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ACADEMY STATUS FAQs

1. Why convert?

This is not a political/philosophical decision – it is a pragmatic decision. A key influence is the additional money (without which we will undoubtedly have to make cuts in staffing as well as other expenditure areas); however other factors are also important:

- Barnet has encouraged schools to seek Academy status
- We do not currently have out of hours use of our Sports Centre. Lettings income goes to GLL but the school receives no money for the additional wear and tear or lettings income.
- Barnet has shown little interest in investing in QEGS – all new buildings in the last 15 years have been provided from our own resources, even though Barnet has been aware for many years that our buildings are poor
- Even necessary works have not been prioritised by Barnet. For example, Barnet undertook survey work to upgrade heating which we were told would start in 2009 or 2010. Although a specification was completed for this, the work was taken out of the programme (before we considered Academy status) and we have been told it is not required.
- The school cannot afford to be the only Outstanding school which fails to convert as this may be negatively perceived by parents (current and future)
- The pace of converting is increasing and the advantages will be greater for the schools which convert at an early stage.

2. What are other schools in Barnet doing?

The other Barnet secondary schools are at the following stages in the conversion process:

Academies on old model

The London Academy

The Wren Academy

Already converted

Queen Elizabeth's School

The Ashmole Academy

The Compton School

East Barnet

Approved but yet to convert

Ravenscroft

Henrietta Barnett

Whitefield

QEGS

Applications pending

Mill Hill County

St Michael's

Hasmonean High School

Independent Jewish Day School (primary)

Other schools where discussions are underway

Christ's College

Hendon School
Cophall School

The catholic schools are all interested in this route but are awaiting permission from the diocese to proceed. This is the situation as far as I am aware.

There are 21 maintained secondary schools in Barnet. More than a quarter have academy status already. Three quarters are somewhere on the route to conversion.

We are also aware that neighbouring schools outside Barnet are also seeking to convert e.g. Dame Alice Owens, Mount Grace both in Potters Bar.

The very high proportion of Barnet schools which are working towards conversion would mean that we could be at a significant disadvantage if we were to remain a community school. For example, rather than taking a share of students who have been excluded or are hard to place we could receive a disproportionate number if all/most other community schools had become academies.

3. As an Academy, will staff still work with the Local Authority?

Academies are not maintained by the Local Authority. However, being at the centre of our local community in Barnet, we will continue to work with other schools and local partners, which is what we have traditionally sought to do.

Barnet have encouraged secondary schools in particular to seek Academy status. The LA has indicated that they would still wish to work with schools and maintain a relationship with schools that become academies.

4. Will we lose services from Barnet?

Barnet's level of services to secondary schools has been reducing for some time. The Secondary Strategy (funded by national government) ceased at the end of March. Other services e.g. EWO service, careers etc have been very significantly reduced and there is little/no service left to be cut. For example, we have not been informed yet about careers advice but we understand that there will be a maximum of 0.5 days per week; other things e.g. work experience placements will double in price. There is no secondary EWO service any more. This is irrespective of the status of the school.

Barnet does not intend to provide any services free to secondary schools unless it is something which is required statutorily e.g. some educational psychology resource for SEN.

5. What about other Barnet services which we currently buy?

We currently buy a number of services from Barnet e.g. HR and payroll. These services are available through the Traded Services arrangements and are being offered this year at the same cost to Academies. Where we continue to be happy with the quality and value for money of the service offered we will continue to buy it.

We also have the scope to buy services from elsewhere. This has always been the case but other providers are being more open about offering their services e.g. Hertfordshire have offered aspects of their school advisory service to schools in surrounding areas.

6. Where else can we get resources such as staff development from?

We have been developing various other relationships in the last couple of years.

- Going for Great – a group of outstanding schools across London
- BOSP Barnet Outstanding Schools partnership

- There are also other sources of information and support e.g. The Specialist Schools and Academies Trust which we have used for some Inset and advice for many years
- Challenge Partners – a link we are developing as a result of being in the London Challenge Outstanding schools group.

The invitations which we have received to collaborate in terms of professional development are largely with schools who have already converted to Academy status and which are well placed to take advantage of opportunities such as Teaching School status. We have good links with local secondary schools and will continue to develop these.

7. What are the financial advantages?

a) The ready reckoner predicted £400,000 additional funding (2010-11 FY figures). The advice from schools which have converted locally is that the ready reckoner figures have been very accurate.

What would we need to spend the money on?

