Academisation consultation

FAQs

What is …

An Academy?

Academies are still state schools, but they’re funded and operated a little differently than maintained schools.

Instead of being funded by the local authority, academy trusts are paid directly by the Education and Skills Funding Agency. This means that academies have more control over how they do things, than schools that aren’t academies.

Academies don’t charge fees.

A Multi-Academy Trust?

Academy trusts are not-for-profit charities that have the charitable aim of advancing education for the public good. They have trustees who are responsible for their performance, in the same way that local authority (LA) maintained schools have governors.

The trustees are both company directors and charity trustees, and the academy trust employs the school staff.

We’re proposing to join an existing multi-academy trust. This means that we’ll be part of a community of schools that are governed by one board of trustees. Each school in the trust will also have its own local governing body, with some delegated governance responsibilities for that particular school. The trust will also employ a team of central staff to support the group of schools and drive school improvement. As part of a trust with multiple schools, our school will have the opportunity to collaborate and share resources with the other schools across the trust.

The benefits of academisation for our school?

The benefits for our school will include:

* Improved teaching and learning for our pupils, because:
  + Teaching expertise and resources can be shared across the trust
  + There will be a wider range of training opportunities for our staff
* The opportunity to collaborate
  + Both on curriculum and extra-curricular activities.
* Greater financial efficiency
  + By procuring goods and services at a larger scale across the trust
  + By sharing staff, including specialist staff who work centrally for the trust, like a school improvement team
* Increased availability of support
  + Access to leaders in education for school improvement

The reason we’re choosing to join The Athelstan Trust

* Ethos and culture closely align to our own
* Have a strong track record of school improvement
* Financially stable trust
* Have capacity for further growth but a desire to limit this to maintain existing high standards
* A local trust that understands the school’s context and location of Chippenham
* 2 existing secondary schools are based in the north of Wiltshire. This will therefore support close collaboration
* A leader in flexible employment. This continues to be an essential aspect to help resolve the recruitment crisis in education
* Everyday aspects of school such as uniform, behaviour policy, curriculum choices remain with the school

On money

Will the trust or trustees make a profit from the school?

No. Academy trusts are charities, and any surplus or other income must be used to benefit pupils.

Will the trust take any money away from our school?

**T**he trust will receive our school’s money known as the General Annual Grant (GAG). It will collect a proportion of this funding to pay for some central services before passing on the rest to our school. However, the trust will carefully consider the funding needs and allocations of each academy.

Central services include:

* Providing a robust school improvement offer led by experienced School Leaders in Education (SLEs)
* A Trust wide CPD programme
* A Chief Executive Officer ensuring all schools provide the best educational experience possible
* A Chief Financial Officer managing trust finances
* A Chief Operating Officer managing HR, site and compliance
* A Central IT network team supporting all schools
* A Trust Governance Professional to support local governance
* Annual Safeguarding monitoring and support

How much is academy conversion going to cost?

The process of academising will not impact on the school’s finances. The Department for Education provides a sum of money to cover the expected costs involved with such a process.

**When our school is an academy**

Will it still be inspected by Ofsted?

Academies are inspected by Ofsted and are held to the same standards as other state-run schools.

Will it follow the National Curriculum?

Academies don’t have to follow the National Curriculum however the curriculum delivered is largely based around the National Curriculum. Each school within the trust has autonomy to deliver the curriculum that best meets the needs of their cohort.

Will we change our name/logo/uniform?

No. The school name, logo and uniform will not be changed as a result of academisation. Each school within The Athelstan Trust maintains its autonomy with this.

Will our term times change?

No. The school term times will continue as is published. As an academy we are able to set our own term times, however these tend to be similar to the Local Authority published term times.

Will our admissions policy change?

No. Our admissions policy remains unchanged, and Wiltshire Council will continue to run the admissions process.

Academies must follow the same rules for admissions as other state schools.

By becoming part of an Academy will it improve support for SEND?

Yes, as there are multiple SENCOs across the trust that can share expertise and experience.

Are we still going to have the teachers that the students are used to?

Yes, the teachers will remain the same.

When the school are made aware of problems, will they be able to act on it faster than they have done in past?

The level of staffing will remain the same. However, as there are multiple secondary schools within the trust then the level of support and experience that can be called upon is far greater than we have currently.

