schools.

So, what is different?

Academy Trusts have additional responsibilities and freedoms that 'maintained' schools do not enjoy. These include:

- Freedom from Local Authority control;
- Greater control over school budgets;
- Access to dedicated capital funding
- Freedom from following the National Curriculum;
- Ability to change length of term and school days;

Why are the Governing Body and Leadership Team of the school considering Academy status?

The Government signaled their desire to see all schools move to academy status in time, to enjoy greater freedom and flexibility in how they can deliver education. Like many other schools both locally and nationally, our school has looked at the benefits and freedoms Academy status can bring and feel it is something we should explore.

Do converting schools need to have a sponsor?

Schools that are performing well such as ours are not required to have a sponsor.

Why are we considering joining The Eden Learning Trust?

Effective collaboration can benefit everyone. Through the sharing of excellent practice, shared resources and training opportunities and future economies of scale we can further improve the provision for our learners.

Which other schools are part of The Eden Learning Trust?

The Eden Learning Trust currently includes the following schools:

- Ferryhill Business and Enterprise College
- Woodham Academy
- Chilton Academy

About The Eden Learning Trust

The Eden Learning Trust is a Multi Academy Trust based in County Durham, currently consisting of two secondary schools and a primary school. Its aim is to provide the strongest possible education opportunities, in an environment where every one of our children really matters. Our banner of 'Achievement for all' is testament to this aim and has supported the founding schools in good stead over the past 5 years.

As a Trust we are defined by our ambition for our students, our warmth and our approachability as well as our drive to help in each other through collaboration and mutual support.

A great trust is about great people and within the Eden Learning Trust our staff are most definitely, our greatest asset. Their skills, unwavering professionalisms and good humour are at the core of what makes education great. We are driven to support our staff in their development, to help them to become great at every part of their role. We believe that a successful staff, make successful learners and a happy and successful school.

Ferryhill Business and Enterprise College (FEBEC) was the founding school within the Trust and is a high performing 11-16 school in County Durham. In the past few years FEBEC has been named as one of the top 100 most improved schools and regularly posts results that are in the top 10% in England. The school is now over-subscribed in Year 7 and regularly has students arriving in other year groups.

Trust CEO

Kevin Brennan is the CEO of the Eden Learning Trust. For the past 5 years he has worked as Headteacher at Ferryhill Business and Enterprise College and has overseen a step change in school performance. His vision was and still is one of partnership, placing value on each person's contribution towards the whole and strong emphasis on mutual respect for students and staff.

How will the Governance Model for the MAT and our School operate?

The Eden Learning Trust has a highly skilled Board of Trustees, approved by the Department for Education. The Board of Trustees delegate decision making for

certain functions to a Local Governing Body for each school. Our school will have a Local Governing Body, largely made up of existing governors. The Local Governing Body will continue to ensure that the needs of each school are monitored closely.

The MAT has a very small group of founding "Members" who are named for legal purposes but don't have a great deal to do with the daily running of the schools. The MAT Board of Trustees has overall responsibility and accountability in law for the performance, site and overall running of the Trust and each of the schools.

What about working with other schools?

Our school already has strong partnerships with other local schools. We are therefore very interested in models that allow us to build on these partnerships through academy status. For this reason, we are seeking to join a multi academy trust.

This will allow us to continue the strong and established partnerships we already have, provide better opportunities for our learners and save money by benefitting from economies of scale. We shall continue to build and strengthen our existing school partnerships with schools outside the proposed MAT.

Does it mean more money?

Academies are funded in a similar way to other schools, however, becoming an academy would open up additional capital funding opportunities for us to explore. Joining a MAT will allow us to achieve savings through the sharing of services and resources across the academies within the MAT. The best value protocols currently in place in our school will be further developed in order to improve the quality of provision at a much more competitive cost.

Will admissions arrangements change?

The Trust/local governing body would be responsible for setting the admissions arrangements for our school. The Local Authority would continue to co-ordinate admissions.

It should be stressed however, that the admissions criteria must have regard to the national Admissions Code of Practice.

When would the school change to become an Academy?

Schools can change to Academy status within 3-4 months of consulting with parents and carers. It is for our Governing Body to decide whether the school should convert to Academy status. If we go ahead, we would aim to become an academy and join The Eden Learning Trust on 1st January 2020.

What does it mean for staff?

All staff would transfer their employment under TUPE legislation from their current employer the local authority, to The Eden Learning Trust. We are also consulting

with our staff and trade unions to seek their views.

How will it affect my child's education?

The conversion to academy status will not mean any changes to your child's education, other than it will allow our school to work in closer partnership with other schools and support the continuous improvement of our offer to students.

What will happen to the uniform?

There will be no changes to uniform

Will the name of the school change?

We do not intend to change the name of our school and we are strongly committed to retaining the identity of our school within the Multi Academy Trust.

Will the times of the school day and holidays change?

We have no plans to change the times of the school day or the terms dates. Any future changes would be subject to extensive consultation with parents and carers.

Are academies still accountable for their performance and are performance targets set?

Like all schools, academies are in the first instance accountable to the learners they serve and their respective parents / carers. Academies still have to meet government performance targets concerning progress of all children across all key stages and will still be inspected by Ofsted. Although Academies can innovate and change the curriculum, they still must ensure students leave having achieved their full potential across a broad and balanced range of subjects.

What services would remain under the control of the Local Authority?

The Local Authority would still have responsibility for a number of services including:

- Home to school transport
- Assessing learners' needs (SEN)
- Coordinating school admissions
- Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)

What are the potential benefits for our school in joining The Eden Learning Trust?

The main benefits of academy status include:

- Ensuring all learners make better than expected progress, raising their aspirations and preparing them to be successful in a modern world.
- Staying in control of our own destiny and preserving the unique identity of our school within the MAT.
- The MAT model provides for a more formalised approach for our schools, with

the opportunity to secure more tangible benefits as a result of being a single employer etc.

- Ability to access capital funding which is only available to academies.
- Removal of the requirement to follow the National Curriculum allows for greater flexibility and creativity when planning the school curriculum.
- In joining a MAT, we are responding to the Government's policy for providing school-to-school support.
- In joining a MAT, we are better able to respond to the budget pressures all schools are facing and will continue to face due to cost pressures exceeding levels of income, by securing economies of scale.
- The opportunity to offer more formalised support to other schools will provide professional development opportunities for staff, which will assist with the retention of high-quality staff and succession planning.
- We will be better able to respond to any future reduction in LA services by developing our own capacity to meet the needs of our learners, or commission our own specialist support services e.g. to support learners with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND).
- We may make a saving on our current insurance costs by joining the Academy Risk Protection Scheme.

What changes will academy status bring?

- Some additional financial and legal responsibilities outlined in the Academies Financial Handbook, which will mainly fall on the Academy Trust Board as the accountable body.
- The Eden Learning Trust would employ our staff.

Have your say

- Complete the response form provided with the consultation letter;
- Attend a drop-in session;
- Wider information on the Academies programme is available on the Department for Education website at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/academy-conversion-process>