- We would need to spend some money on things we would now need to provide ourselves – e.g. Admissions appeals and co-ordination of in year applications.
- Replacing services already removed e.g. EWO support – as things stand, we will have no funding for this
- Protecting jobs and giving us a buffer as staffing is remodelled to reflect reduced budgets. We have managed this year, by cutting curriculum development and other areas of spending. Without extra funding, we will not be able to meet next year's cuts – therefore we will need to lose staff. This could affect both the delivery of the curriculum and other services the school provides. We would also need to make cuts to other aspects of the budget such as spending on equipment, computers and textbooks
- Many schools are consulting on redundancies this year – very stressful for all concerned, even if these are eventually achieved through voluntary reductions.
- Restoring cuts to capitation, curriculum development and other areas of spending (e.g. ICT) which we have had to make this year.

b) Financial year in academies follows the academic year

This is much better for budgeting. This year all of our budget calculations were done without certainty about 6th form funding. The actual amount arrived shortly before the governing body meeting started on 31 March 2011 (the last day on which the budget can legally be approved). Had we worked on the basis of the figures provided by Barnet we would have approved a budget which we could not fund.

c) As an Academy (and registered as a charity and limited company) banking charges are preferable and there is a wider range of services (e.g. BACS) we can access which will make the financial processes more efficient.

8. Who is the admission authority for students seeking a place at the school?

From September 2010 all Local Authorities have to co-ordinate admissions for all schools.

As an Academy, along with most other schools in Barnet – i.e. Foundation Schools, Voluntary Aided Schools, Academies (amounting to 18 schools out of 22 in total), QEGS would need to have its **own Admissions Policy**. The recommendation is that **this should be the same as the LA policy for community schools** – e.g. based on Statemented and Looked After Children, siblings and then geography - **i.e. no change to the existing policy**. Therefore the catchment area would remain the

same as at present (albeit with the annual variations which occur every year). In other words QEGS would still be a school serving its local community.

The school would have to manage the appeals and casual admissions processes. There are individuals and companies which offer this service. Reversion of casual admissions to the school is likely to make the system easier and quicker to administer as liaison with the Borough is frequently slow (which disadvantages the school and potential pupils).

9. What will local families think about QEGS becoming an Academy? Will this affect our admissions?

Although the first round of Academies were used as a strategy for improving unsuccessful schools, this wave of Academies is for outstanding schools (or those which are good with outstanding features). Whatever individual views are about this strategy, a key concern for QEGS must be that if we don't become an Academy local parents might question why we are not among this group.

We will be surrounded by schools which have become Academies. All of the other secondary schools with Ofsted outstanding judgements have made applications for academy status. Of these 4 have completed the process. The Wren Academy has been in operation for 2+ years and was deemed Outstanding by OFSTED in 2010 (as it did not directly replace an existing school it does not have the baggage that some of the academies which replaced schools with issues can have).

A decision not to seek Academy Status **may** have a negative impact upon the school's reputation, which may affect future admissions. (These are likely to become more challenging due to the opening of JCoSS and East Barnet's new building, as well as earlier changes such as the Wren Academy – it very difficult to know what the combined effect of all of these will be). Dame Alice Owens and Mount Grace, the nearest Hertfordshire schools have also started the Academy process.

The overall Barnet situation is summarised in Q2 and it is clear that a high proportion of Barnet secondary schools are or are working towards becoming Academies.

Nationally, the pace of conversion to academies is accelerating. There were 203 academies (old model) in May 2010. By April this year there were 547 secondary academies (16.5% of the total) and another 500 (including QE) have applied and are at some point on the route to conversion.

10. Will becoming an Academy have an effect on services provided for other Barnet Schools?

From September 2010 Barnet LA has to provide admission arrangements for schools (see Q8 above) and oversee SEN arrangements. There would be no change from current practice for QEGS and for all other schools in these two areas.

Within the current financial crisis - a particular issue for Barnet LA, which lost money invested in Iceland - any non-essential funding (e.g. advisory teachers) will be cut in order to protect front-line services like teachers in schools. Over the last year or so Barnet LA has already reduced considerably the services it has provided for schools 'free of charge' and instead the LA has been offering full cost traded services, which schools are already choosing whether or not to buy in. At QEGS along with all other schools in Barnet, we already decide whether to buy these services from the LA or source them elsewhere - or indeed decide not to buy them at all.

The LA has indicated its support for any schools moving towards Academy Status – this policy is in line with its approach to reduce service provision and provide the complete range of fully-costed traded services by 2011. In effect the LA as we knew it in previous years, no longer exists.

There have recently been concerns in relation to top slicing and the centrally retained budget, e.g. there was a 'top slice' of money from all secondary schools for BSF

(which did not finally take place). This work had no direct benefit for QEGS. There was also a proposal fund a very large PFI shortfall in another Barnet school through top-slicing had BSF gone ahead.

11. Is our school expected to support another school to raise attainment?

Outstanding schools will be expected to sign up *in principle* to support another school to raise attainment. We already support other schools through the various partnerships we are involved in, although we do not have a relationship with a single school. Our application has been approved on the basis that we will be collaborating with other schools through links which are emerging, through existing partnerships such as Barnet Outstanding schools and our specialisms.

