

St Margaret's Academy Consultation: Questions and Answers

Draft prepared on: 03/05/2012 16:47

1. What is an Academy?

An academy is a publicly funded state school receiving money directly from the government and free from local authority control. In November 2010, the Secretary of State wrote to schools announcing an expansion of the academy programme and inviting all “good” schools to become academies.

Under academy status there are several differences from our present Voluntary Aided Status.

For example:

- **Governance:** A new charitable trust is established under academy status which has responsibility for the school. This is appointed by the current Governing Body. The governors of the academy are the directors and trustees of the academy trust. The Academy Trust becomes the employer of staff rather than the existing governing body.
- **Land and buildings:** The Academy trustees will take over the management responsibility.
- **Curriculum:** The Academy has to offer “a broad and balanced” curriculum including Maths, English, Science and R.E. However, it does not have to follow the full national curriculum.

2. Why become an Academy?

Academy status will give the school a number of freedoms: the freedom to create new partnerships with other schools, the freedom to set the most appropriate curriculum for students.

Most importantly, the school will receive hitherto retained funding previously held by the local authority (Local Authority Central Spend Equivalent Grant – LACSEG). It is unclear exactly how much this will be, but it is a significant sum (typically in the region of around 10% of the school’s budget – currently in the region of £400,000). In times of tight budgets, this could be essential to maintaining and improving current provision. This increased funding, and the freedom to spend it in the ways we think are helpful, would help us support the education of students.

3. How will it improve education for the children?

Being an academy, as said above, will give us greater finances and greater freedom to spend them in ways which help the students. We are, as you know, ambitious for the school and want to continue

to improve the education service we offer. This extra resourcing will help us give the students the education they deserve.

4. Will the school have a different philosophy and approach to education?

No. Our ethos and values are set out in our mission statement and we do not see the move to academy status as in any way changing these. Academy status for us is about gaining the freedom and extra resources to make our stated aims more achievable – in short, improving the school for the benefit of your children.

5. Will the school ethos and practice change if the school becomes an Academy

The Governing Body wants to maintain its existing ethos as a Church of England School. The distinctive Christian ethos and character of our school is extremely important to us and defines the sort of school we are. There is no intention to do anything to change or undermine this, including no changes to Collective Worship or Religious Studies. The Academy will continue to work closely with the Diocese and parishes in Liverpool. In changing to become an Academy these links will be maintained and further enhanced in order that all our students continue to receive an outstanding education in a place where the distinctly Christian character pervades all that we are.

6. Will the conversion process be expensive?

There are some essential elements that we will have to pay for. However, the government provide all converting schools with a £25,000 grant which should more than cover any necessary expenditure.

7. Will the school continue to buy Local Authority services?

We have a good relationship with the local authority. We welcome the support they have given us over the years and we do not see academy status as an end to this. We would see ourselves as continuing to purchase local authority services. However, the school will now have the freedom to purchase services at “best value” and make our extra funding work in the interests of the students.

8. Does the school need a sponsor?

No. The new style of academy does not need a sponsor.

9. How will the staff be affected?

The teachers and support staff will remain the same. After a due period of time, the governors could look, after due negotiation, to change terms and conditions. However, the Governing Body is satisfied with the work of the staff and has no plans to do this. New staff will continue to join us on the same terms and conditions.

10. Will the admissions process be changed?

No. Children will be admitted to the school in the same way as currently. Next year's intake will be unaffected by any change in status.

11. Does this mean a change to the school name?

The governors do not wish to do this but may incorporate 'Academy' into the title of the school.

12. Will the uniform still be the same?

Yes.

13. Will term dates/times of the day be changed?

The Governing Body have no plans to change either of these. There are currently huge advantages – particularly for parents – in having the same term/holiday arrangements as other schools.

14. Will this affect the relationship between the school and its feeder primary schools?

No. Relationships with our feeder primary schools are excellent.

15. How will the Governing Body change?

The governors will become trustees of the school. They will have greater responsibilities for the school and more accountability than previously. The make-up of the Governing Body can be varied from currently but parents, staff and other stakeholders will all continue to have representation.

16. Will the school be at risk through accident or fire?

The school will continue to have insurance policies to provide cover for these and other eventualities.

17. Can a school convert back to community status?

In theory, yes, but the governors would need to give at least seven year's notice. This would of course depend on whether the existing designation of Voluntary Aided remains an option.

18. Will the school still be inspected?

As with all other state schools, the school will be inspected by OFSTED.

19. Will the curriculum change radically?

We have a very good curriculum which contributes to our success as a school. We have no immediate plans for change but will keep it under continual review (as now!).

20. How will the curriculum cater for students with special educational needs?

The curriculum will continue to cater for students with special educational needs.

21. When will the school convert to academy status?

The plan is to move to academy status for 1 September 2012 or as soon as possible thereafter.

22. Will the school continue to support equal opportunities? The school will continue to support equality for all students and uphold all required statutory regulations.

23. Does the Governing Body have the expertise to support the school?

The Governing Body consists of a group of people with a vast range of professional expertise, including a number with educational backgrounds. Staff will also be represented on the Governing Body. As governors, many have worked with the school over a number of years and have a thorough understanding of school financial, curricular, personnel and resource issues (not to mention familiarity with OFSTED requirements). They are well placed to meet the challenges of Academy leadership. The academy governors or trustees will also have the option to “co-opt” others with areas of specific expertise onto the trust if required.

24. Have the Staff and other stakeholders been consulted?

All stakeholders are in the process of being consulted. Key strategies include;- letters to stakeholders; presentation to Governing Body; meeting with the LA; Diocese and teaching staff; special assemblies; to begin consultation with student body; facility for all stakeholders to respond to consultation on school website. Web-based information provided.

Other planned events: Drop-in sessions for all stakeholders to peak with Governors and Senior Managers; further meetings with staff; further presentation to Governing Body. A Full Governing Body meeting to review the consultation.

25. What system will be put in place to ensure that children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) will continue to receive the best education and receive appropriate assessment and support?

Responsibility for assessment and statementing of individual children still resides with the Local Authority. Statutory obligation for support remains with the schools. The school already receives individual funding for students with statements and this will be employed in the same way as now.

26. How will new members of the Governing Body be appointed?

The new Academy Board will be constituted by the existing Governing body. This means that upon conversion a Trust Body would be set up to run the school without the need for a sponsor. The school's governing body can establish the Academy Trust. In essence, the people involved in the governance, management and leadership of the school will not be very different from as they are now but the new Trust may seek support and guidance from professionals, who it is felt, can add benefit to the work of the school.

27. Will your insurance costs be higher, either in the short or longer term, once you move out of the collective insurance arrangements for the Local Authority family of schools? - No as we do not participate in the LA insurance arrangements. For many years we have arranged our own insurance cover.

28. What contingency plans will need to be put in place to deal with emergencies? - No as we do not participate in the LA insurance arrangements. For many years we have arranged our own insurance cover. I am pleased to note that the Christian ethos and admissions criteria will be maintained.

29. Will the school remain for boys' only, until 6th form? - Yes. The school will remain a 11-16 boys' school with a co-educational Sixth Form. Academy status will not change our admissions policies.