

Academy Frequently Asked Questions

Who is Steel City Schools Partnership? A Sheffield based, Multi-Academy Trust formed on April 1st 2013, initially from a partnership of primary 3 schools. Montenevy is the convertor academy and is a National Support School, led by a National Leader of Education who is also a Lead Ofsted Inspector. Fox Hill and Mansel were the first 2 schools to join the MAT as sponsored academies. All 3 schools are Ofsted "Good". Greenhill and Windmill Hill Primaries both joined SCSP on 1st February 2018 as convertor academies. Woodseats Primary is converting to join SCSP September 2019.

Why join Steel City Schools Partnership? The Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) is wanting MAT's with the capacity and ability to grow. The RSC has asked SCSP to grow due to their effective track record of school improvement, strong leadership, a clear and sustainable growth plan and the support of other partners including local Teaching School Alliances, led by outstanding schools. Steel City Schools Partnership is therefore looking to grow by working with like-minded schools who share a similar educational philosophy, vision for primary education and who want to improve on their previous best. Schools requiring some additional support as well as Good and Outstanding schools are welcome to join SCSP in order to strengthen the Trust and provide highly effective school improvement leading to improvements.

What is a Multi Academy Trust (MAT)? A MAT is the structure that allows more than one academy to work together under an academy trust. It has one overall board of trustees which runs the trust, with each academy having its own local governing body. The MAT gives the chance to share knowledge and teaching and learning between schools. It gives the schools within the trust the opportunity to make collective decisions about contracts with strategic partners thereby releasing more money for teaching and learning.

What is an Academy? An Academy is an independent state school, funded directly from central government rather than through the City Council. A charitable company limited by guarantee (the Academy Trust) is responsible for the academy, and the Academy Trust signs the Funding Agreement (the contract) with the Secretary of State as part of the establishment of the academy. Legislation requires that an academy has the following characteristics: that it offers a balanced and broadly based curriculum; that it provides education for students of different abilities; and that it provides education for students who are wholly or mainly drawn from the area in which the school is situated. Becoming an academy means that we have greater freedom to innovate and raise standards. We have much greater freedom around the delivery of the curriculum, using the budget to work with the best partners available. Each academy would still be subject to Ofsted inspection and the children would still undertake national tests and SATs in the same way as they do now.

Would there be any external sponsors involved, like there are in the 'sponsored' academies? No, Steel City Schools Partnership can sponsor academies but Ofsted "Good" school are choosing to convert to join them.

Is this privatisation? No. The Academy Trust is a charitable trust and is not a profit-making organisation. The only objective of the Trust is to promote education for public benefit.

Would we receive more money as an academy? Academies receive the same level of per-pupil funding as maintained schools receive from the LA, but they also receive an additional amount called the education services grant which is currently retained by the LA to pay for some services which the LA provide. However, out of this money we would have to purchase some services which are currently provided by the LA. The Government states that becoming an academy should not bring about a financial advantage or disadvantage to a school. The main change is that academies have greater freedom over how they use their budgets. As an academy, we would therefore have more freedom to buy the services we need from a range of providers and obtain best value for money and the best quality services for the benefit of the children. SCSP already benefits from better prices with the same contractors we use so we would be able to save money by getting even better deals.

Why should we consider becoming an academy? In addition to the fact that we believe the greater freedoms and flexibilities will enable us to raise educational standards, there are other factors which are pointing towards conversion to an academy. As central services provided by the LA are already considerably reduced and the services which we receive are much more limited than they were a few years ago, all schools are being urged to give serious consideration to pursuing conversion to academy status. The Government's policy is to encourage conversion and they are currently providing funding to assist with the costs of doing so. The governing body therefore feels that we need to engage actively with this issue; if we wait and ignore the changes that are happening around us, we may lose our choices and have a model of academy conversion imposed upon us. Nationally, the majority of secondary schools - 75%+ are now academies and there are already well over 2,800 primary school academies – about 35% of primary schools and this figure is increasing month by month. Sheffield now have all but one of the secondary schools as academies and 51% of primary schools are academies. The RSC has the final say about which schools convert and who they join. It is also very difficult for schools now to convert as a stand-alone academy. More and more are choosing to join a MAT or being "re-brokered" (the process of an academy having to change their academy status or Trust) to a MAT.

