

Consideration of Academy Status : Questions and Answers

Q1 *What is an academy?*

A An academy is a state-funded school, independent of the local authority, that is required to follow the same regulations and serve its community in the same way as other state-funded schools. An academy is established by a formal funding agreement (or contract) agreed between the school's Governing Body and the Department for Education (DfE).

Q2 *What changes will students and parents see if Greenshaw becomes an academy?*

A Very little. The school will continue to be called Greenshaw High School; there will be no changes to the signs or the uniforms; students will be taught in the same classrooms, with the same teachers and support staff, as they would if the school does not become an academy; the ethos and character of the school will remain the same.

Q3 *Would the school change from being a comprehensive school, and would admissions arrangements change?*

A No. Greenshaw will continue to operate as a comprehensive school, providing high quality education for local children of all abilities; at the heart of its local community, working with other schools and community groups.

A Admissions arrangements would not change; the same pupils would come to Greenshaw as would come if it were not an academy. Each academy will manage its own admissions process and must abide by the Admissions Code and participate in the coordination of place planning with the local authority; an academy is not allowed to introduce further selection of pupils, but Greenshaw's existing 60 selective places would continue.

Q4 *Will students with special educational needs be disadvantaged?*

A No. The responsibilities of an academy towards students with special needs would remain the same as for a non-academy school. If Greenshaw becomes an academy its commitment to all students including those with special education needs would continue and it would wish to continue to provide its specialist SEN facilities.

A The process for ensuring provision for students with SEN will essentially be the same as it is now and Greenshaw will continue to work with the local authority, Wandle Valley Special School and The Limes Pupil Referral Unit.

Q5 *So why do it? Why change?*

A Greenshaw is a successful school with a distinct character; however, the environment it works in is changing and budgets will be tighter. The school needs to consider if it would be in a better position to maintain that character and continue to improve the education it can offer by becoming an academy or remaining as a locally maintained school.

A As an academy Greenshaw would have greater freedom to take certain decisions without having to seek approval from the local authority and would have greater control over how the money allocated to it is spent. Specifically, the school would receive an additional grant equal to the sum of money currently 'top sliced' from the education budget by the local authority to provide services to the school, and would have choice over how this money was spent to secure the services the school needs. This additional financial flexibility would help the school to manage its budget, obtain better quality and value services and free up resources to spend on the school's priorities.

Q6 *What advantages are there? What are the risks?*

A There are potentially risks of taking on the greater autonomy associated with academy status. But Greenshaw is a well-run school, with an effective leadership and governing body, that keeps tight control of its finances and has achieved high standards of education; it has had considerable control over its own affairs since the introduction of Local Management of Schools in the 1990s. The same people would continue to be in charge of running the school if it becomes an academy.

Q7 Will the school get more money as an academy? Is it not just a redistribution of money? Will all schools get the same amount of money? And continue to get it?

A The government has said that academies will receive the same level of per-pupil funding as non-academy maintained schools, but will have greater freedom in how their budget is used.

A However, the reality is that all schools, regardless of whether they are academies or not, are facing cuts in funding in the coming years; if Greenshaw becomes an academy, the extra money it would have control over would help to offset this reduction and help to preserve the curriculum and services that Greenshaw provides for its students and safeguard jobs.

A The funding all schools receive for sixth form students next year will decrease, whether the school becomes an academy or not; but Greenshaw has a successful sixth form that has been growing in numbers, and it has a secure future.

Q8 What are the start-up costs? Will the change cost more than the grant?

A There will be some costs in converting to an academy, but these will not be great and will be more than covered by the specific grant the school would get from government.

Q9 What are the services that the school will take on? How will they be provided, what will they cost and will we lose economies of scale?

A These are support services currently provided by the local authority, which the school does not have control over; they include school improvement support, tackling poor attendance and supporting students whose behaviour inhibits their education.

A The school has a range of options to secure these services, as it does with other support services already. If the local authority offers value for money, then the school would continue to purchase the services from them; however, the school would have the choice to provide the services itself by employing its own staff, to work with other schools to provide the service jointly, or to buy the service in from other public, voluntary or private providers.

- For example, when the school took control of its school cleaning, it terminated a service from a private company provided via the local authority and replaced it by a service provided by staff employed by the school, securing an improved service and better value for money.

A Greenshaw and the other secondary schools in Sutton are working together to secure the necessary services and seek economies of scale, and are confident that they can get better value for money for many of them; the schools are also working with the local authority to ensure that there will be no gaps in services.

Q10 If schools become academies, will the local authority be able to continue to function? Would we be taking resources away from primary schools?

A Regardless of how many schools become academies, the local authority will continue to play a part in education locally; it will retain a strategic role, with responsibility for coordinating place planning, providing for students with special needs, and the provision of home to school transport.

A The local authority has assured primary schools that there will not be any diminution of services to primary schools as a result of secondary schools becoming academies.

Q11 Will the school be faced with higher bills for its land and council tax?

A No. If Greenshaw becomes an academy the land and buildings currently used by the school would continue to be available to it and would transfer to the academy trust on 125-year lease at a peppercorn rent.

A As an academy, the school would receive a grant from the DfE to match its actual outgoings on council tax (and VAT), so would not be affected by any changes in the level of council tax.

Q12 How will building work be paid for?

A The local authority will still be responsible for the costs of building maintenance.

A As an academy the school would be eligible to apply for capital grants direct from the DfE, in place of the current DfE grants that are currently channelled through the local authority.

A Greenshaw would continue to fund routine maintenance and decoration from within its own budget as it does now

Q13 What does the partnership with other schools involve?

