



Compass Multi-Academy Trust

Frequently Asked Questions

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 (MAT) is a group of academy schools who agree to work together, overseen by an overarching charitable trust.

MATs 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. A target has been set for all schools to become academies by the end of this Parliament, in 2020.

Roughly 68% of secondary schools are now academies and that number is increasing. The focus is now on the academisation of primary schools. Roughly 15% 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 every school will be part of a Multi-Academy Trust.

Why are we considering forming 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 want to secure this partnership and protect our schools going forward.

Rather than join an existing Multi-Academy Trust and potentially losing some of the unique character of our schools, we want to be the leaders in this process by establishing our own MAT. In doing this, we would be able lead the way and retain our schools' individual characteristics, building upon the huge success that we have had.

This is the opportunity to shape, control and future-proof our schools. 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 be a tightening of budgets, and we need to prepare for cuts to school funding. By being in a MAT we can secure greater opportunities for financial savings.

We have learned, through our partnerships, 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, and 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 Multi-Academy 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. We feel passionate about leading this process as a group of schools so that we can determine, as far as possible, what our formation of schools will look like, protecting our unique characteristics, and established vision and ethos.

The fact that we have not considered this up to now is indicative of our belief that times have changed. Three other Greenwich groups are also now consulting on forming Multi-Academy Trusts.

Do staff have a say?

We have met with the staff across our schools to explain why we are consulting on forming a Multi-Academy Trust, as well as to hear their questions about the process and what the implications of MAT 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 schools change?

We want to continue to be great schools where every child is valued. We do not intend to change, except in ways that we think will improve the schools 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.

Would the admissions arrangements change?

As a MAT we would be responsible for our own admissions procedures. We would continue to follow the Admissions Code. If for some reason the MAT wanted to change its admissions arrangements in the future, consultation would be required.

Would the schools have to change their names?

No, schools would retain their names and uniform policies.

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 schools' religious designation?

No this would not change for the schools.

Would the Free School Meals policy and school journey grants 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, we have adapted the National Curriculum to follow our values and approach. Our 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), which would become their new employer. Staff contracts and their terms and conditions would TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006) across from the Local Authority to the Trust.

Would the MAT employ unqualified teachers?

We already employ unqualified teachers across our schools, through the School 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.

If we become a MAT, the funding would come directly to the schools from the Department for Education. The schools in the MAT would be responsible for their own budgets. They would pay a 'top slice' to the MAT to cover shared costs.

Would the schools continue to access services from the Local Authority?

The schools would continue to 'buy in' 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 each school converts to an academy?

The Governing Bodies of each school.

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

Any decision on additional schools joining our group would be made by the Board of Trustees. We would expect other schools to join as time goes on and any school that joins us 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 schools are 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, Dominic Herrington, 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 MAT?

The Board of Directors run the MAT. The current Executive Headteachers and Headteachers would contribute to the leadership of the whole group, under the leadership of the Board of Directors.

Each school 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 would sit above the Local Governing Bodies, essentially functioning as one board of governors overseeing the local boards. They would be the main decision-making group and accountable for all schools within the Trust. The Trust would consist 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 would sit the Members. The Trust would be a registered charity and the Members would sign the Articles of Association turning the group of schools into a charitable trust. Members would function as founders and shareholders of the Trust, but absolutely no financial benefit would be obtained.

The Members would create the charitable trust because they believe in the vision, values, and methods of this enterprise. Members are responsible for the appointment of Trustees, and ensuring the success of the Trust at an annual general meeting.

The agreed governance structure of the MAT would be published at a later stage in the process, should Governing Bodies decide to proceed with conversion to Multi-Academy Trust status.

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

Each school's Governing Body voted individually before Christmas to confirm that we would proceed with consultation on the formation of a MAT.

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 MAT.

At the end of the consultation period, each school's board of governors will analyse the consultation responses and then have a final vote on whether to convert to MAT status. After all schools have voted, we will update you with the result.

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 timescale for conversion?

The entire process from start to finish generally takes 3-5 months, with conversions being official on the 1st of the month. It would be a smooth transition in which children, staff and parents are unlikely to perceive any change, and no disruption to the normal running of the school. If we convert, the date would be determined with the Department for Education and we would let you know when it is confirmed, and keep you updated throughout the process.

