Academies
Everything you need to know
Thinking about applying for a place at an Academy?

Choosing the school that will be right for your child is an enormous decision that will affect the rest of their lives. If you live close to an Academy, or have heard about one in your area, you may be wondering if that could be the best school for your child.

Academies are a different kind of free state school. They’re different from regular maintained schools, and this leaflet gives you straight, factual information about what you and your kids can expect from them.

“I have a 13-year-old son at The Marlowe Academy, and have been really impressed with how they’ve supported and encouraged him here. He’s come on leaps and bounds since starting.”
Doug Thomson, Gravesend, Kent
So what exactly is an Academy?

**What is an Academy?**
Academies are a different kind of free state school. They aim to offer the very best standards of education and facilities. They have the freedom to structure their days and their curriculum a little differently. This is to allow them to achieve huge improvements in standards of education rapidly. Each Academy is different, but what unites them is their drive for excellence – for all children to have the opportunity to excel and to achieve the very best they can.

**How do they work?**
Academies teach a broad range of subjects which includes English, maths, science and ICT. However, they do not need local authority permission to change the way they teach, or the hours that they teach. This means they can be more flexible, and adapt the curriculum and teaching styles to children’s specific needs. Every Academy has a specialist subject, so they might dedicate extra time to subjects like sport, science, music, communications, drama and the arts or technology.

It’s not unusual for Academies to start early in the morning, for their lesson times to be longer – or for them to stay open until late evening to provide a wide range of extra-curricular clubs and activities.

“I used to go to a private school, but the facilities and curriculum choices are so good at the Academy that I decided to come here instead.”
Demie, 15, David Young Community Academy, Leeds
What’s the big idea?
The original idea was that Academies would replace state schools where exam grades were not high enough – or would be built as new schools in areas where there weren’t enough school places. A number of independent schools have also now decided to become Academies, which means that they no longer select just the brightest students or charge fees. To become an Academy, an independent school must agree to take on an underperforming school and help to turn it around.

Even some successful maintained schools have decided to become Academies. This is because the Academies programme allows these schools to push their already excellent levels of attainment even higher – and to offer their high standards to many more children.

“At my school we can do two GCSEs in Year 9. I’m doing IT and Tech, in product design. We’re using CAD to design our products.”
Matt, 13, John Cabot Academy, Bristol
What difference will an Academy make to my kids?
After an Academy opens, it usually relocates to brand new buildings, with completely new facilities. Children who go to them get to use the very best equipment and learn in modern, purpose-built buildings. Another difference could be in uniform – it’s not unusual for Academies to expect students to be smart at all times, because they believe this generates pride in the students themselves, and in the school. Academies also offer brilliant out of school opportunities – they often provide hundreds of clubs and activities for children to join.

But the biggest difference is in the spirit of the school. The whole point of Academies is to get children to believe in themselves and their futures, and Academies are very positive places where kids are expected to be the very best they can be. Bright children flourish because excellence is positively encouraged, and less academic children get the best chances because teaching and the curriculum can be adapted for their needs. The Academies system is all about not letting any children fall through the cracks.

“I never thought I’d hear myself say this, but I like coming to school. The teachers don’t think I’m stupid if I don’t understand – they just find a different way of explaining until you get it.”
Lee, 15, David Young Community Academy, Leeds
Sponsorship - what is that all about?

Every Academy has a sponsor. A sponsor can be a person, group or organisation that dedicates time, skills, experience and energy to setting up and managing an Academy.

Sponsors can be individuals with strong links to the town or city where the Academy is being set up, like business people. Or they can be companies, charities, universities or educational groups.

When someone wants to become a sponsor, they have to apply to the Government. The Government checks out why they want to run a school, and how they hope to introduce improvements.

The Government needs sponsors to be genuinely fired up about providing a great education and solid future for kids.

The sponsor’s biggest contribution is to bring a fresh way of thinking about the way things are done in schools.
John Laycock – sponsor

Successful businessman and former Chairman of Bristol City Football Club, John Laycock, sponsors The City Academy in Bristol.

Already a governor at another local school, he decided to become the Academy’s sponsor when he was approached by Principal Ray Priest.

He says that the combination of his business insight, and Principal Ray Priest’s distinguished education background has allowed them to make positive changes, rapidly.

He says: “I believe in the Academies system and Academies generally. It’s a fantastic opportunity to look at traditional methods of education and bring something fresh and new, and I believe that the input that we’re able to give will make a significant difference to children’s lives.

“As a sponsor of the Academy, I think it’s really important that we look at society generally. I personally have done well out of business, and I love the thought that I can put something back into the community – and I know I’m doing that when I see the smile on the faces of the children. It’s absolutely uplifting.”

www.cityacademybristol.co.uk
“We enjoy a very special relationship with our sponsors. They prompt us to think differently. We have an absolute agreement as to how they would like a young person to be as they leave The Harefield Academy so we have that shared vision. But on a day-to-day basis they allow me and the educationists and the other people who are working at the Academy to make the decisions. They inspire us to greater things. They can make suggestions that are sometimes completely out of the blue, but make a difference to our community. We thoroughly enjoy working with them, it’s a very special and unique relationship.”

