



Inspiring minds through opportunity

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ACADEMY CONSULTATION FAQ

This FAQ document answers some general questions about academies in England. We have also included some questions that parents and staff have asked.

Why is Cyril Jackson, an outstanding school, consulting on joining a multi-academy trust?

From the outset, the governors recognised that becoming an academy represented a significant decision and was not one that should be taken lightly. Cyril Jackson is a successful, happy school in which children thrive and whose distinctive ethos is valued by parents and governors alike. It is vital that this is maintained. Governors therefore set out a number of core principles to support their thinking.

Becoming an academy must:

- Have tangible benefits for existing pupils, their families and staff;
- Not disadvantage the school or those it serves in years to come;
- Not dilute or ignore the current strengths of the school;
- Not diminish the place of the school in the local community;
- Further strengthen the school's ability to make a positive contribution to the lives of children, their families and other local residents.

With these principles in mind, the governors have considered the implications and processes involved in becoming an academy. The rest of this document summarises the outcomes of the governors' deliberations.

Background

The Local Authority, Tower Hamlets, is currently facing a number of pressures that are impacting significantly on all schools, including Cyril Jackson:

1. Significant reduction in pupil numbers and therefore school income.
2. Significant cuts in funding for school services within the Local Authority (LA).
3. A pupil Place Planning Review (all governing bodies are being requested to consider formal and informal partnerships with local schools).

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Tower Hamlets Council are now formally consulting on the closure of Raine's Foundation Secondary School and will begin a range of consultations in the autumn term to close and amalgamate a number of primary schools within the LA. These discussions have been imposed on school leaders and their governing bodies. The schools in scope are mainly in the west of the LA; however, all schools are seeing a considerable reduction in pupil numbers and all schools are being asked to look at more formal partnership arrangements.

The government has made clear its preference for every school to become an academy. Recently the Department for Education announced that over 50% of pupils in England are now taught in academies. Nevertheless, as an outstanding school, Cyril Jackson is not being forced to convert; nor is it coming under pressure to do so. The governors are, therefore, considering this purely in terms of how it will benefit its pupils and staff.

What this means for Cyril Jackson

The governors and leadership team of Cyril Jackson reflected on the range of partnerships and relationships they have with other schools and academies in the local area. On this basis, they have come to the view that UST would offer both the security and benefits of a formal partnership, as well as being an organisation very much aligned to the aims and values of Cyril Jackson.

We know that many of our parents select St Paul's Way Trust School (a school in the UST family) as their preferred secondary school. Working with the school leaders of SPWT, we will provide further opportunities for collaboration, both in terms of facilities and enhancing our curriculum offer.

Beyond this, and as part of UST, the leadership team, teaching staff and support staff of Cyril Jackson would be part of a wider group of professionals from which they would gain support and advice; this would provide security to the school over the long term.

For instance, as part of UST, Cyril Jackson and its pupils could benefit from a wide range of opportunities not easily available as a stand-alone local authority school, a number of which are outlined below:

- Developing a rich and wide curriculum through, for instance, recruiting and sharing more specialist staff across schools in the trust. This would mean that experts in subjects such as science, music or modern foreign languages could teach pupils, particularly those in higher year groups. In addition, Cyril Jackson could make use of SPWT's impressive sporting and creative arts facilities. These opportunities will only increase if Cyril Jackson becomes part of the Trust.

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- As part of a “family” of schools, there would be enhanced professional development and career progression opportunities for staff across the trust. Losing good quality, experienced staff as they seek career progression is an inevitability, but being able to offer them opportunities in schools within the trust would ensure that their skills are not lost to the organisation as a whole. Equally, schools appointing from within the trust would reduce the challenge and risk associated with external recruitment.
- Providing a wider range of leadership opportunities for middle and senior leaders, while also easing the overall leadership challenge through more supported and focused leadership roles. This is particularly important in primary schools where individuals often hold a wide portfolio of responsibilities. Working across and between schools will allow staff to focus and deepen their knowledge of specific areas of work (for instance, core subject leadership across two or more primary schools, or SEND coordinators working within a supportive trust based team).
- While there is no financial benefit in becoming an academy over and above remaining as a local authority school, there are efficiencies to be gained by procuring goods and services across the trust – this will apply to both back office services (HR, Health and Safety etc.) and ICT and teaching resources etc.
- Within a trust, a core team of support staff can work in a supportive partnership that ensures resources are used most effectively. This provides protection for an individual school as it is part of a larger organisation. This also leads to the reduction in duplication – for instance, around policy development and/or the introduction of new initiatives and responsibilities.
- Finally, by running some of the operational and transactional functions at trust level, head teachers and teaching staff can be freed up to focus on the core work of teaching and learning and supporting all pupils to reach their full potential.

UST can offer all of these benefits and is an organisation whose ethos and values align with those of Cyril Jackson. Importantly, UST is committed to respecting and celebrating the diversity of each school within the trust, thereby meeting the governors’ concern that the uniqueness of Cyril Jackson should not be lost if they took the decision to become an academy. Finally, Cyril Jackson would be the first primary school to join UST and will therefore have an opportunity to contribute and shape its development rather than simply be a “receiver” of a Trust’s way of doing things.

