

Converting to academy status and joining the Grand Union Partnership *Frequently Asked Questions*

1. What is an Academy?

An Academy is a state school that is run by an Academy Trust. The Academy Trust enters into an agreement with the Secretary of State for Education that sets out its responsibilities and accountabilities for the effective running of the Academy. The Academy is funded directly by the Government, not through the Local Authority.

2. What is a Multi-Academy Trust?

A Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) is formed when 2 or more Academies come together in partnership. Within a multi-academy trust all schools are ultimately governed by a Trust Board (made up of Trustees) who have responsibility and accountability for the performance of each school in the Trust with respect to both the quality of education delivered and school finances. Each school has a Local Academy Committee (made up of Local Governors), the Trust Board decide what responsibilities they want to delegate to this local level within a scheme of delegation. This key document is reviewed each year.

3. How can I find out more about the Grand Union Partnership?

The Grand Union Partnership (GUP) website is a good place to start. We would encourage you to have a look to find out more about their vision, mission, ethos, values, the team, the role of governance and their Board of Trustees, etc using this link:

<https://www.grandunionpartnership.org/about>

4. What typically happens prior to a school joining a Trust?

Once Governors decide upon their proposed decision they then move into a period of consultation (typically running for 4-6 weeks). The consultation provides an opportunity for Governors to explore the views of parents, staff, the local community and other stakeholders of the school prior to Governors at the school (and Trustees at the GUP) making a final decision with respect to Academy Conversion. Once the Governing Body makes an initial application, they will contact the Regional Director's Office and this decision will be reviewed at a meeting of the Regional Director's Advisory Board which meets each month. This Board reviews how Governors have arrived at the decision and makes a judgement about the MAT's capacity to support the school as it joins the Trust.

5. Would there be any changes to the admissions policy/criteria?

No, there will be no changes to Cedars Primary School's admissions policy or criteria. The Local Authority would continue to oversee the admissions process.

6. Would the term and holiday dates or the timings of the school day change?

Academies, free schools and voluntary-aided schools are able to set their own term dates but are asked to set the same or similar dates in the interest of parents who may have children at different schools. The GUP calendar has always been very much in line with local schools and

other schools in the Grand Union Partnership, and this will continue. A shared calendar allows schools to plan some elements of shared training and development across the five teacher training days each year.

7. How will being an Academy affect staff?

If Cedars Primary School does become an Academy, all staff would transfer to the Grand Union Partnership with their current pay and conditions. All new staff would be employed under current national pay and conditions agreements. A strict TUPE arrangement would be followed.

Currently, the employer for staff is Milton Keynes City Council. After conversion all staff at the school would be employed by the Grand Union Partnership. Staff are legally protected to transfer under the same employment terms and conditions, including pensions. Their continuity of service is protected, and all staff will be consulted in accordance with the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations.

8. What is a TUPE transfer?

TUPE regulations protect your rights as an employee when you transfer to a new employer. TUPE stands for Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment).

A 'TUPE transfer' happens when:

- an organisation, or part of it, is transferred from one employer to another
- a service is transferred to a new provider, for example when another company takes over the contract for office cleaning

You may be affected by a TUPE transfer if:

- you're transferring from your current employer to a new employer
- other employees are transferring to a new employer, but you stay employed with your current employer and do not transfer
- other employees have been transferred to the organisation you work for

9. Who will be responsible for running our school?

The Governors, Headteacher and senior management team at Cedars Primary School, will stay in place and will still be responsible for running the school. The existing Governors will become Local Governors who are members of a Local Academy Committee. Local Governors will be accountable to the Grand Union Partnership's Trust Board.

10. How does a conversion impact upon Ofsted?

Under the Academies Act 2010, schools may apply to the Secretary of State to convert to academy status. Such schools are known as academy converters.

Upon conversion to academy status the existing school closes and a new school opens in its place. Although little may have changed, the academy converter is a new legal entity.

However, the most recent inspection judgements of the predecessor school are taken into account by Ofsted for the purpose of scheduling the first inspection of the new academy converter. Academy Converter schools aren't typically inspected in the first year that they join a MAT.

