

Anti Academies Alliance



‘Volunteer’ converter academies briefing

“A good
local school
for every
child”

Why are schools choosing to become academies?

There is huge political pressure for schools to convert. Government is using a ‘carrot and stick’ approach. Schools in OFSTED categories can be forced. By raising the ‘floor targets’ Gove intends to force more schools (see our Forced Academies briefing). But other schools have a choice. Over half of secondary schools have chosen academy status, but only about 6% of primaries have done so.

The Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove MP, has made clear he wants all schools to be academies by 2015. He is using additional financial incentives and DfE hired brokers to pressure schools to convert. As a result, many head teachers and governors are assuming this is the ‘only game in town’ or that it is ‘inevitable’. Those supporting academy conversion cite a number of reasons, all of which they claim are positive benefits and all of which are dubious. For example, they argue that:

● **“There is more money for academies”** – There is no extra money for academies. There is a grant for the legal costs of transfer. Academies get ‘LACSEG’ money that the Local Authority used to spend on services to schools. But academies still have to buy

equivalent services, often paying more for them.

● **“There is more ‘freedom’ for academies”** – Academies stop being part of the local family of schools under the Local Authority. They become directly controlled by central government through a ‘funding agreement’. They have freedom to vary the curriculum, pay and conditions and the school day. Academies do not have to employ qualified teachers or follow other regulations e.g. on school food. These freedoms are presented as a benefit, but who benefits? There is no evidence that children benefit. Your current head teacher and governors may promise that they will follow the existing regulations and nothing will change but how long will they be in post?

● **“The Local Authority can no longer provide services”** – Local Authorities (LAs) have seen severe cuts and this has reduced the services available. But they continue to have statutory responsibilities for children. There is no question of this ‘middle tier’ disappearing (the recent Academies Commission recommended that local

authorities should “embrace a stronger role in education”). Some LAs are now improving services and increasing their support for schools. Others are trying to ‘wash their hands’ of responsibility for political reasons.

Unfortunately some head teachers, and the consultants they employ to promote academy conversion, are overstating the benefits. They have a vested interest in doing so. Estimates suggest head teachers’ pay is 30% higher in academies. Schools often recruit private companies such as Strictly Education to manage the process and they make profits out of each conversion.

How is the decision to convert made?

The governing body of the school makes the decision often with only a limited consultation. This has created much controversy. Why are other stakeholders – parents and staff - not given democratic rights in the decision making process? This issue lies at the heart of the concerns about academy status. If it is such a good idea, why can’t all stakeholders have a say in the decision? >>>

What should you do if your school is considering academy conversion?

● **Act quickly** – The process of decision making can be as short as six weeks! Ask the head and governors to be clear and transparent about the process.

● **Get advice** – The AAA has resources and advice available by email, phone or on our website and social media.

● **Demand full and democratic consultation** – Staff and parents have a right to consultation in an open, democratic way. There should be opportunities for both sides of the argument to be heard. In some cases parental and staff ballots have been held and governors have agreed to be

bound by the decisions of stakeholders. This is a really important decision for the community because academy conversion is forever and cannot be undone.

● **Make sure your voice is heard** – Parents and staff can find different ways to make sure they are listened to. This can include petitions, leaflets and protests. The AAA can help. Staff should always seek advice from their trade unions.

● **Use the local media** – Academy conversion is a controversial issue. Most local media outlets – radio, TV and

newspapers – will cover the issue sensitively. You can also use social media like Facebook and Twitter.

● **Build alliances with other stakeholders** – Schools have different stakeholders – parents, future parents, staff, the local community and political representatives such as MPs and Councillors. It is important to involve all these groups in the discussion.

● **Be prepared for hard hitting and coordinated action** – Experience has shown that academy conversion can be stopped when parents and staff take action together.

Ten things you should know about academies

1. Academy conversion means schools become businesses run by directors of a trust. The trust appoints its own governors to run the school. Critics argue that this is 'privatisation'.

2. Academies are exempt from most education legislation (e.g. they can employ unqualified teachers and ignore school food regulations) and they can change their admissions criteria. The 2013 Academies Commission reported that there is evidence that schools that control their own admissions are more likely to be socially selective.

3. Academy conversion is motivated more by politics than educational 'best practice'. Mr Gove wants to create a 'market' in education in which schools compete with each other. He calls this a 'supply side revolution'. But research, for example on the London Challenge, shows that children do better when their schools

collaborate rather than compete.

4. Academy conversion is part of the government's agenda to privatise public services, as in the NHS. There are now several big businesses running chains of academies. These chains want to expand and they can take over volunteer academies.

5. Head teachers are being encouraged to set up their own chains of academies by 'mergers and acquisitions'. There is no guarantee that your headteacher and governors will stay on.

6. There is no evidence that becoming an academy improves a school. Some academies have been successful. But some are failing. The government presents the statistics to make academies appear more successful than other schools.

7. Critics argue the academies programme is having a negative impact on the wider education

system. After 10 years of the programme, UK schools remain 'among the most segregated in the developed world' according to a recent OECD report.

8. Although academies are not run for profit, there are many companies making profits from the programme. Other schools are being run on a 'for profit' basis and the Secretary of State has said he would be comfortable with academies making profits.

9. Critics warn that, as the impact of austerity becomes more severe, school budgets will be threatened. They say it is better for schools to stick together in their local family of schools.

10. Academy conversions can be successfully opposed. We rarely hear success stories in the national media, but many schools have considered conversion, and rejected it.

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