

Tarporley High School and Sixth Form College

Consultation Document Academy Status

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Consultation about whether to convert to academy status

The Governing Body of Tarporley High School and Sixth Form College is exploring whether to convert to academy status. As part of this exploration, the Governors are consulting parents, staff, students, partner schools and colleges, local partners and other stakeholders. The governing body is holding an open and wide ranging consultation about whether to convert. The responses will inform Governors' final decision.

The Governing Body has registered an interest with the DfE in becoming an academy. This is not a commitment to convert to an academy, it merely enables the school to obtain more information from the DfE about academy status.

The responsibility of the Governing Body is to ensure that Tarporley High School and Sixth Form College is best placed to continue to improve the outcomes and provision for its students in the future. Investigating whether academy status would benefit the school and its students is part of this strategic role.

The national and local context

Education is changing rapidly at national and local level. The Government has made clear its expectation that academy status will become the norm for schools, with a clear belief that schools and students benefit from the additional freedoms and resources which academy status enables.

Nearly 40% of secondary schools in England are either academies or have applied to become an academy. High performing and popular schools in our surrounding boroughs have or are converting – including Christleton High School, Bishop Blue Coats School (Chester), Sandbach High School and Sixth Form College, Sandbach School, Brine Leas High School, Holmes Chapel High School, and Fallibroome Academy. In some local authority areas, the majority of secondary schools are or have applied to become academies; in other local authority areas there are few or no academies.

Locally, Cheshire West and Chester LA is positioning itself to provide services to convertor Academies (See Cheshire West and Chester's Academy Offer Document).

Key principles for an academy

Tarporley High School and Sixth Form College is a successful and oversubscribed Foundation School school of 1034 students in Cheshire West and Chester. If the school were to convert to academy status, it would continue to be a comprehensive school serving the communities within the school's current catchment.

The school is committed to its community ethos and to working with other schools / organisations. This commitment will remain irrespective of whether or not the school converts to academy status.

If the school did convert to academy status, the Governing Body has agreed that on conversion the school would:

1. Continue to work in collaboration with local primary and secondary schools, Colleges, CW&C Council, and other partners to improve opportunities and outcomes for students and staff.
2. Not seek to change the principles of the current Admissions Policy
3. Continue to develop the curriculum to meet all student needs, including exploring how to take advantage of the freedoms of academy status
4. Not to change the terms and conditions of staff, including pensions.
5. Not change the staffing structure as part of the conversion process, although the Governing Body would evaluate the impact of academy workloads for support staff.
6. Retain the existing school day and continue to set the school year within the context of other local schools
7. Retain the current school name and uniform
8. Have a Governing Body where:
 - a) The number of parent governors would be at least the same as now
 - b) The number of staff governors would be at least the same as now, including representation from teaching and support staff

What is an academy and how is it different?

An Academy is an independent state school, funded directly from central government rather than through the local authority. As a Foundation school, Tarporley already has greater independence than current community schools – for instance, the Governing Body is the employer of staff, the admissions authority, and has responsibility for land and buildings. An academy has additional areas of freedom and responsibility, principally:

- Freedom from the National Curriculum, while retaining a requirement to offer a broad and balanced curriculum for pupils of different abilities;
- Receiving its share of the funding that is retained by the local authority for maintained schools, and having the responsibility for providing those services; and
- Being part of a new charitable organisation (the Academy Trust) that would have responsibility for the academy. The Governors of the Academy would be the directors and trustees of this Trust.

The rationale for exploring academy status

The rationale for Tarporley High School and Sixth Form College exploring academy status is that:

1. Tarporley High School and Sixth Form College would have greater independence to make decisions in the best interests of its students.
2. Academy status would provide significant additional resources to the school at the outset (approximately £250,000 for the full 2011/12 academy financial year in the region of 6% of the school budget). While some of this would be required to operate the academy and replace services that are currently provided by the local authority, the remainder would be available to improve facilities, invest in ICT, act as a buffer against the expected future funding cuts (including maintaining staffing, class sizes, and KS4 and 5 options), and improve teaching and learning opportunities.
3. As part of Cheshire West and Chester's capital programme, Tarporley does not feature as a priority in any of the LA's capital programmes. As an academy, Tarporley would be able to bid directly to DfE for funding on an equal footing with the LA to address many of the issues with our time expired buildings. It would also put the school in a more favourable position when the James Report recommendations are implemented.
(<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/c/review%20of%20education%20capital.pdf>)
4. Financial analysis indicates there would be additional resources available for the school to prioritise, representing a significant increase in the 'discretionary budget' available to the school. There is confidence that this would be the case even if the specific academy funding declines significantly.
5. Increased autonomy to make decisions in students' best interests, including responsibility for services currently provided by the local authority. Greater freedom to personalise and develop the curriculum, including greater freedom to respond to the Wolf Review of qualifications and forthcoming National Curriculum Review in accordance with students' needs.
(<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFE-00031-2011>)
6. Develop and maintain partnerships. Tarporley High School works closely with both partner primary and secondary schools in CW&C and Cheshire East. Further collaboration would allow our schools to:
 - a. Save money by sharing resources
 - b. Share expertise across the partnership
 - c. Provide excellent professional development opportunities, supporting retention and recruitment.
7. A different relationship with the Local Authority. The Governing Body views the Academies programme as an opportunity to enter into a new relationship with the L.A. As an Academy, the school would seek to work in partnership with the L.A.