12. Does this affect what we teach?

As an Outstanding school QEGS already has had the confidence to develop an appropriate curriculum for our students. Academies have the freedom to move away from the National Curriculum; however QEGS would continue to offer a broad and balanced curriculum so this is unlikely to make much difference for the school and its pupils.

However, as subsequent curriculum reviews might later suggest, we would have even more flexibility over our curriculum offer, allowing us the ability, should we wish to use it, to innovate in order to provide the highest quality education for our local community. We might also wish to retain areas which are currently under threat e.g. PSHE and core delivery of ICT.

13. Who will own the land and buildings?

These would be transferred over to the school, probably on a long term lease (125yrs). Currently the school pays significant amounts of money to Barnet LA to insure the contents and buildings. This would be paid to an insurance provider directly instead to give the school cover. The insurance costs are fully funded by a grant.

As an Academy we would be able to approach the Department for Education directly for approval and funding with a view to renewing our accommodation. We have had no investment from Barnet in our buildings other than on H&S related issues despite the LA having known for many years that there are many ways in which the buildings are unsuitable.

Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Education, indicated the possibility of providing capital funding to allow popular local schools to increase provision, although there are no undertakings on this and we have no plans to expand. However, the DFE have changed funding priorities to include as a key factor 'fitness for purpose' which could be very helpful to QEGS. It is clear that Barnet does not have the resources to renew the buildings – heads have been told that any central capital funding by Barnet is likely to have to go on providing buildings to meet the existing and anticipated additional numbers in the early primary years. QEGS is more likely to achieve funding for new buildings or improvements as an outstanding school which has converted to academy status (this was definitely the experience for the early adopters under grant maintained status).

Schools which have transferred so far have taken their land intact. I have been informed by the officer who is leading support for conversion that Barnet is keen to see schools convert and is not putting issues in the way such as trying to withhold some of the site.

14. If QEGS becomes incorporated as a company, what does this mean for the school?

Becoming a company and registered charity will mean different accounting procedures for the school. It will provide more flexibility in forming partnerships with

other organisations. There are also opportunities to pursue procurement initiatives with partnered schools, potentially reducing supply costs of materials and services.

Some of the other successful schools are already considering working together to offer consultancy within and beyond Barnet. Such opportunities are unlikely to be extended to us if we are slow to move to this new status.

15. What is the role of the Academy Trust?

An Academy Trust is a charitable company responsible for the running of the Academy and has control over the land and other assets. The Academy Trust (a charitable company limited by guarantee) enters into a funding agreement with the Secretary of State for the running of the Academy. It has a strategic role in running the Academy, but delegates day-to-day management of the school to the governors. The Trust members (often referred to so far as trustees) are responsible for ensuring the company performs in accordance with its charitable objects.

16. What will the charitable object be?

This will read: *“advance for the public benefit education in the United Kingdom...by establishing, maintaining, carrying on, managing and developing a school offering a broad and balanced curriculum.”*

17. Who will the members (trustees) be?

It will be for the members of the governing body of the school to decide and agree, in discussion with the Secretary of State, who among them would wish to be members of the Academy Trust and which of them would wish to be governors of the Academy Trust (it is possible to be both a member and governor). In other words the members will come from the existing governing body. The governors will also have the power to appoint new members. This reflects the existing practice on governing bodies and provides a safeguard in terms of the operation of the academy.

18. What will the responsibilities of the governing body be?

The individual members of the governing body will be responsible for establishing the Academy Trust.

Once established, it is the governing body that manages the Academy on behalf of the members of the Academy Trust. The key responsibilities are to: -

- ensure the quality of educational provision;
- challenge and monitor the performance of the Academy;
- manage the Academy Trust's finances and property; and,
- employ staff.

The new Governing Body would reflect the current composition which gives a balance of interests (i.e. parents, staff, community) essential for an effective Governing Body (although legally it can only have 1 LA nominee).

19. Academies used to have outside organisations sponsoring them - is that still the case?

Not where an outstanding school is converting to Academy Status. A school's governing body can establish the Academy Trust. We would be free to work with any external organisation, however we do not expect to link with a sponsor or Academy provider. Any such agreement in the future would need to be approved by the Trustees and governors.

20. If a company were involved in the school would a member of the company have a right to be on the trust?

Members (Trustees) are appointed by governors. The governors are either elected (parents and staff) or appointed by the governing body (community governors). Therefore if there were ever a proposal for a company to be involved with the school

and/or have a representative as a governor or member (trustee) this could only happen with the agreement of the governors.

21. Academies currently have at least one specialism in a curriculum area - will that still be the case for schools converting?