11. What is involved in becoming an Academy?

Governors typically explore the pros and cons of joining a MAT and will then meet with representatives from a number of trusts to understand which MAT is likely to be the best fit for the school. Once Governors have made an initial proposal and Trustees at the relevant MAT have made a similar proposal, the school will submit an initial application to the DfE's Regional Director. The Regional Director's Advisory Board (that meets most months) will then review the initial application and decide whether to approve it. Once the initial application is made school

governors will run a period of consultation to engage the local community regarding the decision. Should the Advisory Board approve the decision and Governors and Trustees still wish to progress to the next stage there is typically a 6-month period (to support legal and funding arrangements to be established) prior to a school formally converting to be an academy and join the MAT. The government provide a grant of £25,000 to cover any legal costs incurred.

12. Would the school have to change its name, logo or uniform if it joining the GUP?

No, there would be no change to the name, logo or uniform for Cedars Primary School unless the governors wanted to use it as an opportunity to re-brand itself, and this is not the case. The Trust Board of the GUP are committed to each school retaining its individual identity.

13. How are the children affected?

The children would not notice any immediate difference; they will be in the same uniform, in the same classrooms with the same teaching staff. However, in time, the children may notice changes and improvements in the way that they learn which will flow from greater training opportunities for staff and wider learning opportunities for children in such areas as Science, DT, French, Music and Sport.

14. Would we get more money as an Academy?

Academies receive the same amount of per-pupil funding as they would receive from the Local Authority as a maintained school. All funding comes direct from Government to the Multi Academy Trust which controls the overall budget. Each school does not necessarily have more money, but as a group the schools are better able to control their part of the budget and seek economies of scale.

15. Would you be introducing any new charges?

No. There is no intention to charge in the future for anything that is currently free.

16. How would the money raised by the Parents/ fundraising be used?

Each school in the Trust continues to have its own independent mechanism for fundraising. The money raised by each school's fundraising efforts will only be used for its own school and will continue to be independent of the school, raising money for agreed resources or projects that have been asked for by the school's leadership.

17. How would admissions to the school be affected?

The Local Authority will continue to have responsibility for making sure there are sufficient places locally and will coordinate the admissions process for all schools. This means parents will still only have to complete one application per child. Applications will still be via the coordinated process.

18. Does becoming an Academy change the relationship with other schools and the community?

No, each school in the GUP is committed to being at the heart of the community it serves, a local school for local children. We continue to collaborate and share expertise with other schools outside of the proposed MAT and the wider community.

19. Would there be more exclusions as an Academy?

No. Academies must follow the exact same government guidance and law on suspending or excluding pupils. This includes reporting exclusions to the Local Authority.

20. Would the Curriculum change?

The school currently teaches to the National Curriculum and we already have the power to change this if we wish. Our main consideration is to continue with a broad and balanced curriculum that helps us to instil in children a lifelong love of learning.

21. Would our responsibilities in relation to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and exclusions change?

No, responsibilities as an Academy in relation to SEND and exclusions will be just the same as they are now.

22. What is a Regional Director (RD)?

The responsibilities of the Regional Director include monitoring the performance of Academies and intervening where underperformance is found; making strategic decisions on the creation of MATs and granting academy orders; ensuring there are enough academy sponsors to meet local demand.

Questions raised at previous Staff Consultation Events

23. Would the Trade Unions that are currently recognised by Cedars Primary School continue to be if the school were to join the Grand Union Partnership MAT?

Yes- the MAT would continue to involve all Trade Unions that the school recognises.

24. Would there be any plans to make changes to the staffing structure should the proposal move forward?

No- there would be no plans to amend the staffing structure without going through the usual processes to do this.

25. Would there be plans to amend any contractual obligations that the school has, for example in relation to non-teaching staff contracts linked to cleaning staff or catering?

No- there would be no plans to make any immediate changes. When contracts are up for renewal then each school will follow a review process, that seeks to promote the efficient use of resources and deliver value for money.