How do you envisage keeping the needs of children as individuals at the forefront of your care?

We are extremely proud of our ability to do this currently and recognised that this was an essential element in our decision to look to join The Athelstan Trust. Other larger Trusts were discounted as we want to be able to maintain our own identity whilst benefitting from working closely with a collection of schools.  The Athelstan Trust’s ethos closely aligns with our own and is evident throughout its current schools.

Are all staff on board?

The staff body are being consulted currently.

Will any teachers be leaving as they don't want to join the academy?

This is not something that has become apparent during the consultation.

How will parents be able to discuss or influence changes that are brought in through becoming part of the academy?

Parents are able to contact the school in the normal fashion and there will still be a Local Governing Board with parental representation.

Will governance of the school stay local, or will we be swallowed up in the academy's rules?

There will still be a Local Governing Board. This will report directly to a Board of Trustees.

Will the ethos and focus of the school be changed to that of the academy, so that it loses its identity?

No, the school will continue to maintain its own identity and the Headteacher will set the school’s focus.

Who wants Abbeyfield School to become an academy?

The Government has made it clear that all schools will become academies. Whilst there is not currently a deadline for this, it is felt that it is better for Abbeyfield to be able to choose a MAT to join that aligns with it, rather than be directed to join any MAT.

What are the benefits for Abbeyfield becoming an academy?

Currently in Wiltshire there are now only 3 standard secondary schools (one of which is due to become an academy this academic year). As a result, there is very limited support for secondary schools from the Local Authority. Athelstan Trust has a team of experts employed to support secondary school improvement.

How does the Athelstan Trust plan to support leaders and teachers with the volume and depth of monitoring that will inevitably take place when first joining the academy?

Athelstan has a strong track record of successful support to schools joining them. Abbeyfield and several schools in the trust already work closely together so the school is well known and would join the existing school improvement programme.

What plans are in place to support leaders and teachers to guide them in implementing the changes that will follow?

A detailed plan will be in place following an academy order being granted. It is anticipated that this process would take up to 12 months, due to additional complexity around PFI. During this period Abbeyfield would have sufficient time to begin to adjust and adapt where required along with support from the Trust.

How will the changes be rolled out so that staff workload is monitored and managed to retain our highly experienced and valued members of staff?

Athelstan Trust has a good reputation for working with its staff. All changes will be managed within the school, with workload being considered, as is currently the practice when implementing any change.

What day to day benefits will students experience from being a part of the Trust?

Students will not notice a significant difference day to day. The school however will be able to determine its own curriculum and be innovative with this. It will also be able to access better support, which will in turn drive up standards and ensure students receive a better educational experience.

Will Abbeyfield be officially closing and reopening under the Athelstan Trust, as other trust schools have done?

Abbeyfield School would officially close and would re-open with a new DfE number.

**Can you provide credible evidence to demonstrate that academisation provides any tangible benefit in terms of pupils' attainment?**

A significant number of ‘failing’ schools that have been directed to join a Multi Academy Trust have improved their overall rating. The increased opportunities for collaboration and CPD for staff ensure that struggling schools benefit from more successful schools.

There is clear evidence that Athelstan has improved standards within all of their schools; transforming previously underperforming schools and maintaining appropriately performing schools. The February 2024 MAT Progress 8 score for The Athelstan Trust is + 0.17 ABOVE AVERAGE (top 31%of trusts), 59th in the newly published MAT performance table.

Since joining the Trust two schools have moved from triple RI to Good and one moved from double SM to Good.

Each year they are able to invest about £1mill in capital in direct funding without grant applications and can point to significant enhancements in their facilities that contribute to school improvement.

**What impact does the PFI arrangement at Abbeyfield School have on any potential academisation?**

Schools with PFI arrangements have previously converted. It is anticipated that this will however increase the length of time for the conversion process.

**What impact (if any) would academisation have for Abbeyfield's planned expansion?**

There would be no impact on the proposed expansion of Abbeyfield. The school has been identified to account for the growth in numbers in the Chippenham area, to bring the size of the school in line with the other two schools in the town.

What innovative changes to the curriculum are you hoping to introduce through the process of Academisation?

We are not currently planning any significant curriculum changes at this stage. However, having this as an option going forward would be beneficial.