Lynn Gadd, Principal, The Harefield Academy

Oasis Community Learning is part of the family of Oasis Charities, which develop housing, health and education programmes and facilities throughout the world.

When the Government launched the Academies programme, Oasis had already been working in education for many years.

“The Academies programme is a perfect fit for us,” says Oasis Community Learning Founder and CEO, Steve Chalke MBE.

“We have a genuine desire to play a positive role in society and to improve opportunities for young people.”

The charity’s aim is to create “learning communities where everyone can reach their full potential”.

Its Academies have different specialisms and each one is twinned with an Oasis project overseas. They are not selective schools (either for faith or ability), and promote knowledge and understanding of all beliefs.

www.oasiscommunitylearning.org
But are Academies working?

Academies often replace a school where kids weren’t doing very well in exams, so some Academies are starting from a very low level of achievement. However, the statistics already look good.

Academies are achieving big year on year increases in their English and maths results – well above the national average.

GCSE results

A total of 36 Academies have been open long enough to have had results in both 2007 and 2008. In 2008, 55.2% of children in these schools achieved at least five grades A*-C at GCSE. This is an increase of 11.5% on 2007 – which is more than twice the national average of 4.6%.

The increase in students at these 36 Academies gaining five good grades or more at GCSE including maths and English is 4.3%. This compares to a 2.5% increase nationally.

55% of children in Academies that have been taking GCSEs since 2007 gained five or more grades A*-C in 2008.

29.5% of children in these Academies gained five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C in 2008, including maths and English.

These tables show how exam results have been improving in Academies.

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<th>Percentage of 16 year-olds in Academies gaining five or more A*-C grades at GCSE, including English and maths (simple average)</th>
<th>Average improvement for all Academies at Key Stage 3 over the period 2002–2007</th>
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<td><strong>2003</strong></td>
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<td>14.1%</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
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“This is substantially higher than the average annual change for England as a whole over the same period.”

“…above the average for England as a whole.”

“…much higher than the average improvements for England as a whole.”

These Academies are improving at more than twice the rate of all other schools nationally.

In the 62 Academies that had predecessor schools, and that took GCSEs in 2008, the percentage of children gaining five or more A*-C grades improved by 32.2%, compared to results at the school they replaced.

In 2001, the percentage of improvement in the predecessor schools was just 23.2%. In 2008 in Academies, that figure had risen to 55.5%.
Capital City Academy, London

Capital City Academy opened in 2003 and specialises in sport and the arts.

It replaced Willesden High School, where just 12% of children gained a single grade C or higher in their GCSEs.

In 2008, the Academy got its best results ever. A total of 98% of students achieved at least one qualification, and 58% gained five or more good GCSE results. A total of 27% of students attained five grade A*-C at GCSE, including maths and English.

Principal Alex Thomas said: “We set challenging targets for our students and they have made outstanding progress. The positive Ofsted judgement in November 2008 identified a good school with many outstanding features and we are seeking to build on these achievements.”
That’s all well and good, but...

But don’t Academies just take the cleverest children? Academies are bound by the same laws as other schools to cater for children of all abilities, including children with special educational needs (SEN). Academies certainly do encourage excellence – and they believe that every child should be allowed to achieve the very best that they can. Both bright and less academic children flourish in Academies, because teaching can be tailored to suit each different child’s needs.

My child goes to the school that is going to be replaced – will he or she automatically get a place at the Academy?

If the Academy is only replacing one school, then your child will automatically be guaranteed a place. If the Academy is going to bring together two or more schools, then places will be allocated in exactly the same way as any school merger. Admissions are fair, and and must be in accordance with the School Admissions Code.

Can my child attend the Academy if he or she didn’t go to the old school?

Children can apply for a place in an Academy, in the same way that they do for any other state school.

I’ve heard that Academies just expel all the children they don’t want there… The figures show that many Academies have exclusion rates that are no higher than in the rest of their local authority. However, because some Academies start out with groups of extremely disruptive children, exclusions may be higher in the early days of the school so that the majority of children aren’t made to suffer through the bad behaviour of a few. That said, many Academies are justifiably proud of their inclusion programmes for more disruptive children – and some have made no exclusions at all.

Do you have to pay? No. Academies are state schools. They are completely free of charge.

Do Academies get more funding than other schools? The Government always aims to provide an equivalent amount of funding for Academies as it does for other state schools. The National Audit Office has said that the formula the Government uses to do this works.