How accountable are academies? Academies are subject to inspections by the schools' inspectorate, Ofsted, in the same way as other schools are. SATs and other test results will continue to be published as at present, alongside those of other state schools in league tables. In January 2017 the first performance tables for Multi Academy trusts were published and Steel City Schools Partnership was among one of the better performing local

MATs in this table, this improved in the January 2018 tables. Academies are accountable directly to the Secretary of State for Education and the Education and Standards Funding Agency (ESFA) with regard financial accountability, so they are financially accountable.

Would conversion to academy status affect our admissions policy? Academies are subject to the same admissions code as other state schools. This sets the rules for fair admissions. Steel City Schools Partnership adheres to the authority admissions and uses the local authority team to administer the process as we do now. We would continue to be able to represent ourselves at appeals as we do now.

Would there be changes to the number of pupils admitted into reception each year? No. The admissions process and criteria will stay the same and be managed by the local authority as it is at present. SCSP follows the Sheffield admissions policy.

Will the admissions policy change to favour children from the other SCSP school catchment areas as well as ours? No

What about the way in which the school is governed? Would that change? The Trust has a small number of Members (similar to the role of shareholders) who have a substantial interest in and knowledge of the school and its local community. In addition there is a Board of Trustees who is a group made up of people with specific skills and competencies to provide the overall strategic direction of the MAT. Each academy in the MAT then has a Local Governing Body to oversee the day to day running of the school in the same way as they do now. The focus of this Governing Body is primarily around the Outcomes for Pupils, the Curriculum and ensuring the quality of Teaching and Learning.

Would staff remain the same after conversion? All current school staff would transfer to employment with the Multi Academy Trust (MAT) on academy conversion and there are no plans by the MAT to change the staffing structure. The Trust and governing body is committed to continuing to recruit and retain high quality staff and will support existing staff through the transition and beyond if the school does convert to academy status.

Would staff pay and conditions change? When a school converts to academy status, members of staff transfer to the academy trust with their existing employment terms and conditions under the TUPE (transfer under protection of employment) regulations which means that their terms and conditions of employment and pension arrangements, including continuity of service, are protected on conversion. When Steel City Schools Partnership became a MAT, a commitment was made that staff terms and conditions would be no less favourable than they would be if staff were employed by the Local Authority and this assurance remains for all the schools in the MAT.

What does the process of converting to academy status entail? Initially, schools register their interest in becoming an academy online with the DfE. A school then completes

and submits an application to become an academy to the DfE. Whilst not necessary SCSP encourages any school considering joining SCSP to consult with parents, staff and all other stakeholders before a funding agreement is entered into between the academy trust and the Secretary of State for Education. When the Secretary of State for Education approves the school's application to convert, they issue an academy order. The MAT also employs the staff and owns the assets of the schools in the MAT and will enter into arrangements to enable it to occupy the school sites after academy conversion. The final stage is the signing of the funding agreements with the Secretary of State for Education.

Do schools have to cover the costs of conversion to academy status? No. The DfE pays a flat-rate grant of £25,000 into the Trust bank account after an application has been approved and academy order has been issued. This grant is provided for the detailed exploration of academy status and, if the school decides to proceed, the implementation costs. There are costs relating to the legal conversion (i.e. setting up the Trust, preparing the lease and Funding Agreement, and the TUPE process) and other 'one-off' costs relating to preparing each academy for successful operation. All work to convert will be led by SCSP staff, thus enabling the school leaders to focus on ensuring the quality of teaching and learning is the best it can be.

What else would not change? There will be very little that obviously changes in the day to day running of our school. Keeping all that is special about the school whilst allowing them to continue to grow and develop is one of the drivers for academy conversion. Academies are required to follow the law and guidance on admissions, special educational needs and exclusions, as in maintained schools. Academies have to ensure that the school will be at the heart of its community, collaborating and sharing facilities and expertise with other schools and the wider community.

