



FAQs for Parents and Stakeholders

on St Stephen's Primary School becoming an Academy

What is an academy?

Academy schools are state-funded schools in England which are directly funded by the Department for Education and are independent of local authority control. In converting to academy status schools must apply to become part of a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT). The Department for Education's strategic plan requires all schools to have converted to academy status by 2022.

Why has St Stephen's School decided to become an Academy now?

The Governing Body feels that in becoming an academy our school will be able to benefit from being part of a larger organisation in terms of economies of scale, shared resources, dedicated school improvement support and greater financial stability.

In addition, as more primary schools decide to become academies BaNES will receive reduced funding and therefore the current range and level of services may be reduced to a point where they are no-longer viable. It is important that St Stephen's commences the conversion process well ahead of this happening.

What are the benefits of becoming an academy?

The key consideration for the governing body has been what positive impact there will be for our children and the staff. Being part of a larger organisation will enable our school to benefit from sharing the economies of scale, shared resources, dedicated school improvement support and greater financial stability. We should also benefit from the opportunity to more formally expand our mix of partnership arrangements and to share staff and leadership development opportunities across a group of schools. As the chosen Multi-Academy Trust matures there should be a broader range of opportunities for both children and staff. Increased flexibility and operational efficiencies should also enable schools to save time and effort. Shared strategic leadership across both Head Teachers and Governing Bodies will provide greater challenge and support across a group of schools. This is currently not provided by our local authority, but the structure and functioning of the MAT will enable this.

What are the drawbacks to becoming an academy?

While retaining our unique identity and values, our school will also be expected to embrace the vision and values of the Multi-Academy Trust. However, the Governing body has only considered Multi-Academy Trusts that have a similar vision and values to our own.

Since St Stephen's is considered a 'Good' school the expectation is that we will retain a lot of the autonomy that we have enjoyed being part of the Local Authority. However, the Multi-Academy Trust will oversee the school budget, the staffing strategy and appointment and performance of the Head Teacher, in conjunction with the Governing body.

Are there any risks to becoming an academy?

The Governing body acknowledges that any change involves a certain level of risk. However, there are also risks in not doing anything, losing local authority support and services, and finding ourselves in the minority as other schools start the conversion process.



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Possible risks have been carefully analysed and the Governing body is confident that it has made the best decision for our school.

What are other Primary schools in BaNES doing?

Our Head Teacher and Chair of Governors have been working closely with other Primary schools as they have conducted their own due diligence in parallel with St Stephen's School. Some of these schools are ones we have closely collaborated with in the past in terms of continuing professional development for staff. Over one third of the fifty three Primary schools in BaNES have already converted to academy status and we know of more than 20 other schools who are likely to start the conversion process this year.

Which Multi-Academy Trusts have been considered?

The Governing body decided at the commencement of its due diligence that it would only consider Multi-Academy Trusts that were essentially Primary-led; that were likely to be big enough to provide economies of scale and shared services; whose vision and values were similar to St Stephen's School; and where we might already enjoy some affinity with the potential member schools.

This eventually resulted in two possible Multi-Academy Trusts being identified for detailed consideration. These were the already established Bath and Wells MAT and the planned Sulis Minerva MAT. After very careful consideration of the two options it was decided that the Bath and Wells MAT most closely met the requirements for our school and it is the one with which we share the greatest affinity.

What process has been followed to reach this decision?

In Spring last year a Steering group was established as part of the Governing body. During the past year this group has defined its criteria for joining a MAT, attended several presentations, spoken to other schools, and played a part in the development of the Sulis Minerva Trust. At a Governing body meeting on 27 February 2017 the Steering Group recommended to the Governing body that St Stephen's School should apply to become an academy and to become part of the Bath and Wells MAT. The Governing body voted overwhelmingly in favour of this.

Will St Stephen's School change as a result of the decision?

The day to day nature and running of the school will remain the same. There are no plans to make curriculum changes, uniform changes or school hours adjustments. In addition, the following will remain the same:

- St Stephen's will still be a church school with strong values and standards of behaviour
- School will retain its individual identity and some autonomy, but will support and embrace the Trust ethos and vision
- The Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) will continue every 5 years; and Ofsted inspections will continue
- The composition of the Governing Body with respect to Foundation, Parent, Staff and Local Authority governors will remain the same, except that the LA governor will become a MAT appointed governor
- School will continue to be its own Admissions Authority, in liaison with BANES administration/ coordination



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- The RE Curriculum will continue to be subject to a requirement of 70% Christianity based
- All staff appointments will be decided by school, except for the Head Teacher
- Day to day budget management and responsibility will reside with the school; and the existing level of funding will continue via the MAT instead of the LA.
- The school buildings will continue to be owned by St Stephen's church and maintained and insured by school

What will change?

- School improvement/development plans will be approved and monitored by the Trust Board
- Head Teacher appointments will be approved by the Trust Board, with the CEO being part of the school selection process along with the Governing body
- Staffing strategy, structures and policies will be subject to approval by the Trust Board
- Capital and revenue funding will be the responsibility of the Trust Board
- The school playing field will be leased to school on a long term basis by BaNES

Will there be any costs involved in converting to become an Academy and joining a MAT?

There will be a number of associated costs, mainly to do with the legal separation of our school from the local authority, the transfer of the land lease and the establishment of a new legal status for our school as part of a MAT. In addition we may require some project management support to take care of the process. However, once our academy application is approved we will receive a grant of £25,000 from the DfE to cover these costs.

What will happen next?

In addition to writing to parents and carers of our school community, the Head Teacher and Chair of Governors will also be advising our other stakeholders, including St Stephen's Church Parish Council and other schools (Primary, Secondary, Pre-school and Nursery). In parallel we will also start the application process with the Bath and Wells MAT, inform BaNES that we wish to move out of their jurisdiction, and apply to the Regional Schools' Commissioner to become an Academy and join the Bath and Wells MAT. The whole process is expected to take around six months.

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