- A The secondary schools in Sutton have a strong partnership and work together on a wide range of issues to support each other and share experiences and expertise. All the secondary schools in Sutton have said they want to maintain and build on the strong partnership working between schools and facilitate collaboration and joint commissioning of services.
- A Under the proposed partnership between academies, all the schools would be more likely to continue to work with, and purchase services from, the local authority; the local authority has stated that the proposals for secondary schools to become academies in a partnership will see the collaborative approach and the school / local authority relationship maintained.

Q14 Will the school share resources with other schools?

- A Sutton schools already share resources and expertise; for example, Greenshaw supports sports and ICT in primary schools and shares good practice across a range of areas including teaching and learning. If Greenshaw became an academy it would continue to work in the same way.

Q15 What if we did not do it? What if some schools are academies and some are not?

- A The Government says that it wants all schools to become academies; and many other local secondary schools have already decided to become academies or have stated a clear wish to do so. Greenshaw should not become an academy just because others are doing so, but it will be affected by other schools becoming academies.
- A Whether or not they all become academies, all the secondary schools in Sutton have given a commitment to continue to work together; but schools that do not become academies could be left at a disadvantage compared with schools that do, and it will be more difficult for them to play an equal part in the partnership.

Q16 Will academy schools take decisions in an uncoordinated way? Can an academy change its term dates?

- A All secondary schools in Sutton have given a commitment that if they become academies, they will continue to work together, share information and coordinate appropriate decisions and activities.
- A If it became an academy, Greenshaw would be able set its own term dates and length of day without local authority approval; but it would continue to coordinate term dates with other schools and would consult staff and parents before making any changes.

Q17 If the school wants to change the curriculum, how will that be decided?

- A As an academy, Greenshaw would have greater flexibility over the curriculum it teaches, but it would still have to provide a broad and balanced curriculum, and would want a curriculum that gives all students the best start in their lives, and would still be subject to education regulations and Ofsted inspections. Any significant changes would have to be agreed by the Governing Body.

Q18 Are staff jobs at risk? Can an academy employ unqualified teachers?

- A The change to becoming an academy would not mean any current staff losing their jobs or their jobs being 'out-sourced'. All current teachers and non-teaching staff would transfer to the academy under TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment) regulations, on their current pay and conditions.
- A An academy could employ unqualified teachers, in the same way that the school can and does now where that is in the interests of the school and the curriculum.

Q19 How will staff pay and conditions be affected? Will staff contracts change?

- A If a school becomes an academy, then the academy trust becomes the employer of the staff, not the local authority, and the academy trust would determine staff pay and conditions.
- A Greenshaw's governors have given a commitment to maintain the current, nationally agreed pay and conditions for all existing and future staff, including agreements on working hours and pay increments.

- A Staff will not have new contracts – the only variation to their current contracts would be that their employer would become the academy.

Q20 How will staff pensions be affected?

- A Teachers would remain in the Teachers' Pension Scheme and support staff would remain in the Local Government Pension Scheme, as they are now; these bodies will retain responsibility for investment decisions; as far as staff are concerned there will be no changes in how their pensions operate and their entitlements would remain the same; the employer's contributions would be paid into the pension schemes by the academy.

Q21 Who will be responsible for the running the school? Will it turn into a private business?

- A If Greenshaw becomes an academy it would be an autonomous academy, managed by its own Governing Body; it would not be part of a federation or 'super academy'; it would not have a 'sponsor' and there will be no external or private organisation involved in running the school. The assets and finances of the school would be held by an Academy Trust – a non-profit charitable company. General control and management of the school would be the responsibility of the school's Governing Body, in the same way as they are now.
- A The Trust and the Governing Body will be required to act and use the academy's resources in the best interests of the school, and to follow education regulations and the terms of the charities and companies acts; they are not allowed to make a 'profit' or use their resources for other purposes. The new Governing Body and Academy Trust would be set up by the current Governing Body.
- A The school would have to be run in an efficient 'business-like' manner, as it is now – but that does not mean it will operate like a private business.

Q22 How will the role of the school's governors change?

- A The role and responsibilities of the school's governors would be essentially the same as they are now: to manage the finances of the school, ensure the quality of education, and ensure the school follows regulations and legislation. The governing body has to act in the interests of the school; and it should not get involved in the day-to-day management of the school; as with the current governing body, governors would not be personally liable if they act in good faith.
- A The governing body would continue to have 6 parent governors and three staff governors and other governors representing specific stakeholders and the local community, as it does now, and the current governors would continue in their roles.

Q23 How will the decision be taken? Will there be a ballot of staff?

- A Whether or not to apply to become an academy is a decision for the current Governing Body. Governors have to examine the issues in detail and take the decision that they believe is in the best interests of the school. It is not a referendum and it would not be appropriate to ballot staff with a simple yes/no question.
- A Governors want to hear the views of all those involved with the school. All staff, and other stakeholders including parents and students, have been consulted and given every opportunity to make their views known. All views received will be seen by governors, in an anonymised form, before they take their decision.

Q24 If the decision is approved, when will it happen? What if it doesn't work, could we go back? We were told the school has to sign up for 125 years.

- A If the Governing Body takes the decision to apply to become an academy, the school could convert to academy status in June 2011.
- A If the academy trust wishes to withdraw from its agreement with the DfE, or the DfE wants to take the school away from the academy trust, either must give 7 years notice, to allow the orderly transfer and to prevent disruption to students.
- A The school's land is leased to the academy for 125 years, which is normal for leases for land, to give security to the school.
- A Of course, a future government could change the law!