

KESTRELS' FIELD PRIMARY SCHOOL

ACADEMY CONSULTATION

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Last updated 29 January 2019 to include questions asked at staff and parent meetings
(additions featured in blue)

GENERAL

What is an academy?

An academy is essentially a non-fee charging, independent school which is funded by the state. It is independent of the local authority and receives its funding direct from central government. There is more information about academies on the [Department for Education website](#).

What is an academy trust?

This is a charitable company that has to be set up to run an academy or group of academies. A multi-academy trust (MAT) is an academy trust with more than one academy. An academy trust is responsible and accountable for the performance of all the academies within the trust and sets the vision, strategic direction and values for the trust. As the legally accountable body, the academy trust is the employer, admissions authority and enters into contracts. All academies within a trust are governed by the trust.

An academy trust is subject to company and charity law, it is not allowed to 'own' schools and it cannot profit from the academies it controls. Year-end accounts must be sent to Companies House within strict time limits and be published on the academy trust's website.

The academy trust enters into a funding agreement with the Department for Education which is the contract by which the trust agrees to provide educational services in exchange for funding. Usually the academy trust enters into a leasehold agreement with the local authority when taking a school into the trust.

What is The Mead Educational Trust (TMET)?

[TMET](#) is a multi-academy trust currently comprising seven schools and a new school:

- five Leicester primary schools: Willowbrook Primary Academy, Thurnby Lodge Primary Academy, Northfield House Primary Academy, Knighton Fields Primary Academy and Rowlatts Hill Primary Academy;
- two Leicester secondary schools: Rushey Mead Academy and Hamilton Academy; and
- a new Leicester secondary school due to open in September 2019: Castle Mead Academy.

How big will TMET grow?

TMET is expected to be 10 schools by the start of the 2019/20 academic year (7 listed above, Castle Mead, Abbey Primary and Kestrels' Field). The current plan is to grow to 15 to 20 schools but it depends on the size of schools that join – a secondary school can be significantly larger than a primary. TMET intends to remain a local trust which could include schools within Leicestershire County.

What checks and balances are there for academies and academy trusts?

Academies are still subject to Ofsted inspections as they are as local authority maintained schools. The Regional Schools Commissioners act on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education and are responsible for academies in their region. Amongst other things, they monitor and review the performance of academies, take

action when academies underperform and make decisions on applications from schools to convert to academy status.

The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) is an executive agency, sponsored by the Department for Education, which is accountable for funding education and skills for children, young people and adults. Amongst other things, the ESFA regulates academies, intervening where there is a risk of failure or where there is evidence of mismanagement of public funds. The ESFA publishes the [Academies Financial Handbook](#) which describes the financial requirements for academy trusts, including the requirement for academy trusts to have annual external and internal financial audits.

THE PROCESS OF CONVERSION

Will our school definitely become an academy?

The school is not obligated to become an academy until the contract between The Mead Educational Trust (TMET) and the Department for Education (known as the Funding Agreement) is signed. This will not be signed until parents and carers of pupils at the school, staff at the school, and pupils themselves have had the opportunity to comment on the proposals during the consultation period. Any comments or representations which are made about the proposals will be considered by the governing body before it takes the final decision about converting to academy status.

At the same time, TMET will conduct due diligence on the school which means that it will look at areas such as the school's education standards, staffing, finances and buildings to assess what the school could bring to the Trust and whether there are any risks in bringing the school into the Trust. TMET will not sign the Funding Agreement unless they are content that conversion would be in the best interests of both the school and the Trust, taking account of all of the legal and practical ramifications.

What was considered by the governing body in making the decision to convert to academy status and why did it take so long?

The governing body wanted to take its time to ensure they made the right decision. It has been a four-year process to come to the decision to propose academy conversion and joining TMET.

When Mrs Simpson became the Headteacher, the focus was on securing a more stable financial situation for the school and getting to a 'Good' Ofsted rating, which was achieved in the April 2017 inspection. The governing body also wanted Mrs Simpson to have time to get to know Kestrels' Field in depth before any decision about the long term future of the school was taken with her.

By June 2018 the governing body had concluded that, to secure long term sustainability of the school, joining a multi academy trust made sense. They carried out a thorough investigation of academy trusts and, by November 2018, had agreed that TMET was the right choice for Kestrels' Field. Previously, TMET had been considered as a possibility but, at the time, it was a relatively new trust and the governing body wanted to have the confidence that it was secure and sustainable. By November 2018 TMET had been in existence for over 4 years, was being confirmed to be well managed and was demonstrating a good track record in school improvement. The governing body liked the fact that TMET is a local option, works well for its academies and offers Kestrels' Field the best way to develop further.

The governing body carried out its own due diligence on TMET. Representatives from the Trust met with the governing body, TMET answered detailed written questions and members of the Kestrels' Field senior leadership team talked to leaders at TMET primary schools. This process satisfied the governing body that TMET is the right fit for Kestrels' Field.

Is there a cost to academy conversion and how is that covered?

Yes, for things such as solicitor's fees and licences for the services used by the Trust. The Department for Education provides a conversion grant of £25,000 so there should be no cost to the school budget for academy conversion.

