



How to describe Academies

Academies Communications Toolkit



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What are Academies?

Academies are a different kind of free state school. They've been introduced to rapidly accelerate levels of excellence and attainment.

They have more freedom than other state schools to make decisions about how they operate and deliver education. This allows them to raise standards in the ways they think are best for their children and their area. Unlike other state schools, they also all have at least one Academy sponsor – a person, charity or business from outside education, or a successful school, college or university.

Academies explained...

Academies are a different kind of free state school. They can either be built as a completely new school, in areas where extra school places are needed – or they can replace schools where exam results have dropped to unacceptably low levels.

To combat cultures of low aspiration and achievement, they were given more freedoms than existing state schools. This allowed them to quickly bring into being an atmosphere where success is expected and celebrated. These freedoms allow them to make changes in the way a school day happens, and also in the way that subjects are taught. It's not unusual for Academies to start early in the morning, for their lesson times to be longer – or for them to stay open until late evening to provide a wide range of extra-curricular clubs and activities.

Academies teach a broad and balanced curriculum which must include English, maths and science. In addition, every Academy specialises in one subject area, for example, languages, sport, the environment, science, arts and drama, communications, business or technology, and will dedicate extra time and resources to their special subject.

Academies explained... (cont.)

Academies are for children of all abilities, and because they are free to structure teaching in the way they think is best for each child, both bright and less academic children flourish.

Another special feature of Academies is that every school has at least one Academy sponsor. An Academy sponsor can be a person, group or organisation that dedicates time, money and energy to setting up and managing an Academy. Academy sponsors can be individuals with strong links to the town or city where the Academy is being set up – like business people. Or they can be companies, charities, universities or education groups.

The sponsor sets up an endowment fund for the school. This is a sum of money – generally up to £2m. It generates interest that can be used to pay for extra-curricular activities. Apart from that, Academies are completely funded by the Government. The Academy sponsor's biggest contribution is to bring a fresh way of thinking about the way things are done in schools.

The success of the Academies programme has meant that a number of former private schools, and successful state maintained schools have also now decided to become Academies, often taking over the running of a failing state school in the process. The Academies programme allows them to push their excellent levels of achievement even higher – and to offer their high standards to many more children.

Because many Academies replaced schools that had been struggling and failing for years, it will in some cases take more than a year or two for results to really turn around. However, Academies are already improving at a faster rate than other kinds of schools in England – and the future looks very promising indeed.

FAQs

Do Academies just select the brightest children?

Academies are bound by the same laws as regular schools to cater for children of all abilities, including children with special educational needs (SEN). Academies certainly do encourage excellence – and they believe that every child should be allowed to achieve the very best that they can. Both bright and less academic children flourish in Academies, because teaching can be tailored to suit each different child's needs.

Is every child guaranteed a place in their local Academy?

Children have to apply for a place in an Academy, in the same way that they do for any other state school. Admissions are fair, and must be in accordance with the School Admissions Code.

So Academies don't 'select' children?

Some Academies (just like some maintained schools) do select a very small percentage of their students. This tends to happen most at sports Academies which have training facilities for elite athletes. No Academy can select more than 10% of its students in this way, and most Academies don't select at all.

What is fair banding?

Fair banding is a system for allocating school places in both Academies and regular maintained schools. It is only used when a school is over-subscribed. Children take an exam, and according to the results are placed in an ability 'band'. Every school that operates fair banding has to take an equal proportion of children from each band. This means that no school can just cream off the cleverest children.

Do Academies raise standards by expelling problem children?

The figures show that many Academies have exclusion rates that are no higher than in the rest of their local authority. However, because some Academies start out with groups of extremely disruptive children, exclusions may be higher in the early days of the school so that the majority of children aren't made to suffer through the bad behaviour of a few. That said, many Academies are justifiably proud of their inclusion programmes for more disruptive children – and some have made no exclusions at all.

Do you have to pay to send a child to an Academy?

No. Academies are state schools. They are completely free of charge.

FAQs (cont.)

Do Academies get more funding than other schools?

The Government always aims to provide an equivalent amount of funding for Academies as it does for regular state schools. The National Audit Office has said that the formula the Government uses to do this works.

Do Academies teach strange subjects?

All Academies teach a broad and balanced curriculum that must include maths, English and science. Academies have the flexibility to structure their curriculum in the way the school's leaders think will best serve its pupils and the wider community. All Academies specialise in one or two subjects, like languages, technology, business, science, maths or music – but your child does not have to excel in these subjects to do well. Academies also teach a range of qualifications, which can include the International Baccalaureate, A Levels, GCSEs, BTECs and Diplomas.

What is an Academy sponsor?