This was the case when we applied but is no longer true (as ring-fenced specialist funding no longer exists). We would expect to retain the specialisms we currently have, albeit developing and reviewing the work we do in the absence of earmarked funding.

22. What funding will be available to help schools become Academies and how can schools claim the money?

If we were to move to Academy Status we may incur costs such as obtaining legal advice on the documents necessary for setting up the Academy, advice on the process for transferring staff, and new signage and stationery. As a contribution to these costs a flat-rate grant, normally £25,000, will be payable to the school. If there is any surplus at the end of the process the school can retain this. The school has already applied for and received this grant. If conversion does not go ahead, we have to repay any unspent part of the grant.

23. What is the position in relation to the school's name?

The school will retain its current name as it is an important part of our history and ethos.

24. Will staff pay and conditions be affected?

The Academy will adopt the national Teachers Pay and Conditions and mirror the local authority arrangements for non-teaching staff, therefore staff pay and conditions would be unaffected. We would expect to appoint new staff on similar terms.

It would not be in the school's interest to try to recruit staff 'on the cheap' as there is competition for good teachers in London and we would continue to wish to recruit the best. It would also not be in the interests of the school or its employees to have a two tier workforce among any group of staff.

As an Academy the school would have the freedom to pay honoraria e.g. for a temporary project or role which is not the case at present.

25. Will staff pensions be protected?

Teachers will continue to be members of the Teachers Pension Scheme and non-teaching staff will be members of the Local Government scheme as at present. Therefore there will be no change.

A number of other questions which are specific to staff are in the minutes of the TUPE meetings or have been provided in preparation for those meetings. These are available to staff but will be made available to parents on request to the school office.

26. What would happen if the company went bankrupt?

Like existing governing bodies, the governors of an Academy are not allowed to set a deficit budget. We would also have similar requirements for financial monitoring by the governors and auditors as at present. The school is no more likely to encounter financial problems than at present and the additional funding should make it more secure in the short term. If there was a serious financial problem the Academy would need to seek support from the YPLA or DFE whilst a recovery plan was put in place. This is similar to the current arrangement with local authorities.

27. Will the academy change its holidays or hours of operations?

We would expect to mirror the local pattern of school holidays (these are set as a result of negotiations across London) as this makes sense for families and staff who might have family members in several schools/local authority areas.

In terms of hours, as we would be using the national pay and conditions framework, we would not be in a position to operate hours beyond the 1265 hours which are at the disposal of the school. If any changes to the pattern of the school day were planned these would have to be consulted on with staff and parents (as is the case as a community school).

28. What further consultation will take place?

There will be further period of consultation with all stakeholders for 20 working days from 16 May.

Internal union reps (and non-union members if requested) will be invited to make presentations to governors on 9 May.

During the official consultation there will also be provision for staff, parents and students to have further presentations and to ask questions. The FAQs list will be regularly updated on the website and a dedicated room will be set up in Fronter for staff.

There will be a meeting for parents and staff will be able to meet the Head in groups or individually.

We will also be inviting comments from parents in feeder primary schools and inviting comments from the wider public.

All stakeholder groups will have the opportunity to comment on the proposals via 'survey monkey'.

29. What is the planned date for conversion?

The planned conversion date is 1 August 2011. This assumes that there are no unexpected delays in the legal process or other concerns which emerge during the preparations for transfer. Governors will take a further decision to proceed which will be informed by the outcomes of the consultation process and issues, if any, arising from the processes preparing for transfer.

30. Who will the Trustees (called Members) be?

The Trustees will be selected from the current governing body. There will be 5 trustees, of whom at least 2 and no more than 3 will be parent governors and at least 2 but no more than 3 will be community governors. The governing body have decided to have 5 rather than 3 trustees (called members) to reassure stakeholders that it will be very difficult to make major changes to the school in the future.

31. What will the new Governing Body be like?

There will be the same number of parent governors as at present (7). There will be 7 Community/co-opted governors (two of the current Local Authority governors be appointed as Community governors). Staff representation will be unchanged i.e 2 teaching staff governors, 1 from support staff and the Headteacher (ex-officio)

The quorum will be increased from a third to half of the governing body to prevent any one group dominating decision making.

What if my question isn't here?

Please contact the school office and they will pass it on to be answered and if it is of general interest it will be added to the next update of the FAQs.

Alternatively come to a meeting when these are announced or ask your question via the forthcoming consultation on SurveyMonkey. News of these will be available through the newsletter and on the website.

I have done my best to make these answers as clear, accurate and as objective as possible, in particular putting the issues in the context of QEGS. The other main sources of information are the Academies section of the Department for Education website. The Anti-Academies Alliance opposes Academies and also has a website which reflects its views.