

Frequently Asked Questions

What is an Academy?

An Academy is essentially an independent school which is funded by the state. It is independent of the Local Authority and receives its funding directly from central government.

Will Walkden High School definitely become an Academy?

The Governing Board has submitted an expression of interest to convert to Academy status and is working towards conversion in early 2018. However, the school is not obligated to become an academy until a contract between CAT and the Department for Education, known as Funding Agreements, are signed.

The Multi Academy Trust will not sign the Funding Agreements until the parents and carers of pupils at the school, the staff of the school, our partner organisations and pupils themselves have had the opportunity to comment on the proposals. This letter is being sent to all members of our school community and our partner organisations.

Any comments or representations which are made about the proposals will be considered before a decision is taken to sign the Funding Agreements. CAT will not sign the Funding Agreements unless they are content that conversion would be in the best interests of the school taking account of all the legal and practical ramifications.

Will my child continue to be taught by Walkden High School teachers?

Yes. Our staff will remain the same and students will not notice any difference in the classroom. We hope that this status will enable us to retain staff who might otherwise look elsewhere for promotion – there will hopefully be opportunities for our staff to spend time supporting colleagues in other schools in the Trust.

Will staff leave Walkden High School?

The Governing Board and the Senior Leadership Team of Walkden High School value their staff very highly and will ensure that members of staff are retained. If the school converts to an Academy, all staff currently employed by the Local Authority will automatically transfer to the new Academy on their current pay and conditions.

Who will decide on the curriculum?

As now, the Governors and senior leadership of Walkden High School will set and monitor the curriculum. We have however sought a Trust that can give us advice on how we can improve GCSE outcomes for our pupils.

Will the uniform change?

It is likely that our blazer will change if we join the Co-operative Academies Trust. CAT have been clear that this would be done in a phased manner. Parents would buy new blazers when their child grows out of their current one. We will provide more information about this as discussions progress.

Will the school name change?

It is likely that our name will change to Co-op Academy Walkden if we join the Co-operative Academies Trust. This is something that Governors have debated at length. We know some parents will be concerned about this. However, we believe that CAT has a strong track record of improving outcomes for pupils in their schools. We believe that if we can improve outcomes for our pupils then we will improve their life chances. We have decided that a name change should not get in the way of us joining a Trust that can improve our pupils' life chances.

Will the school ethos change?

We have looked for a MAT that allows us to continue with our current ethos and values. The Co-operative Academies Trust's values are the Co-operative movement's values. We feel we can subscribe to these and that they are a good fit with our values of developing Walkden STARS - pupils who are Sensible, Thoughtful, Ambitious, Respectful and Supportive.

Will the Admissions arrangements change?

This is not something Governors are looking for in a MAT. CAT does not operate any selective admissions policies in any of their existing schools.

If my child sees little difference, what's the point in making this change?

As far as students are concerned, most things in school will stay the same. However, we may have more money to spend on them at a time when school budgets are under strain. They will also benefit from their teachers having access to extra support and training. We also feel that the Co-operative, CAT's sponsor, offers our students fantastic career opportunities. The Co-operative is a vast company with financial, commercial and social branches.

Did the Co-operative Academies Trust approach us?

No. We approached them. They are very clear that this process is for both organisations to be sure that we are a good fit for each other.

What will happen if we do nothing?

Increasingly, schools are being encouraged to work together. There are already 5 Multi Academy Trusts operating in Salford. Worryingly, however, there are big "chains" that are looking for schools to join their Trusts. These chains are not always successful and they sometimes impose a strict 'model' on their schools, so that one school is indistinguishable from another. We want to avoid being forced to join one of these chains because of pressure from the Regional Schools' Commissioner or the Department for Education. This way, we stay in control of our own destiny.