

School Academies

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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 schools are open to children of all abilities. 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, the Borough'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 BSF 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 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, any Oldham academies will share their expertise and facilities with other schools and the wider community.

Who runs an academy?

Any Oldham academies 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 their own governors who are responsible for running the school in the interests of the pupils and the community. The sponsors do not make a profit and the schools do not charge fees. Academies are a new addition to the state education system.

The choice of academy sponsors is key and in Oldham great care will be taken to ensure any 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.

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 pupils and parents, just like any local authority school. They receive the same level of funding from the state per pupil as other schools in similar circumstances.

Is there any proof that academies help to raise standards?

Academies are monitored very closely by the DfES and the independent education watchdog Ofsted. Although it is early days, both report encouraging signs. According to the DfES 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 the Borough'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 pupils. The Council will consult with staff about any proposed changes.

What will happen next?

The Council has been working with secondary school headteachers to identify and agree early proposals on the future of secondary education as a basis for consultation. There will be many opportunities for people to have their say throughout the BSF programme. The first opportunity is during a public consultation from 12 March to 11 May 2007.

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Further information about BSF, the consultation process and a list of frequently asked questions is available on the Council's website at www.oldham.gov.uk/bsf

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