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Converting to an Academy - FAQs

WHY ARE WE LOOKING AT BECOMING AN ACADEMY?

- 1. What is an academy?** Academy schools are state funded schools in England, which are directly funded by central government (specifically, the Department for Education) and independent of direct funding and control by the local authority.
- 2. Are all academies the same?** No. There are many different types of academy. For example, some schools have become academies independently; others have joined together with other schools to form a multi academy trust (MAT) whilst others have joined larger groups and organisations, often known as academy chains. Different academies have a variety of school improvement and governance arrangements.
- 3. Why are we considering converting to an academy now?** The current educational climate is changing and many schools nationally are choosing to take advantage of academy status. Many schools wish to make the move now to determine their own destiny and to make the changes when it is right for their own school.

We have been in discussion with Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust about joining them and governors feel that now is the right time to take this forward.

- 4. What is Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust?** The trust was established in June 2017, with four schools joining initially: Poulton Lancelyn Primary School, Egremont Primary School, Stanton Road Primary School and Great Meols Primary School; Church Drive Primary School joined later in 2019; and Brackenwood Junior School joined in 2021. The most recent school to join the trust is Greasby Junior School, which converted on 1st January 2023, bringing the total number of schools in the trust to seven. The trust was set up to enhance the good working relationships and practices built up over a number of years between the schools; all current schools were judged at least to be 'good' in terms of OFSTED category. All schools who joined the trust at the outset had equal rights, and a large amount of due diligence was carried out in order to ensure that this 'equal footing' was appropriate to the founding schools.

Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust's mission and values are:

Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust mission:
'Achieving Excellence Together'



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Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust values:

- ▶ Respect - our trust is built on strong relationships and we work together for the good of our children and families.
- ▶ Collaboration - this is at the heart of what we do. Our teams work together on a range of tasks and areas, and there is always someone to help.
- ▶ Inspiration - our schools work together to inspire our staff and our children. We work with national trainers and inspirational trust leaders for the good of our schools.

You can find out more about the Oak Trees MAT at www.oaktreesmat.co.uk.

5. **Are any other schools in our local area academies?** Yes, there are a number of academies in our region; however, all academies are different in the same way that every school is different.

Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust currently has seven member schools:

Poulton Lancelyn Primary School (Bebington, Wirral); Church Drive Primary School (Bebington, Wirral); Egremont Primary School (Egremont, Wirral); Brackenwood Junior School (Bebington, Wirral); Stanton Road Primary School (Bebington, Wirral); Great Meols Primary School (Meols, Wirral) and Greasby Junior School (Greasby, Wirral).

6. **What are the advantages of becoming an academy?** In addition to the advantages mentioned above, as governors and headteacher of Irby Primary School, we believe that the opportunity to work together with new partners and schools to ensure standards across the trust are consistently high, is an exciting new proposition. We will, however, continue to actively work with all local schools and current partners, ensuring the best of both worlds. The trust has made it clear that academy status will not change the things that work so well for our school.
7. **What are the disadvantages of becoming an academy?** As an academy, there are a number of additional responsibilities placed on the school in terms of financial management and reporting. It is expected that, on a day-to-day basis, the pupils and their parents and carers, teachers and staff will not notice the difference when we become an academy. There will also be additional work for members of staff in the school office. Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust recognises these additional pressures and will provide the school with a significant amount of support from specialists who will be able to pick up the majority of this additional work.

WHAT DAY-TO-DAY CHANGES WILL HAPPEN?

8. **Will a move to academy status mean a new name for the school?** No. The school will continue to be called Irby Primary School. Other schools that have chosen to become academies with Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust have also retained their existing names.
9. **Would becoming an academy mean a new uniform?** No. Parents will not need to buy a new uniform.