What is timeframe for conversion?

The conversion process usually takes 5 or 6 months to complete though this can take longer if there are any specific issues with things such as the buildings and site.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND DISADVANTAGES

What are the benefits of being an academy in The Mead Educational Trust (TMET)?

The governing body believes that the benefits include opportunities to:

- work with the other schools in TMET to share thinking and planning in order to spread expertise and tackle challenges together;
- engage in sustained school-to-school support;
- share staff across more than one school, enabling schools to find different solutions to recruitment challenges, to retain staff by providing new opportunities and to plan succession more effectively;
- work as a group of schools to find and fund specialist expertise and provide richer curricular and extra-curricular activities;
- share staff professional development; and,
- seek economies of scale through group business management and collective purchasing.

What are the disadvantages?

Every school that joins an academy trust loses some autonomy. The trust board and executive team will retain some control over areas such as senior leader appointments, the school budget and reserves and policies. It is worth saying that such control at a central level can ensure more consistency and a level of assurance for each school. Any school choosing to join an academy trust needs to weigh up the loss of some control against the potential benefits.

How does TMET improve standards in its schools?

All the primary academies in TMET have improved since joining the Trust. Major factors in this are the:

- sharing of staff, expertise and training opportunities;
- collaborative groups, including principals, business managers, premises officers, stretch and challenge, maths, English, special educational needs and early years; and,
- close monitoring of academies and rapid response to any drop in standards or to any problems.

Why does it take so long to improve some schools?

A school is a very complex organisation. There are some quick fixes you can make but it takes time to improve overall and in way that is sustainable in the long term. For example, if there was previously poor teaching, it will take time to develop teacher skills and subject knowledge through things such as training, coaching and mentoring. A major part of improving a school is to identify and address gaps in the pupils' learning which again takes time. As improvements are made, there should be an increase in progress through the school which, in turn, has an impact on the final results, but it can take a few years for the legacy of poor provision to work its way out of the school.

TMET has taken in, or worked with, a number of schools which have needed to make significant improvements. Some, such as Northfield House and Knighton Fields Primary Academies, have made huge strides in the last

few years. Hamilton Academy has been in TMET for just over a year and a firm foundation has been developed for sustained improvement. A secondary school can take longer to improve than a primary because it is so much larger and more complex. TMET has also learnt a great deal about how to effect rapid improvements through its experience with these and other schools.

It should be emphasised that these comments do not apply to Kestrels' Field which is in a strong position and is expected to bring additional capacity to TMET.

WHAT WOULD CHANGE?

Will the school change?

For pupils and parents/carers, it is unlikely that they will see much, if any, change in their day-to-day school lives. Academies do have the power to vary their curriculum and vary the length of the school day. However, TMET does not intend to take any such steps at this stage and we would engage with parents/carers, staff and pupils if any such changes were proposed in the future. All TMET academies continue to follow the National Curriculum and assess children using national standards.

Will SEN (special educational needs) work in the same way?

Yes, the way funding for SEN works the same once you become an academy and the process for applying for an Education, Health and Care Plan is the same.

Will Ofsted still inspect the school?

Yes, Ofsted carries out inspections of academies. Once a school becomes an academy, they usually do not carry out an inspection until its third year of operation.

What routes will parents have to complain about concerns?

TMET has a Trust-wide [complaints procedure](#) which sets out the stages of a complaint.

Will there be equal access to all secondary schools by Kestrels' Field Primary and its pupils?

Yes, there will. All secondary schools that want to engage with Kestrels' Field will still be welcome to do so. The school newsletter includes information about secondary school open evenings where details are sent to Kestrels' Field. Parents will continue to be encouraged to apply for the secondary schools that they consider will be best for their child.

It is worth noting that academies are responsible for their own admissions arrangements but that all the TMET academies' admissions are administered by Leicester City Council schools' admissions process. So parents will see no difference in applying for school places between TMET academies and maintained schools (they are all listed on the admissions system) and it will make no difference whether the child is moving from a primary academy or maintained school. The admissions arrangements for TMET secondary academies do not give any preference to children who have attended TMET primary academies.

TMET is working hard to improve Hamilton Academy and its reputation so that it becomes a first choice school for more families. One part of this is a name change from Hamilton to Orchard Mead Academy this year.

Kestrels' Field would like to develop a stronger relationship with Hamilton Academy as a local secondary school as that would benefit all the children at Kestrels' Field regardless of where they subsequently go to secondary school.

STAFFING

Will the school still have a headteacher?

Yes. All the TMET academies have a headteacher (known as the principal) and some also have an Executive principal. Northfield House Primary Academy had a part time head of school for two years who worked with the executive principal. At the time the academy needed additional leadership capacity. From the start of the 2018/19 academic year, Northfield House has a principal like the other academies.

Will Mrs Simpson stay on as Headteacher?

Yes, if she wants to. Mrs Simpson is recognised by TMET as a very effective leader at Kestrels' Field so would not plan to move her. It is worth mentioning that, if a Headteacher leaves or is off for a period of time, the Trust can provide rapid support in the form of an interim Headteacher or an Executive Headteacher to support a Deputy to step up temporarily.