An Academy sponsor is an individual or organisation who makes a long-term commitment to help support and manage an Academy, dedicating time, money and insight to improving education and life chances for its students. An Academy sponsor can be an individual, like a business person – or a group, charity, or university. When an Academy is being set up, the Academy sponsor helps shape the vision and ethos for the school, defining the values that will govern the way it operates. Once the Academy has opened, the Academy sponsor works in partnership with the principal, bringing insights and fresh approaches. The Academy sponsor also appoints the majority of the governors, which must include a governor from the local authority and at least one parent governor. Often, an Academy sponsor also provides a sum of money which is invested on behalf of the school.

Why do Academies need Academy sponsors?

Academy sponsors play an important role in getting schools to operate in ways that will make success happen quickly. They often bring experience from outside of secondary education, and they have a different way of looking at the world. This means they can often see ways of working or solving problems that wouldn't be the first thing teachers and educationalists might normally think of. Academy sponsors can also often find ways to make things happen quickly – for example, by using their business contacts, or the resources of their organisations.

Principal of The Harefield Academy, Lynn Gadd says: "We enjoy a very special relationship with our Academy sponsors. They prompt us to think differently. We have an absolute agreement as to how they would like a young person to be as they leave The Harefield Academy so we have that shared vision. But on a day-to-day basis they allow me and the educationists and the other people who are working at the Academy to make the decisions. They inspire us to greater things. They can make suggestions that are sometimes completely out of the blue, but make a difference to our community. We thoroughly enjoy working with them, it's a very special and unique relationship."

How can you be sure about the motivation of Academy sponsors?

When a potential Academy sponsor lets the Government know that they'd like to support an Academy, they are thoroughly vetted, and their motives for wanting to become involved are scrutinised. Some Academy sponsors are charities or groups. For example, the Harris Federation of South London Schools, which sponsors seven Academies, and is due to open a further two, is an education charity with a long history of running successful schools.

What happens if an Academy sponsor goes bust?

An Academy sponsor does not directly run an Academy. Rather, they set up a trust which appoints the governors. If an Academy sponsor's business gets into difficulties, the Academy and the trust are unaffected.

What if an Academy sponsor decides to pull out of an Academy?

When a person or organisation agrees to become an Academy sponsor, they commit to doing so for at least seven years. However, if an Academy sponsor wants to withdraw, they can give notice. If they do this, they are expected to stay in place until another Academy sponsor has been appointed by the Government.

What happens if the Government is not happy with the Academy sponsor?

The Government takes a keen interest in the effectiveness and direction of Academy sponsors. Where an Academy is not making satisfactory progress the Government will work closely with sponsors to secure whatever changes are necessary to accelerate progress. This may include a change of leadership, a new partnership with a successful strong Academy, sponsor, partner or school.

Do Academies represent the privatisation of education?

No. Academies are state-funded schools. Their sponsors cannot and do not make a profit from their involvement with Academies. There has to be agreement between the Government, the local authority and the Academy sponsor on things like the size of the Academy, its specialism, and the ages of pupils it will cater for.

FAQs (cont.)

Academies have been accused of being secretive...

Although Academies have greater freedoms than other schools, they cannot hide what they do and how they operate. Every Academy has a member of the local authority on its board of governors. Academies are also inspected by OFSTED, and their exam results are published in exactly the same way as all other state schools. The Government also publishes other information about Academies, including expressions of interest from Academy sponsors, funding agreements and attendance figures. You can find much of that information here www.dcsf.gov.uk/foischeme/.

Are the teachers in charge of education at Academies?

A school is only as good as its teachers. The relationship between Academy sponsor and principal is one of partnership. The Academy sponsor brings a fresh perspective, business contacts and new ideas, while the principal and his or her staff bring expertise and experience in teaching.

Are Academies inspected by OFSTED?

The year after an Academy opens, OFSTED inspects it and publishes a report on their website. Then in the third year after it has opened, an Academy has a full OFSTED inspection, which is carried out in exactly the same way as for other schools.

Do children need expensive equipment and uniforms to attend Academies?

Like most state schools, Academies are very conscious of the cost of uniforms and equipment and will do their best to make sure that they are not too expensive. What Academies will probably expect is for uniforms to be kept smart, and for dress codes to be strictly adhered to. Often, uniforms for a new Academy are provided free of charge, or are subsidised.

Are children bullied for attending Academies?

Good behaviour is a high priority for all Academies. A survey of pupils at Academies showed that most Year 7 pupils feel safe and believe that their work has improved since they started the school. A total of 84% said they felt safe during break and lunchtimes. The principals and sponsors of Academies often work closely with the leaders of other local schools to prevent inter-school problems. And Academies also have the flexibility to set different home times from other schools in the area. Newly built Academies often feature wide open spaces so that trouble can be spotted immediately, and initiatives like vertical tutor groups – where students of all ages study together – are often used to generate warm, supportive environments for all children.



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