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10. **Will the school still be open to the community if it becomes an academy?** Yes. There will be no change to the current provision and use of the school by different groups to hold events.
11. **What will be the impact on our children with special needs?** There will be no change to the level of support provided. Irby Primary School will continue to recognise that every child is different and has the right to be included as a valued, respected and equal member of the school community.
12. **Will the school hours be any different as an academy?** Although it is highly unlikely that the school day will be changed, Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust Board does have the power to make changes. This decision is usually delegated to the local governing body of an academy, however, so there is no real change from our authority in this regard. As is the case now, parents would be consulted prior to any change in school hours, although no change is envisaged.
13. **Will pupils' education be disrupted by a transition to academy status?** No. When an academy is approved to go ahead, it will do so with minimal disruption to the staff and students. Most of the changes will take place behind the scenes, with support from a dedicated team from the trust who have gone through this process before with other schools.
14. **If we move to being an academy, will this change what is taught?** We would be expected to continue to offer the full range of National Curriculum subjects. OFSTED continues to inspect academies and their handbook for inspection is the same one as used in any other school. The academy would be expected to strive to be outstanding under the statutory OFSTED ratings (section 5). In other words, there may be no change in what or how pupils are taught.

WHAT WILL THIS MEAN FOR OUR SCHOOL FINANCES?

15. **How is an academy funded?** In maintained schools, all revenue funding (building funding is slightly different) goes directly to the local authority (LA). The LA takes a proportion of the money from the school budget to provide essential services to the school and the rest is delegated under the local management of schools. Schools can, and do, buy additional services from the LA and other providers. As a result, schools currently depend upon the LA for many services such as school improvement, HR, finance, etc. This has led to a dual system where the LA has taken the lead on school effectiveness whilst the local governing body has focused on the distinctive and inclusive characteristics of the school.

Academies will receive the same level of per-pupil funding as maintained schools, plus funding to meet additional responsibilities that are no longer provided for them by the Local Authority (LA). With Oak Trees MAT, the money that would have been provided to the LA to run the school is provided directly to the school when it becomes an academy. Oak Trees MAT does take a proportion of the budget in order to provide trust services to the academy. Local authorities fund their core services in a similar way.



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16. Does this improve on current funding arrangements? Converting to an academy will not be to our detriment financially. There may be the potential for some financial gain; however, any decision taken is not motivated by money. Funding is available to cover the costs of the conversion process itself, which is provided by central government once the decision to convert has been approved. We will also have opportunities to support other schools and to benefit financially from doing so. In addition, the MAT board has access to capacity funding from the Department for Education as well as opportunities to bid for capital funding on an annual basis.

WHAT WILL THIS MEAN FOR TEACHERS AND STAFF?

17. What are the terms and conditions for staff? On conversion to academy status, teachers and staff employed by Wirral Council will transfer with the same terms and conditions, via a formal TUPE (transfer of undertakings protection of employment) process. In addition, conversion will not affect any union memberships.

18. Who will employ teachers and staff following conversion? At present, Irby Primary School teachers and staff are employed by Wirral Council. Following conversion, teachers and staff will be employed directly by Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust.

19. Will Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust employ non-qualified teachers? All class groups of pupils will be registered to a qualified teacher, as is the case in schools currently.

WHAT WILL THIS MEAN FOR STANDARDS?

20. Does Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust have the capacity to support our educational standards? Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust has established its own school improvement capacity for those schools choosing to become an academy. The trust has a school improvement lead and regularly uses education consultants.

Collectively, the team is experienced and qualified to support and challenge schools in data analysis, teaching, behaviour, safeguarding, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, special educational needs and disabilities, and leadership and management. The school improvement package will include support and challenge for governance and the team is able to draw on further support from national leaders in governance as appropriate.

21. How will an academy raise achievement? The whole structure of Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust has been designed to challenge and support schools in equal measure. We would receive a number of days of school improvement support from the school improvement lead, irrespective of whether the school is outstanding or inadequate.

Irby Primary School

Inspiring Pupils Successfully



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These visits are not inspections but an opportunity for senior leaders to benchmark their judgments through shared lesson observation, work scrutiny, analysis of data, supported self-evaluation and school improvement planning. Indeed, the outcome of these visits will confirm the development of the school.

Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust will intervene rapidly in schools that are underperforming or on a downward trajectory based on OFSTED criteria.