Do Academies teach strange subjects? All Academies teach a broad and balanced curriculum that includes maths, English, science and ICT. Academies have the flexibility to structure their curriculum in the way the school’s leaders think will best serve its pupils and the wider community. All Academies specialise in one or two subjects, like languages, technology, business, science, maths or music – but your child does not have to excel in these subjects to do well. Academies also teach a range of qualifications, which can include the International Baccalaureat, A Levels, GCSEs, BTECs and Diplomas. To find out what qualifications your local Academy teaches, check its website, or call its reception.

What is a sponsor? A sponsor is an individual or organisation who makes a long-term commitment to an Academy, dedicating time, money and insight to improving education and life chances for its students. A sponsor can be an individual, like a business person – or a group, charity, local authority or university. When an Academy is being set up, the sponsor helps shape the vision and ethos for the school, defining the values that will govern the way it operates. Once the Academy has opened, the sponsor works in partnership with the principal, bringing insights and fresh approaches.

Why do Academies need sponsors? Sponsors have an important role in getting schools to operate in ways that will make success happen quickly. They often bring experience from outside of secondary education, and have a different way of looking at the world. This means they can often see ways of working or solving problems that wouldn’t be the first thing teachers and educationalists might normally think of.

How can you be sure about the motivation of sponsors? When a potential sponsor lets the Government know that they’d like to support an Academy, they are thoroughly vetted, and their motives for wanting to become involved are scrutinised. Some sponsors are charities or groups. For example, the Harris Federation of South London Schools sponsor of 10 Academies, is an education charity with a long history of running successful schools.

What happens if a sponsor goes bust? A sponsor does not directly run an Academy. Rather, they set up a trust which appoints the governors. If a sponsor’s business gets into difficulties, the Academy and the trust are unaffected.

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What happens if a sponsor decides to pull out of an Academy?
When a person or organisation agrees to become a sponsor, they commit to doing so for at least seven years. However, if a sponsor wants to withdraw, they can give notice. If they do this, they are expected to stay in place until another sponsor has been appointed by Government.

What happens if the Government is not happy with the sponsor? Government takes a keen interest in the effectiveness and direction of sponsors. Where an academy is not making satisfactory progress the Government will work closely with the sponsor to secure whatever changes are necessary to accelerate progress. This may include a change of leadership, a new partnership with a successful strong Academy, sponsor, partner or school.

Don’t Academies just represent the privatisation of education? No. Academies are state-funded schools. Their sponsors cannot and do not make a profit from their involvement with Academies. There has to be agreement between the Government, the local authority and the sponsor on things like the size of the Academy, its specialism, and the ages of pupils it will cater for.

I’ve heard people say on the news that Academies are secretive places… Although Academies have greater freedoms than other schools, they cannot hide what they do and how they operate. Every Academy has a member of the local authority on its board of governors. Academies are also inspected by OFSTED, and their exam results are published in exactly the same way as all other state schools. The Government also publishes other information about Academies, including expressions of interest from sponsors, funding agreements and attendance figures. You can find much of that information here www.dcsf.gov.uk/foischeme/.

It seems like the teachers aren’t in charge… A school is only as good as its teachers. The relationship between sponsor and principal is one of partnership. The sponsor brings a fresh perspective, business contacts and new ideas, while the principal and his or her staff bring expertise and experience in teaching.

Do Academies get inspected like normal schools? The year after an Academy opens, OFSTED inspects it and publishes a report on their website. Then in the third year after it has opened, an Academy has a full OFSTED inspection, which is carried out in exactly the same way as for other schools.

Will my kids have to go and work for the sponsor? Not at all. Sponsors sometimes come from industry or business, but they can also be faith groups, charities, universities or other schools. The sponsor just brings a new way of thinking to the way the school is run. They are not there to recruit new staff, and the education provided at an Academy is free of charge, with no strings attached.

Will I have to spend loads of money on uniforms and equipment? Like most state schools, Academies are very conscious of the cost of uniforms and equipment and will do their best to make sure that they are not too expensive. What Academies will probably expect is for uniforms to be kept smart, and for dress codes to be strictly adhered to. Often, uniforms for a new Academy are provided free of charge, or are subsidised.

Will my kids get picked on if they go to an Academy? Good behaviour is a high priority for all Academies. A survey of pupils at Academies showed that most Year 7 pupils feel safe and believe that their work has improved since they started the school. A total of 84% said they felt safe during break and lunchtimes. The principals and sponsors of Academies often work closely with the leaders of other local schools to prevent inter-school problems. And Academies also have the flexibility to set different home times from other schools in the area. Newly built Academies often feature wide open spaces so that trouble can be spotted immediately, and initiatives like vertical tutor groups – where students of all ages study together – are often used to generate warm, supportive environments for all children.

“I enjoy the extra activities we get to do, last term I did dance club and this term I’m doing girls’ football. We’ve got a match against another school on Thursday, so I hope we beat them.”
Charlotte, 11, The Marlowe Academy, Ramsgate

Got more questions? Just turn over the page...