26. How would arrangements for training days be different? What would the balance between school level and trust level training typically look like?

The majority of training days are typically school focused, though once a year a whole Trust half day event is often planned. There may also be some cross Trust training that takes place on shared training days that focus on specific themes that are shared by some or all of the schools in the Trust e.g., safeguarding, phonics, etc.

27. Would the school joining the Grand Union Partnership have any impact on the PTA, for example, could funds raised for Cedars be re-directed to another school?

No - joining the Grand Union Partnership would have no impact on how the PTA at Cedars operates and all funding raised by the community would be used within that same community.

28. Would there be any changes to staff contracts should the school join the Grand Union Partnership?

Legally no change to contracts can be made within a two-year period after joining any MAT. Historically the Grand Union Partnership has not made any changes to contracts at any of the schools who have joined the MAT.

29. Does the Grand Union Partnership recognise national pay scales for teachers and national joint council pay scales for support staff?

Yes, in addition the MAT also adopts the Burgundy Book for Teachers and Green Book for support staff when it comes to wider contractual conditions.

30. Does the Grand Union Partnership have a history of moving staff between schools?

Whilst a small number of staff have moved between schools in the MAT, in each case this has been a decision that individual staff have made, there have been no forced moves.

31. If the school were to join the Grand Union Partnership would this have any implications for staff pensions?

There would be no impact on pensions, employer and employee contributions would go unchanged. Admitted body status (ABS) provisions were extended in the LGPS in 1999 to allow contractors, who take on local authority services or functions with any specific groups of transferring employees, to offer the transferring staff continued eligibility for the LGPS during the contract. Hence there would be no changes to pension arrangements.

32. Would there be pressure from the Grand Union Partnership for the school to adopt the same curriculum schemes that other schools in the MAT use (e.g. Read Write Inc, Power Maths, etc)?

No- the Grand Union Partnership does not prescribe the use of specific schemes. There are underpinning principles that the MAT looks for in relation to the curriculum that a school adopts, for example, there is an expectation that there are clear year group milestones for knowledge and skills linked to each subject and that between year group the progression in the targeted knowledge and skills is evident.

33. How can I find out more?

The best source of information on academies is the Government's website:
<https://www.gov.uk/become-an-academy-information-for-schools> .

You can access further information about The Grand Union Partnership at
www.grandunionpartnership.org

Questions raised at Parent and Wider Community Consultation Events

34. Would children move between the schools in the MAT?

No- The MAT would not move a child's enrolment between the schools in the Grand Union Partnership unless this was agreed through a managed move process.

35. Cedars Primary School offers a broad curriculum and supports the wider development of children, would joining the MAT support this being maintained?

Schools in the Grand Union Partnership have autonomy to design their own curriculum, as long as it delivers the overall curriculum principles that the GUP champion. One of these principles relates to having a broad curriculum that supports the wider development of each child.

36. Would moving to the MAT have any significant impact for the on-site Nursery?

No- there will be no significant impact for the Nursery.

37. Would there be any significant changes with respect to how the school would approach the education of SEND children?

There would be no changes, other than that the team at Cedars would be able to draw upon the wider expertise in relation to SEND provision that exists across the schools in the MAT and the Department based at New Bradwell School.

38. Does the Grand Union Partnership have any plans for other schools to join the MAT in the current year?

We are having conversations with a number of different local schools, Cedars Primary School have recently received an Academy Order and are consulting to join the Grand Union Partnership by January 2025. The goal is to be a trust of 2,500 children. Once the GUP reaches 2,500 children, we will need to take stock and trustees and local governors will explore what will be prioritised in the next phase of the Trust's development.

39. Is the Grand Union Partnership run on a not-for profit basis?

The Grand Union Partnership is a charity and so runs on a not-for profit basis.

40. Would the school be able to keep the 95% of the income that it receives and make decisions about how this money is spent?

Absolutely, the Headteacher would work with the School Business Manager to develop an annual budget for how 95% of the income will be spent each year. Governors at Cedars would review the budget which would ultimately be signed off by the Trust Board.

