

What is an Academy School?

An [academy school](#) is a publicly-funded independent school. In a lot of respects they are the same as state schools - they are required to follow the same rules on admissions, on children with special educational needs and the policy for excluding pupils.

Academies, like-state funded schools, are also assessed by Ofsted inspectors.

How are Academy Schools Different from State Schools?

One of the main differences is that academies get their funding directly from the government rather than a local authority as a normal state-funded school does.

Academies are directly accountable to the Department of Education.

What also sets them apart is they can set their own term times, instead of adhering to those decided by local authorities, and they don't need to follow the National Curriculum.

Academies can also access funding from other sources by seeking sponsorship from businesses, universities, other schools, voluntary organisations or faith groups.

What is an Academy Trust?

There are two types of trusts – a single academy trust and a multi-academy trust.

The former is created when a single school becomes an academy or two schools amalgamate and make the switch to academy status.

When a group of schools become part of a trust, governed by a single board of members and directors, that is known as a multi-academy trust.

The trust employs staff as opposed to a local authority in the case of state-funded schools.

The head teacher, or principal, at each academy school is responsible for its day-to-day running. But their work is overseen by the academy trust, which provides support and advice.

Expertise is also shared among the schools which belong to an academy trust and its directors are responsible for strategic overviews of those schools under its umbrella.

Why was the Option brought in for Schools to Convert to Academy Status?

There has been a significant increase in the number of multi-academy trusts in this country.

In 2011, there were 391 and there are now more than four times that figure operating.

The academy school policy was initiated by Labour Prime Minister, Tony Blair. The aim at the start was to improve failing schools, particularly in deprived and disadvantaged areas of the country.

They were initially called city academies when the first ones were created in the year 2000. But the word 'city' was dropped to encourage more schools to convert in rural areas as well as urban ones.

Current policy under Theresa May's Conservative government is to encourage all schools to make the switch to academy status if they feel it is appropriate.

Struggling schools can be supported as part of multi-academy trusts by sharing resources and best practice with their sister schools.

What are the Advantages of being an Academy School?

Flexibility: Head teachers have more freedom to run academies, by setting their own term dates, not having to follow the national curriculum and getting access to extra funding through sponsorship.

State-funded schools, in comparison, are controlled by a local authority with no real options to go their own way.

Innovation: Staff can be more innovative in academy schools to try new things and think outside the box in the way they teach their children and the curriculum they follow.

Academies have access to extra funding through sponsorship which can enable them to improve facilities and offer a wider range of educational visits and trips to their students.

Shared expertise and resources: Schools in a multi-academy trust benefit from being able to share money, best practices and even their staff, who can be deployed at sister schools who might be short-staffed or in need of a fresh teaching approach.

Struggling schools can also be supported by others in their trust to help them improve.

What are the Disadvantages of being an Academy School?

Schools are run more like businesses: Some teachers are concerned that education is becoming privatised as more schools become academies.

Critics say there is too much of a focus on money and financial return, rather than what is best for the children who attend academies.

Trusts can get too big too soon: There have been some fears voiced that some academy trusts have taken on too many schools too quickly and are unable to cope as a result.

When trusts increase in size, it has been argued, some of their schools lose out because of a shortage of resources to manage them effectively.

Flexibility is not always a good thing: Parents who send their children to state-funded school can be certain that they will be taught National Curriculum subjects.

There is not the same certainty with academy schools, whose head teachers have the option to follow a different curriculum.

Academies can also set their own term dates which could cause childcare issues for parents who have different children at an academy and a state-funded school.

Make sure you do plenty of research before deciding on an Academy School.