What services would remain with the local authority? The following duties remain with the local authority and do not become our responsibility:

- education psychology, Educational Health Care Plans and assessment,
- assigning SEN resources for pupils who require high levels of additional resource (this is a top-up to formula funding under a separate contract with the local authority),
- monitoring of SEN provision and parent partnerships,
- prosecuting parents for non-attendance,
- provision of pupil referral units for a pupil no longer registered at an academy.

What are the safeguards for vulnerable students? Under the terms of the Funding Agreement (which is the contract between the Multi Academy Trust and the Secretary of State), an academy has to act in exactly the same way as a maintained school in relation to Special Education Needs, behaviour, and exclusions.

What about the insurance costs an academy would incur to cover the significant risks posed by potential emergencies such as fire, flood, pupil accidents, major

crimes etc.? All academies are required to take out a wide range of insurances, often to levels specified by the DfE.

Would the school day, holidays and school year change? No.

Would the school name or logo change? No. We would simply become part of Steel City Schools Partnership, a Multi Academy Trust. If you look at the Fox Hill, Greenhill, Montenev, Mansel and Windmill Hill websites you will see how they have retained their individuality.

Would the school uniform change? No. There is no plan to change the school uniform.

Will leadership, teachers or staff change? Not as a result of academisation. Any recruitment to roles would happen as they do now based on the needs of pupils, staff who choose to leave and the budget available.

Will class sizes change? No, each school has an IAN (Indicative Admissions Number). This will not change and therefore class sizes are not expected to change. Any changes would only happen as a result of local population growth or reduction.

In any agreement set up - is there a guarantee that the Steel City Schools Partnership will not sell off land / buildings? There is no plan by SCSP to sell off land or buildings as part of any land transfer. There is very detailed legal work undertaken as part of the transfer process and this would be part of any agreement prior to conversion.

What capital investment / building improvements will be put into the school? As a Multi Academy Trust, SCSP will be eligible to apply for capital funding through the Conditions Improvement Fund (CIF). Funds are allocated based on clear criteria. Once the Trust reaches a certain size, then there would be automatic funding delegated to the trust to enable capital investment and repairs. These would be based on the annual conditions survey that the Trust will undertake.

Other schools in the SCSP have dropped the 'school' element from the title and some of the leaders are called Principal - if this happens to us will we then require new uniform / book bags etc? There is no plan to drop the school name unless you choose to do this. There is no plan to change the uniform either. School leaders are also free to choose the title they wish such as Principal, Head teacher, Head of School etc.

Shared services are mentioned to cut costs - so if this is the case will we see our children having to go to the other schools to access extra curriculum activities that we may have normally had at school? Shared service costs are more specifically related to operational / premises activities such as procured services like HR, payroll, legal, IT service contracts, waste management, purchasing of school resources, energy, grounds maintenance and other premises services. Curriculum resources and activities, including

extra curriculum opportunities can be enhanced by offering a wider choice across the Trust, however there is no plan to move these to one base. Schools will continue to offer the extra curriculum opportunities they currently do.

When will we become an academy? This very much depends on the length of the consultation, the due diligence work that Steel City Schools Partnership will do as well as the due diligence of the Governing Body, the timescales of other partners such as the legal representatives, the trade unions and Human Resource providers and any possible land issues. Usually the process of conversion can take up to 6 months from the academy order being received. A school will always convert on the 1st day of a month.

We have loads of information on why it is so good for us a school to join - but what is in it for the Steel City Schools Partnership in adding our school to their portfolio of schools? SCSP are being encouraged by the RSC to grow and are keen that this happens with like-minded schools. Given the school to school support work that is already underway with our school and further work planned, this will support the improvements at our school and the growth plans for SCSP. SCSP are keen that they work collaboratively with other schools and recognise that they can learn from the work of other schools too. By joining SCSP we will be supported to improve and be able offer support to other schools across the Trust. This clearly fits with the governments agenda to have a school led school improvement system.

Where can I get further information? The Department for Education website has information about academies, including an extensive set of themed questions and answers: www.education.gov.uk/academies. SCSP also has their own website www.steel-city-schools-partnership.org where more information can be found about the MAT.