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What things would not change?

There will be very little that will change in the day to day running of the school. The leadership team at Cyril Jackson will continue to lead and drive forward the improvements at the school.

There will be no immediate or significant changes in our curriculum delivery. As you are aware, any changes we do make are driven in response to the needs of pupils. The act of becoming an academy will not require us to make any changes.

There will still be governors for the school. Trustees will delegate governance functions down to the local level of the Academy and therefore operate Local Governing Bodies. This is the approach followed by the University Schools Trust and will remain at Cyril Jackson. There will also still be elected parents on the local governing body. We intend to ensure a high level of continuity in our governance during the conversion period.

Academies have a range of explicit freedoms not available to local authority schools including setting the pay and conditions of staff and setting their own term dates. However, the governors of the school and UST have committed to adhering to national agreements on pay and conditions and have no plans to alter term dates once the school has become an academy.

The employment rights of all current members of staff will be protected by TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment) Regulations. This means that the staff will transfer to the UST under the same terms and conditions of employment they enjoy now. Pension rights and continuity of service record will be preserved. UST has adopted the same pay scales and terms and conditions as those negotiated nationally and locally for teaching and support staff.

The school will be subject to the exact same Ofsted inspection framework as now.

What is an academy?

Academies are state-funded, non-fee-paying schools in England. They operate in accordance with their funding agreements with the Secretary of State, and are independent of local authorities (LAs). Academies have more freedoms than those schools under local authority control. When a school becomes an Academy the employees of the school transfer over to the new Trust or Sponsor. The Academy is governed by a Charitable Trust; however, it is still led by the Headteacher and (in the case of UST) a Local Governing Body.

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What is a multi-academy trust or MAT?

Multi-academy trusts, or MATs, usually run more than one academy. MATs themselves are single legal entities, with one set of trustees. Their member schools operate under a single governance structure. A handful of MATs are very large, with 40 or more schools; most MATs are much smaller than this, having between 1 and 10 schools.

Will the admissions policy change when the school becomes an Academy?

No, all Academies are required to adopt clear and fair admission arrangements in line with admissions law and the School Admissions Code. Primary admissions for Cyril Jackson are currently co-ordinated by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets and this will continue.

Does the school have to change its name and uniform?

No, there is no need for a school to change its name. Cyril Jackson will be keeping the same uniform, signage and school badge.

If my child has SEN needs and is applying for an EHCP will it be harder or more complicated to get a place through the academy as opposed to how the process works now through Tower Hamlets?

No, the process for applying for an Education Health Care Plan remains the same in both an academy and local authority maintained school.

If a child receives an Education Health Care Plan, the process for applying for a place at Cyril Jackson also remains the same as is now. Tower Hamlets will continue to manage our admissions for all children.

Who owns academy land and buildings? Can property or land be sold off?

Tower Hamlets would lease the land to UST for 125 years. There are controls on the disposal of academy (and maintained school) publicly-funded land. The Secretary of State's permission is required for the disposal of publicly-funded school land.

What are the safeguards for vulnerable pupils?

Under the terms of the Funding Agreement, the contract between the Academy Trust and the Secretary of State, an Academy has to act in exactly the same way as a maintained school in relation to Special Educational Needs, behaviour and exclusions.

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Could there be cuts to academy funding in the future?

We know that the Government is planning to change how schools are funded through the National Funding Formula and that this may have a negative impact on schools in London. These changes, however, will apply to academies and local authority schools equally.

The Trust and the local academy committee will remain responsible for setting a balanced budget each year. By being part of a MAT, however, the school may be able to make savings on some of the goods and services it buys to run the schools.

What about links with the local authority?

The change of status brings greater independence from the local authority but we will continue to work in partnership with the local authority and may continue to buy services from them. UST is a unique Trust and representatives from the local authority sit on our Trust Board. UST are proud of this relationship.

What support is available to academies if they get into financial difficulty?

Academies, like all schools, are expected to maintain strict budgetary controls and are required by their funding agreement to balance their budgets. The Academy receives an ongoing Grant ('General Annual Grant') which covers the running costs of the school. If a deficit occurs or appears likely, the Education & Skills Funding agency (ESFA), will intervene. It will provide advice and support to the Academy to find an appropriate solution to bring costs and income back into balance, usually in the form of a restructuring plan, and will give additional contingency funding if absolutely necessary.

What input do parents have as part of the consultation / decision making process?

This consultation forms part of the overall consultation process. Your views, alongside those of other stakeholders, will be considered by Governors as part of the decision making process. The Governors will, however, make the final decision on whether to convert to academy status once they have considered any responses to the consultation and are satisfied that all of the legal processes required to convert have been completed satisfactorily.

If you have any other questions you would like answered, please send them to admin@cyriljackson.towerhamlets.sch.uk and entitle your email 'Academy Consultation' or hand your questions in to the offices.

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