

Frequently Asked Questions

November 2023

This paper sets out a number of frequently asked questions (FAQs) about academy status and being part of a multi-academy trust. It is available on the school and the trust website.

What is an academy?

Academies are classed as independent state-funded schools, which have the freedom to determine their own policies on such things as the curriculum, school hours, term dates and staff pay. They aim to provide a free, first-class education for pupils of all abilities through a fresh approach to school leadership, teaching and learning. They offer a full, broad and balanced curriculum. This is enabled by the Academies Act 2010. Primary, infant, junior, secondary and special schools are all able to apply to convert into an academy and are then accountable to the Secretary of State rather than the Local Authority.

All academies are managed by their own academy trust (a charitable company limited by guarantee) and are not the responsibility of the Local Authority. Academy trusts are given directly the money which would have been given to the Local Authority, so academies can choose how best to spend that money on the provision of education.

What is a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT)?

A multi-academy trust is a single trust which runs more than one school and is the statutory governing body of each of the schools that it runs. The multi-academy trust is a charitable company limited by guarantee, which means it may not make any profit, and because it is publicly funded it is subject to judicial review and to the Freedom of Information Act like any other public body/organisation. The multi-academy trust has a formal agreement (like a contract), with the Department for Education (DfE) which sets out the parameters in which it must operate. It must also abide by charity law, public law (being publicly funded) as well as general company law.

By entering into the Trust, Buswell's Lodge Primary School would retain its individual identity and a local governing board. The local governing board will have delegated authority over most school business from the trust board. In practical terms there will be very little visible change in the way that the school operates. Our values and ethos will also be maintained and our goal will remain to provide the very best education possible for our children. Once Buswell's Lodge is an academy and a member of the trust, it cannot go back to being a local authority school.

What is Attenborough Learning Trust and why become an academy in the trust?

Attenborough Learning Trust is a Multi-Academy Trust formed in 2019 from four Leicester schools with a passion for working in partnership in a spirit of collaboration, openness and trust to achieve the highest standards of academic progress and personal achievement. These are Green Lane Infant School, Highfields Primary School, Sparkenhoe Primary School and Uplands Infant School. Charnwood Primary School joined the trust on 1st April 2023 and Inglehurst Infants joined on 1st July 2023. The Trust's ethos, culture and memorandum of understanding was drawn up collaboratively, with our local schools. The Trust will grow in time, but we are clear that we want to remain local to Leicester, able to help other schools and be a manageable size.

There are clear positive reasons for closer co-operation through:

- improving the education resources and facilities that we offer our children and their families;
- having open and honest challenge to each other that focuses on improving children's outcomes;
- being able to work more effectively and efficiently and buying resources and services more cost effectively;
- sharing responsibility and bringing together our wider skills;
- having the scope to create new career opportunities for our staff where this will enhance teaching and learning in our schools
- working together to better help and support our communities which in turn enhances the educational experience of pupils.

Being an academy gives a school greater freedom over their curriculum, budget and staffing. The multi-academy trust structure also gives us the opportunity to:

- continue and further develop their programme of school improvement.
- build upon and share their successes as schools to help more children.
- further strengthen and improve links with our communities and other local schools.
- use the increased flexibility to benefit all the children and the wider community of Leicester.
- improving the education resources and facilities that they offer our children and their families.
- Maintain strong leadership and governance through collaboration and a high level of delegated authority.
- You can find out more about the Attenborough Learning Trust by visiting their website at www.attenboroughlearningtrust.org.uk

How will the Multi-Academy Trust be governed and managed?

The Multi-Academy Trust has a group of Members and a Board of Trustees.

The "Members" are like shareholders in a commercial company, they appoint the Trustees to run the MAT, and are the only people able to amend the Articles of Association of the Company (and for this they require consent from the Secretary of State).

The "Trustees" are those people who actually run, determine policy, and make decisions for the MAT. They are the statutory governing body of each academy within the MAT. They do this by appointing the right individuals to be the executive leaders for the trust, e.g.; the Chief Executive and Chief Finance Officer for the MAT and delegating the responsibility for the day to day running of the MAT to them.

What are the main responsibilities of the Multi-Academy Trust?

Typical activities include: -

- Setting a strategic direction for improvement of educational progress and attainment.
- Ensuring that the right infrastructure (people & resources, leadership & management) is in place to deliver the necessary changes to support the educational improvement.
- Challenging progress in all areas of the trust and its academies' operations whilst providing support and guidance aimed at promoting success.

- Responsibility for the performance of the academies, including monitoring and where necessary establishing a plan of action to improve performance.
- Setting up committees with a specific focus to monitor aspects of trust and academy life.
- Leading involvement with parents and the wider community, to promote the MAT and support community engagement.
- Ensuring value for money and good use of public funds and leveraging other finance and resources when needed.
- Championing the MAT in the wider community in order to bring new resources to the schools and the trust.

What does the conversion process involve?

The conversion process for schools to become academies has been made as simple as possible for all schools. The key areas of work are related to any legal transfers of land, buildings and assets and establishing appropriate leases, a financial review and budget setting, staff TUPE transfer (whereby all staff transfer in their current roles, automatically with continuity of service, retaining their existing terms and conditions), transferring and establishing contracts for services, and establishing new policies and procedures at the MAT level.

In addition, activities to transition the governance structure from a single school governing body to a multi-academy trust model is also undertaken.

When might the transfer to Attenborough Learning Trust happen?

On average, the conversion process takes approximately six months to complete.

Will the school be changing its name and uniform?

No. The Trust values the individual uniqueness of each school as well as our shared vision and objectives.

What will change after we join ALT?

For pupils, parents and carers, staff and governors day to day, the operation of the school, its leadership and governance will not feel different. When a school becomes an academy, all of the pupils on roll transfer automatically to the academy and so do any applications for places. Parents and carers do not need to do anything differently. Sometimes more opportunities will be on offer, for example schools coming together to organise special activities like residentials and holiday programmes.

Do the schools break all ties with Leicester City Council?

No, the council is still responsible for all sorts of areas of school life, including safeguarding (concerns must still be reported to the local authority), the allocation of school places in the first-year intake for each school and funding for high level special educational needs and disability. More generally, the council is responsible for ensuring that there are enough school places for all of the children in Leicester so, for example, none of our schools could reduce their capacity (the number of pupils they take) unless the council agreed.

The council provides some services to schools, and many of those services are still purchased by ALT where they are the best option.

8. Your questions and views

We want to know your views, and in particular any questions you might have. Please either e-mail

info@attenboroughlearningtrust.org.uk,

office@buswellslodge.leicester.sch.uk

or drop a note into reception at the school, or ask your question at one of the consultation events. If you would like to ask a question or submit your views but are not able to e-mail, access the website, post at reception or attend an event, please let us know by contacting the school.