41. Why is it that schools are generally looking to join MATs?

There are number of factors that are encouraging schools to consider joining a MAT that include:

- Statements from the current government over the last few years that have outlined their desire that all schools join a MAT in the longer term. They have also employed a previous MAT leader to the role of Chief Inspector at Ofsted.
- Tightening Local Authority budgets have often (though not always) seen a reduction in the breadth of services that schools can access through their Local Authority. Many would see this as a trend that won't be reversed.
- When a school is able to work in partnership with a MAT for a reasonable length of time the benefits that joining that MAT are actually experienced enabling leaders, governors and staff to get a tangible sense of what a MAT offers beyond accessing LA resources.

42. Would the length of the school year and term dates be impacted by joining the Grand Union Partnership?

There would be little impact. Schools in the Grand Union Partnership follow the terms dates set by the relevant Local Authority to try to minimise holiday clashes for families. The MAT does try to have consistent training days for staff in order to enable cross Trust training opportunities.

43. Would the school still be inspected by Ofsted should it join the Grand Union Partnership?

Yes- all schools within the MAT are in scope for Ofsted inspection.

44. Would the clubs be impacted by the school joining the MAT?

No- decisions linked to clubs will be driven by school leaders.

45. Would the school joining the Grand Union Partnership have an impact on how the school approaches assessment?

Schools in the trust share an assessment calendar for in-year assessment points linked to reading, writing and maths. Children across the MAT complete the same assessments at these points to support moderation activities across the Trust.

46. Would the school still be able to access Local Authority Specialist Services or advice once it becomes part of the Grand Union Partnership?

Yes- all of the schools in the MAT can choose to buy in specific LA services, should they choose to.

47. Would the library be impacted by the school joining the MAT?

No.

48. Would there be an option to review the decision to join the Grand Union Partnership further down the line and leave the MAT?

No – However the decision to join the Grand Union Partnership would only be subject to review if there was a negative Ofsted outcome for the school.

49. Who holds a Multi Academy Trust to account?

At the moment the Regional Director holds MATs to account in that they will only support the growth of a MAT if they are happy with how they are performing. Currently Ofsted inspect individual schools/ academies, not central MATs, though we think it is highly likely that in time MATs will be inspected.

50. What are the potential disadvantages of joining a MAT?

In many cases schools make the decision to join a MAT based on information that has been presented to them and potentially quite limited practical experience of working with the MAT. When this is the case there is the potential for a disconnect between the information that the MAT presents about its culture and processes and what the school actually experiences. Since Cedars has been working with the Grand Union Partnership for a significant period of time governors, school leaders and staff are able to draw upon their actual experiences, not just information about the MAT that has been presented to them. They have been able to view for themselves the support that schools in the MAT have been accessing. Hence, the disadvantages that are potentially there have been minimised because of the length of time that the school has been able to see how the Grand Union Partnership actually operates.

5% Contribution – the offer

Online systems

- Arbor (Student Info System)
- SAGE (Finance)
- MyConcern (Safeguarding)
- Edukey (SEND)
- MyHealthAdvantage (Employee Assistance)
- MyNewTerm (Recruitment)
- Payroll and Pensions (Strictly Ed)
- Governor Hub and NGA training modules

Externally sourced Expertise

- Internal and External Audit
- External Curriculum Reviews
- Leadership Development
- Professional governance support and advice
- HR and Legal support and advice
- Staff recruitment
- Actuarial Reports

Sector memberships

- National Governance Association (NGA)
- Confederation of School Trusts (CST)

Internal Services

- Cross Trust CPD and networks (Heads, DSLs, SENCOs, Subject Leads, Facilities, Admin)
- School improvement and wider general support from CEO/HOD
- Shared curriculum principles and school improvement cycle
- Internal benchmarking
- Policy Development
- Budgeting and forecasting support from CFO
- Support for Capacity Improvement Funding (CIF) bids and project management
- Centrally funded property facilities projects