



Questions and Answers for The Horsell Village School (HVS)

This document has been adapted from questions raised from the Governor Academy Group's research into Academies, questions from the Department of Education (DfE) and other schools.

What is an Academy?

Academies are classed as independent state schools, which have the freedom to determine their own policies on such things as the curriculum taught. This is enabled by the Academies Act 2010. Primary, Secondary and Special schools are all able to apply to convert into an Academy and are accountable to the Secretary of State - not the County Council.

Why become an Academy?

The conversion to Academy status is seen by the Governing Body as creating more flexibility and freedom to develop closer links to other local schools:- whether to help or be helped. Links between Secondaries and feeder Primaries have been provided as examples.

By thinking ahead it will mean we are likely to have more choices in the Academy journey – who to choose to collaborate with, when and how. As time moves on and more schools become Academies these choices could become limited.

What are the benefits for the children should it be decided to adopt Academy status?

Academies are free to spend their total budget as they see fit. We would have even greater discretion to direct resources, including the whole of our Government funding, to meet our own school aims. In a stressed financial world we would like to make our own choices with our children in the forefront of our minds.

We also have to recognise that Academies are a main focus of Government Education policy. The Government is focused on raising standards of education which they believe will be best achieved by promoting the new Academy ethos. Consequently, to remain an outstanding school as the educational landscape evolves, we may well need to be an Academy. In short, the benefits include:

- HVS has enjoyed autonomy for many years and operated a unique school model. Continued independence is in keeping with our ethos.
- Having more autonomy to best use the school's total budget share to meet the needs of our children, particularly in a challenging financial climate.
- Continuing to attract and retain the very highest quality staff.
- Using the opportunities and freedom given to new-style Academies to shape and secure the school's future direction.

Some comments in the press have highlighted various risks and issues associated with potential conversion.

These include:

- *The uncertainty of future funding models for all schools.*

Academies are clearly the political preference of the Coalition Government and unlikely to go away even with a change to government.

- *The costs of services Academies have to pay could be in excess of income.*

There should be no financial gains to becoming Academies and the advice we have had so far indicates that we would be financially stable; there is unlikely to be a financial gain however we would have more financial flexibility. By starting this process we will gain access to the schools funding agreement and be better informed.

- *A change of education policy with any future change of Government to the detriment of Academies.*

Equally there could be a future change to maintained schools, in many ways we are unable to predict the future and only work with what we know.

- *Increasing numbers of Academies could be detrimental to a Local Authority's ability to provide for its maintained schools.*

The Local Authority is aware of this and trying to future-proof, they too are beginning to encourage some primaries to convert.

The Governors will examine the potential liabilities and risks involved with Academy conversion. The Governor Academy Group's findings will be made available to the Governing Body in good time for robust scrutiny before any decision to convert is taken.

Why make any changes to such a successful school?

Academies are the Coalition Government's preferred vehicle for school improvement. There are risks in remaining with a status quo which may well quickly deteriorate and become unrecognisable in what is likely to be a period of reduced budgets for all maintained schools and rationalisation within Local Authorities. Part of The Horsell Village School's success has been based on the autonomy it has always enjoyed arising from its outside learning. Academy status would simply enhance our already successful model.

Is a private sponsor required?

No outside sponsors are required for an 'outstanding' school to convert to an Academy. Our funding would come straight from the DfE

Will HVS be better funded as an Academy?

There is unlikely to be a financial gain however we would have more financial flexibility.

Could there be cuts to Academy funding in the future?

There could be, but if there were there could also be reduced funding from the Local Authority. Governors will seek to weigh up the relative advantages/disadvantages and to make a decision in light of the best possible information available.

What would happen if there were insurance claims made, due to an injury to a pupil or staff member?

The school has insurance to cover any claims already; this would continue.

How would major projects be funded?

We would have to apply to Central Government, rather than the LA for capital funds. Although finance from both sources is currently very scarce, it is difficult to envisage a situation in which HVS would be more likely to gain a capital grant from Surrey LA than Central Government.

