



Academies in Oldham

The basics about academies

What are academies?

Academies are a new type of state school set up to take on the challenges faced in secondary education. They are schools set up by sponsors from business, faith or voluntary groups who work in innovative partnerships with local authorities, other education providers and the Government. The academies in Oldham will be open to young people of all abilities and will not select by faith. They aim to deliver educational improvements, particularly in disadvantaged areas and usually replace one or more existing schools.

Why does Oldham need academies?

Educational standards in Oldham are improving, particularly for 16-year-olds gaining five or more good GCSEs. However, Oldham's results remain below the national average and the Council wants to make a step change that will help more young people to achieve the national measure of five A*-Cs.

The academies programme, together with the wider secondary education initiative, is a once in a lifetime opportunity to invest a never before seen sum of money into education. This will challenge educational under-performance and deliver real improvements in standards so that schools can provide the best possible education to young people. Academies are a new addition to the state education system.

Who runs an academy?

Any Oldham academy would work alongside and complement the Borough's other secondary schools. They are set up by charitable trusts, known as Academy Trusts, who bring with them up to £2 million in sponsorship and their expertise, drive and ambition to help the school succeed. Academies have governors who are

responsible for the day to day running of the school in the interests of the students and the community.

The choice of academy sponsors is key and in Oldham we have taken great care to ensure our sponsors are committed to the values of the Oldham family of schools – including no selection by ability, working within agreed pay and conditions for staff, and a commitment to community cohesion.

Academies bring a distinctive approach to school leadership and draw on the skills of sponsors and other supporters. They aim to give school leaders and staff new opportunities to develop educational strategies to raise standards and provide further choice for parents in areas of disadvantage. It is also expected that once established all Oldham academies will share their expertise and facilities with other schools and the wider community.

How are academies funded?

Academies are run under a funding agreement between the Government and the charitable trust/sponsor. They are publicly funded, non-profit making and are free of charge to students, just like any local authority school. They receive the same level of funding from the state per students as other schools in similar circumstances.

Is there any proof that academies help to raise standards?

Academies are monitored very closely by the DCFS and the independent education watchdog Ofsted. Although it is early days, both report encouraging signs. According to the DCFS official figures, academies are improving faster than the national average and some are already showing significant success. The latest report by Ofsted says that the progress of academies is broadly positive, though uneven. Many of the early academies have been established in poorly performing schools and it will take time for improvements to come through.

What subjects do academies teach?

Like all of Oldham's schools, academies must offer a broad and balanced curriculum including the core National Curriculum subjects (English, maths, science and ICT) and undertake national assessments and examinations which will be published annually.

Can academies admit pupils based on their ability?

Academies are not allowed to select pupils by ability. They must consider every student that has applied for a school place. They are local schools for local young people and academies are required to follow the Borough's agreed admission arrangements.

Every academy's admission arrangements are subject to public consultation and must be agreed with the Government as a condition of their funding agreement.

Their arrangements must also be consistent with the Government's School Admissions Code.

Do academies admit pupils with statements of special educational needs?

Like all mainstream schools, academies must admit pupils with special educational needs and disabilities.

Are there any problems encouraging staff to transfer over to an academy?

School staff are understandably apprehensive about what academies mean for them. The Council will do everything it can to ensure that staff are looked after during the period of change. For all staff transferring to academies TUPE regulations will apply – that means their pay and conditions, including pension, are protected. The experience elsewhere in the country is that there have not been any major problems in attracting staff to the new schools and indeed many are now popular with staff as well as parents and students. The Council will consult with staff about any proposed changes.

How do academies affect the investment Oldham will receive?

By having academies in the Oldham programme we receive more money overall – we have estimated this to be up to the value of £21 million – so have more to spend on schools across Oldham. Once they are up and running, they do not get any more money per pupil than any other school.

Is it true that Oldham could rebuild its schools without having academies?

No. Not in the same way. Firstly, if academies were taken out of the proposals, it would mean a significant reduction in the funding available. Our current plans mean that every school benefits substantially from this programme. If the funding was reduced, some schools would miss out. The implications of this are quite large.

Secondly, it would mean that Oldham's proposals would not be innovative enough to stay in this round of funding. They would have to be completely redesigned and Oldham would have to go to the back of the queue. There is a serious risk that this would mean missing out on this investment altogether.

There is a precedent for being moved out of an investment round. It happened to Hull and delayed their programme by 2-3 years. There are now a lot of authorities in the queue, and a delay for us could be longer, and could mean no investment at all.

Why can't Oldham just leave its schools alone?

There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, there are surplus places in Oldham, and this has to be resolved because it means we are running the system inefficiently. Also, some of our school buildings are not in a good state and there is no other way of modernising them without building new schools. There has never been a programme like this before and it is not likely to happen again for a very long time. It really is a once in a lifetime chance.

While many of Oldham's schools are improving, they will not continue to do this without a major change. We have some big challenges that we must address if we want our children to achieve as well as they can. For instance:

- Too many pupils leave school without the qualifications they need to progress.
- Too many pupils don't do well in English and Maths.
- We don't have enough pupils going on to University.
- Too many people in the Borough are poor because they don't have the qualifications needed to get well paid work.