Considerations about becoming an academy school

When academies were first set up under the previous government, they were almost always replacements for schools which were deemed to be failing. These original academies had private sponsors, sometimes religious groups, and they required the closing down of an old school, usually the appointment of a new head teacher, often a series of permanent exclusions of children and frequently significant capital investment. The original academies were usually in areas of social deprivation and often opened in controversial circumstances, with job losses and disruption in the community. The outcome, however, was often a better equipped and higher achieving school; but not always. It should be noted that some of the original academies have struggled, sometimes because of issues with the private sponsor and sometimes because of on-going social problems. Understandably the professional associations, which school staff belong to, have been very concerned about the set-up of these academies because of the negative impact on many of their members.

New academies for good and outstanding schools which are given the same freedoms as the original academies, do not have the same issues with sponsorship and job losses. However, many people still have a number of concerns. These include:

Generally, unions remain against the programme because they fear the freedoms given to academies could impact on school staff in the longer term. They also worry that if hundreds of schools become academies, there will be less opportunity for collective negotiations to secure the best working conditions and pay scales for school workers.

Another concern that some people have is that more academies will create a potentially divisive two tier schools service. It is thought that if hundreds of schools become academies, they will be seen as more attractive schools than non-academy schools and, therefore, become more popular with parents and consequently receive better funding from Government. There is a concern about the reduction of the influence of local councils on academies. An argument in favour of all schools remaining within their local authorities is that the LA can ensure schools are equally well supported and fairly funded.

Increased risks

Governors do acknowledge that there are risks associated with becoming an academy:

- Change of this nature will occupy the governors and leadership team of Tarporley High School for some time. The school has a good track record of managing change and governors are confident that the conversion process would be effectively managed by school leaders. Governors will also have a full impact assessment undertaken so that they can quickly respond to any potential difficulties resulting from academy conversion.

- The school will be directly responsible for its own future and will not have the LA to fall back on for support. The DfE would provide this assistance but on a more “arm’s length” basis.
- The need for sustainable managerial, financial and operational acumen from within the school’s Governing Body and Senior Leadership Team for the medium and long term.
- Some staff may feel unsettled by this process of change.

The Consultation Process – how to have your say

The consultation process, agreed by the Governing Body, has been designed to gather as wide a range of views as possible. It is important you have your say, as your views will influence:

1. The Governing Body's decision as to whether or not Tarporley High School and Sixth Form College becomes an academy.
2. How the academy will be set up should the decision be taken to convert.
3. The Governing Body will seek the views of:
 - Students
 - Parents/carers
 - Staff and their union representatives
 - Primary School community
 - Local secondary schools
 - The Local Authority
 - Local councillors
 - Local community groups
 - Any other interested parties

How can I share my views?

Governors are happy to receive correspondence in any form. Emails should be addressed to academyconsultation@tarporley-high.cheshire.sch.uk.

Letters should be marked "Academy Proposal" so they can be quickly forwarded on. During this time, the school will hold meetings with staff and union representatives. Consultation documentation and links to useful websites will be posted on the school website: <http://www.tarporleyhigh.co.uk>.

Governors will see all responses.

How long will the consultation period last and when will the final decision be taken on whether or not to become an academy school?

The consultation period begins immediately and will last until 29 February 2012. The Governing Body will reconvene on 20 March 2012 to make a final decision on whether or not to become an academy school. A Consultation Summary Document will be released following the meeting, summarising the outcome of the process. If the decision is taken to proceed with the conversion process, Tarporley High School would plan to become an academy on 1 July 2012.

Yours sincerely



Tom Crotty
Chair of Governors



Sarah Lee
Headteacher

Further information is also available on the Department for Education website (www.education.gov.uk/academies) or through an internet search of 'academy status'.

You can have your say by:

Email – academyconsultation@tarporley-high.cheshire.sch.uk

Post – Pamela Zborowski, Clerk to Governors, Tarporley High School and Sixth Form College, Eaton Road, Tarporley, Cheshire, CW6 0BL

Opportunities have been arranged for parents and staff to meet Governors and hear more about the issues.

Please note that the consultation closes on 29 February 2012.