**What would happen to teachers' current pay and conditions if the school became an Academy?
How would the pay and conditions be altered?**

There would no change to staff terms and conditions as a result of Academy conversion, there would be the process of TUPE.

Would current staff be issued with new contracts?

No. A letter of variation will be issued indicating that all their conditions of service will remain unchanged.

Do continuous service and pension rights apply to these 'new' contracts?

Yes.

It appears that every teaching union is against schools becoming Academies. If this is indeed the case, the school runs the risk of alienating the very teachers who have made the school so successful.

Union opposition is principle-led and not necessarily driven by what is best for HVS's pupils and staff. Our staff are talented and committed and every effort will always be made to ensure that HVS continues to attract and retain the best staff team. As part of the consultation process we will be contacting and meeting with all unions.

Would Academy status mean HVS was no longer required to follow the national and local admissions code?

No, as an Academy HVS would continue to adhere to the national Admissions Code and the priority order published by Surrey County Council.

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

The parent consultation forms part of the consultation process. Their views, alongside other stakeholders will be considered by Governors as part of the decision making process. The Governors make the final decision.

How would Academy conversion affect local schools?

We remain committed to working with our local schools. Conversion would improve our community relationship as we would be expected to work closely with those nearest to us.

What about links with the Local Authority?

The change of status brings greater independence from the Local Authority but there will be the opportunity to continue to purchase services. Surrey County Council and Babcock 4S are developing service level agreements for all of their traded services. It could be argued that a freer market for SCC traded services will improve quality and value for money for schools.

Only 'failing schools' are Academies?

No. Coalition 'converter Academies' are successful schools which the government seeks to allow greater independence to; these 'new' Academies are very different from Labour's 'transformational Academies', which did tend to be 'failing schools'.

Will HVS school name need to change?

No

Will the strengths and ethos of the school be eroded?

No, the ethos and values we hold will continue

Is an Academy still inspected by Ofsted?

Yes. However, as HVS is an 'outstanding' school, under the current arrangements we are unlikely to be inspected.

What is the time scale for conversion?

Currently, schools can convert in 3 to 5 months. The DfE have announced that there will be monthly conversion opportunities on the first day of each subsequent month.

If schools become Academies what would happen to the remainder of Surrey schools?

Our understanding is their position with Surrey will not change.

What is the proposed Governor structure?

This is a decision for the Governing Body, but no substantial change to the Governing Body of the school is expected, both Parent and Staff Governors would continue to be elected.

Would there be any narrowing of the curriculum offer if Academy status was adopted?

Academy status does allow the opportunity to be more selective about the curriculum. We do not anticipate any narrowing of our current range because we believe that we currently provide an outstanding curriculum for our children.

Why is the conversion being considered now?

Over half the secondary schools in the country are considering conversion and there is an increase in the need for primaries to convert to support other schools in the community. It would be remiss of HVS not to consider the opportunity.

Is there any need to convert before the start of the next academic year?

Should the decision be taken to convert, the intention of the school leadership is to make a smooth transition in which children, staff and parents are unlikely to perceive any change – there certainly should be no disruption to the normal running of the school. When considering the timetable for conversion, we are anxious to gain maximum benefits which are likely to be achieved by going sooner rather than later, if we decide to convert.

What assurances do we have that someone impartial and with the power to influence matters, will be available to hear our concerns and complaints when necessary?

The Governing Body take their monitoring role very seriously and would continue to do so if we became an Academy.

Will the school just be answerable to the Secretary of State for Education/DfE and will this be the only effective body to which the school is answerable?

In theory, we are answerable to the Secretary of State rather than the Local Authority, but we would be subject to many of the same checks on school performance and standards as currently.

Will existing support services such as outreach services be reduced because the school has to 'buy' them in?

No

Who makes the decision to convert to Academy Status?

The Governing Body of The Horsell Village School.

Why do the Governors have the final decision?

The Governing Body are elected to ensure the highest educational, legal and moral standards. The decision whether or not to convert to Academy status is one that resides quite properly and solely with this body - The Governing Body of The Horsell Village School. Stakeholders can be confident that Governors have the best interest of the children and school at heart and will make the most appropriate decision for the future of the school.