If we don't reorganise schools using this investment, changes will still happen – we will still have to sort out surplus places, we will still have to explore trust and foundation status (but without any added investment or contribution from sponsors), and the Government may still close schools that are not performing to levels they have identified. Our programme of transforming secondary education allows these changes to happen in a way that is strategic, comprehensive and shaped by local needs.

What is different about academies?

Academies are allowed to do some things that other schools aren't (although we have negotiated certain exceptions we felt are important for the good of education in Oldham):

- They can select up to 10% of students on aptitude for their specialism. In Oldham, our academies will not select students by ability.
- They only have to stick to the core subjects in the national curriculum (English, Maths, Science and ICT).
- They employ the staff directly instead of them being employed by the Council.
- They do not have to follow the national terms and conditions or pay for staff. In Oldham, the academies will follow the national terms and conditions.

Our sponsors have agreed that they will pay staff according to National Terms and Conditions. This means they will not be poaching staff from other schools by offering higher wages, nor will they be paying staff above or below the nationally agreed rates.

- They receive their money directly from the Government instead of it coming from Government via the Council.

- Sponsors set up a charitable fund which pays interest every year for the Governors to spend on the school (Further Education and Higher Education sponsors do this in kind, not in money).

They are also run differently. They have a sponsor who sets up an educational trust and appoints the Governing Body. This is managed through an agreement that they sign with the Government. However, academies are still subject to the following rules:

- They are accountable for their performance.
- The local authority has a watchdog role in terms of their performance and powers to intervene if it isn't good enough.
- They are subject to the same rules as everyone else in terms of exclusions, attendance and Special Educational Needs.

Is the Oldham model for academies different at all?

We are continually working to develop and improve our proposals for secondary education. This is because we are trying to get the very best deal for Oldham. During the past six months, we have achieved the following arrangements for Oldham.

The academies will be 11-16 schools. In Oldham our two Further Education colleges are outstanding and we do not want to undermine this very successful provision.

All academies have agreed that their admissions policies will be identical to the Council's. They will not select any pupils in any way at all.

All academies have agreed that they will pay staff according to National Terms and Conditions. This means they will not be poaching staff from other schools by offering higher wages, nor will they be paying staff above or below the nationally agreed rates.

All academies have agreed that they will recruit all staff openly using the same criteria that the Council would use in terms of equal opportunities.

What other work is taking place to keep on improving the proposals for Oldham?

Educational trust for all schools in the Borough will make sure that all schools benefit from the new partnerships we are bringing into Oldham. We are looking at how we can set up an educational charity so that all schools have access to some added educational funds.

We are also looking at having stronger links to the economy in the North West, with an emphasis on new employer links. In addition we are building links to the Universities, and involving them much more in shaping education and helping Oldham students to get into higher education.

Oldham is also working with National Governing Bodies for Sport to encourage them to come and work in partnership with our schools, including building regional centres here.

Why have we chosen the sites we are proposing?

The sites are chosen because they are neutral – it is usually better to have a new site when bringing two schools together

We believe they are also in the right locations. We do not have lots of different sites to choose from and they are in short supply in Oldham. We don't think they are all perfect, but we do think they are the best available

They are also big enough to build the schools and supply them with all the social spaces, sports and PE spaces they need to deliver a full curriculum. Architects have tested the feasibility of the sites to make sure they are the right size. We have had the sites checked by Partnerships for Schools. In fact, we would not be allowed to build on unsuitable sites.

What benefits can these new schools bring to the wider community?

This programme is not just about schools. It is also about community facilities, and we are required to develop facilities for the wider use of the community. There is no rigid blueprint for this but it can include a wide range of ideas:

- Access to education including world class ICT facilities.
- Community use of playing fields and sports facilities.
- Community use of school buildings for events and activities.
- Partnerships with National Governing bodies for different sports, and local sports clubs, to enhance facilities and maximise their use.
- Partnerships with voluntary and community groups about evening and weekend provision.

The schools will be open at evenings and weekends, and they will serve as hubs for a wide range of local services, not just those traditionally based in schools. We are very open to ideas from the community about how this aspect of the new schools can be developed. This is a key part of the process of developing plans and will be taking place over the next 12 months.

Contact

You can access fact sheets in a number of ways:

Download: www.oldham.gov.uk/bsf

Tel: 0161 770 3904

Fax: 0161 770 1111

Email: bsf@oldham.gov.uk

Write to: The BSF project team, Oldham Council, FREEPOST, RRXE-JYCL-BELC, Level 10, Civic Centre, West Street, Oldham, OL1 1UT

Call in: to any council office

We want to provide good quality services for people in Oldham and as we are a public service you have a say in what we do. We want you to be completely satisfied with our services but to ensure this we need to know what you think. What we do best? Where could we improve things? Do you have any ideas or suggestions? Only by listening to you can we give you the service you deserve.

If you wish to make a comment about our services you can email us on customer.feedback@oldham.gov.uk or you can phone us on 0161 770 4191 or you can write to: Complaints Officer

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