Will staff be moved around the different academies in the Trust?

Staff who already work at a school on joining the Trust will not be required to work in another TMET academy, although they are welcome to put themselves forward to do so if they wish. Many members of staff in the Trust have recognised that secondments to other Trust academies can provide them with opportunities to stretch and develop themselves and to gain additional experience and skills. Staff who join a Trust academy once it is in TMET have a clause in their contract to say that they can be deployed to any TMET academy as required although the Trust would seek to do this in agreement with the individual.

What support will there be for support staff?

All the business managers attend a fortnightly Operational Improvement Forum with the TMET Chief Financial Officer and Operations Manager and there is a regular Premises Officers' Forum. These provide an opportunity for attendees to share effective practice and work together on solving specific challenges. The academies hold some joint staff training days and support staff may have sessions together, e.g. for office staff. Some support staff positions are shared between more than one academy and some have swapped to give them additional experience. TMET is open to further ideas.

Does TMET take steps to improve staff wellbeing?

TMET conducts an annual staff survey and uses the results to inform developments. The Trust Early Years Foundation Stage Lead Practitioner recently carried out a review of EYFS across the Trust which included looking at workload. The Trust HR Manager has staff wellbeing as one of her areas of focus.

How do the Primary Lead Practitioners work?

There are currently five Lead Practitioners (LPs) who are practising teachers working in TMET academies and who applied for the LP role. Their academy agrees to release them to support TMET academies. The five areas the LPs cover are: maths, literacy, English as an Additional Language, attendance and behaviour and Early Years Foundation Stage. These areas were chosen by the academy principals as areas of priority for them. For 2019/20 they will look afresh at the LP roles, will agree which areas they want to cover and recruitment to the roles will be carried out, so giving other teachers the opportunity to be an LP.

STAFF TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Will staff have the same pay and conditions?

If the school converts to an academy, all staff currently employed by the local authority will transfer to employment by TMET on at least their current pay and conditions. Full details of the transfer arrangements will be discussed with staff at a TUPE meeting arranged by the LA. Any subsequent changes to terms and conditions of staff in the Trust have to be consulted on.

Will pensions be affected for staff?

No. All teachers, both current and future, will be in the Teachers' Pension Scheme. All non-teaching staff, both current and future will be offered the Local Government Pension Scheme which replicates the current position. Employer contributions and the ability to make additional contributions will be unchanged.

Will staff have continuous service if they become academy trust staff?

On the transfer to academy status, all staff continuous service will be protected for redundancy and other purposes. In the instance of redundancy, for all staff, continuity of service for the purpose of redundancy calculations is protected by the 'Redundancy Modifications Order'. This amends the employment regulations so that, if an employee moves employment between bodies in a specified list of public employers, then continuity of service is retained for redundancy. Local authorities and academies are on this list so continuity of service is retained for staff moving back and forth between these employers for redundancy purposes.

Will unions be recognised?

Yes. TMET has continued union arrangements when a school joins the Trust. In addition, the Trust holds a termly meeting with all the unions which are represented amongst the Trust employees to consult on HR policies and procedures and any other relevant matters.

What support and training will staff be offered?

The Trust is committed to developing staff at all levels and makes this a high priority. Staff are encouraged to engage in training and development programmes and some staff have taken up the opportunity to work in other Trust academies or across several academies, which has enabled them to develop their skills. The Trust academies work together to plan some of their training so they can afford to buy in high quality facilitators and benefit from working across academies. The Leicester Teaching School is part of the Trust and provides a range of excellent development programmes and training workshops for teachers, school leaders and governors.

FINANCES**Where does the funding for academies come from?**

Academy funding comes from the Government but, instead of it coming via the local authority, it comes via the academy trust. Each academy in a trust gets an allocation based on the number of children and additional funding for factors such as disadvantage and special educational needs.

Will there be a difference in the funding on becoming an academy?

The academies in TMET get a similar amount of funding as they did when they were maintained schools (under local authority control). For maintained schools, the local authority retains some of the education funding to pay for their central education services. In the same way, TMET retains some funding to pay for its central services.

The TMET academies are able to gain from economies of scale and collective bargaining in buying services and resources.

GOVERNANCE**How does governance work in an academy trust?**

A trust has to have Members (who are effectively guardians of the constitution) and a Board of Trustees (who govern the trust). The Board decides how governance works at a local level and TMET has an academy council to govern each academy. See the [TMET website](#) for more information. Responsibilities for the different levels

of governance, Executive Team and principals in the Trust are set out in the TMET Scheme of Delegation which can be found on the TMET website [here](#).

What will happen to governance at the school on conversion?

On academy conversion the governing body of the school will be reconstituted and an academy council will be set up. In TMET each academy council is typically made up of 9 people: 2 parents, 2 staff, academy principal and 4 Trust-appointed members. Usually many of the existing governors of the school joining the Trust transfer over onto the academy council. As vacancies arise, parents and staff members are recruited through an election process which is the same as in maintained schools. Trust-appointed members are appointed by the Trust Head of Governance in agreement with the chair of the academy council and the academy principal.