

## FAQs

Please find below some of the most frequently asked questions from governors, parents and school staff that we have experienced. These are succinct responses and if you want further clarification or have any other questions, please get in touch with the team at Enlighten Learning Trust. We will be happy to help.

Q What are School Trusts?

A Academy and Multi-Academy Trusts are education charities that run schools to give children a better future. Over half of pupils in state schools attend academies and we help our local communities thrive by giving children the best opportunities to learn inside and outside the classroom. A Trust is a group of schools working in collaboration as one entity to improve and maintain high educational standards across the group. A Trust has a single legal and moral purpose: to advance education for the public benefit.

Q Why should my school join an academy trust?

A We believe the question should instead be: “How can my school best collaborate with others in a strong and resilient structure to ensure that each child is a powerful learner and that adults have the opportunities to learn and develop as teachers, staff and leaders?” We believe that the answer rests in working in deep and meaningful collaboration with other schools, by being part of a school trust like ELT and that our approach, values and culture will be of significant benefit to like-minded schools. Recent DfE evidence shows that over 70% of schools who had recently converted said the overall impact had been positive, with the key reason being increased collaboration.

Q What is the difference between a school trust and a partnership or federation?

A Schools sometimes collaborate with other maintained schools through various formal and informal arrangements to share good practice. However, through committing to being a single entity as a trust the level of challenge and rigour can be raised in all aspects across a school. This delivers improvements in support functions, staff development, staff workload, and enables headteachers to focus on their pupils’ learning whilst simultaneously raising the educational expectations in ways that a less formal arrangement is not able to realise. Schools can opt to work with ELT on specific projects or aspects while they consider whether to join on a more formal footing in the future and this would need defining, agreeing and the timeframe set at the outset.

Q How should my school decide which Trust to join?

A There are several key elements. The Trust’s vision and culture needs to sufficiently align with your school’s own in order for you to work effectively and also gain something from the relationship for the children in your school. The personnel need to be those who you can work with; although they may change over time any replacement will certainly be sought with similar values. You need to feel that your school can contribute to and receive from the central support team and the family of schools in a way that fits with your ethos and capacity. Finally, spend time meeting key people and perhaps working on some small projects together to see how it works out.

Q How does the role of Governors change in a Trust?

A Once a school joins a Trust the accountability for some of the key aspects such as finance, policies, cyber security, H&S and estates is removed and passes to the trustees. However, there will be certain delegated responsibilities (through a negotiated Scheme of Delegation) which mean the Local Governing Body retains responsibility for how some of these aspects are implemented. The governors also have clear lines of communication with the trustees through the trust board who will seek the opinion on key

decisions as appropriate. The Local Governing Body will also retain governance of some important aspects at school level such as safeguarding, evaluation of quality of education and staff within the school. All these depend on how well the school is performing and the level of support the school and its governor community need, which is decided together and reviewed regularly using the Scheme of Delegation and the individual risk register.

Q What does it cost a school to join the ELT? Are there associated costs or savings?

A Joining any trust is not free and like all trusts we have a partnership contribution to fund the work of the Trust delivering its statutory responsibilities. There are three elements to the support received via the Trust

- Procurement of resources that are required to be consistent across the trust such as the finance system. An example of similar costs in the maintained sector would be the de-delegated funding to the LA for CAPITA licences, or the HR Service Level Agreements
- Provision of services where staff are no longer employed locally. For example, a Finance Officer or HR Officer leaves and instead of replacing locally this function is delivered by a Trust member of staff, enhancing efficiency and resilience. Costs are charged proportionally to requirements
- Delivery of statutory requirements and government defined responsibilities previously delivered by the LA, and additional to the organisation because of its Academy status. For example, Audit, Internal Scrutiny, Oversight, Executive roles, MAT leadership and professionals to enable reporting and accountability of statutory responsibilities.

The first two elements are charged at cost, the delivery of statutory requirements is under constant review, transparently built on an annual basis, and is anticipated to be around 4.5% during the period that the Trust remains small to medium. The important aspect is that the quality and specialist knowledge that schools in the ELT can access means that this is very good value for money.

There can be some economies to be made by working together as part of a bigger group of schools, although these tend to be marginal in nature. There are also legal, professional and operational fees, such as the procurement of software, that are incurred during conversion and these are supported by a £25k fund from the DfE.

Q How long does the process of joining take?

A Typically joining can be managed within 9 months of the governors taking the decision. There are preferable times during the course of a year (January, April, September) that lend themselves to being sensible conversion dates and it is often best to choose the most realistic date and work back from there (we have an indicative timeline to help you). The process itself involves consultation, legal procedures and financial considerations, and require the school and the Trust to communicate clearly with their communities as well as the diocese, PCCs, the Regional Schools Commissioner and local authority. The timeline can sometimes be delayed by complications such as land ownership, so these need to be carefully considered.

Q How do schools retain their distinctiveness in ELT?

A The ELT aims for all the family of schools to serve their distinct community well and respond to the differing needs, history and context of their pupils and parents. This means that, while we would want their culture to align with the Trust, how the school decides its individual values, mission and climate should remain at the local level. This increases the diversity of the Trust family and enables creative sharing of ideas and the cultural capital of the schools together. Together we develop the quality of teaching and

learning and support the school staff in focusing on the core purpose of delivering a great experience for children.

Q Will my school retain autonomy over what they teach?

A Schools will be able to choose what they teach and the curriculum will be managed by the Headteacher and shared at the Headteacher Board. Over time, as teachers get the opportunity to cooperate between schools more easily, it will usually become more sensible to align the schemes of work, curriculum delivery models and exam boards and this would only be done in consultation and agreement between the schools. This allows greater collaboration, sharing of effective practice and deeper planning to take place which ultimately supports our children's learning. This also brings benefits for teachers as they may be able to move to another school if they wish to gain experience without having to change employer. This is always done with agreement and is a considerable attraction for new colleagues joining the teaching profession or seeking to develop their career with experience spanning several schools.

Q How is the strategic direction of the Trust decided?

A All trusts differ from local authorities by having more explicit vision and values that they bring about through working strategically with the schools in their family. This is decided through careful evaluation of what works for the children in the current schools, what the local and national context is, what the future needs of the schools are perceived to be and whether we should prepare for other schools to join. This process is refined by consulting the current school leaders and matching the ambition of the organisation with the capacity and skills that we have alongside the needs of the wider education community.

Q How will the Trust develop and improve the learning of the children?

A Our Trust is founded on the collective will to share effective educational practice, provide motivating professional development, recruit and retain the best staff possible and rigorously evaluate what is working and what can be improved. We carefully balance schools joining from settings that need more support with those that can offer capacity to manage the flow of experience around the organisation. We analyse the effects of our work within and across schools, pitching the level of challenge appropriately to make sure that the outcomes in all aspects are as good as possible for the children in our care.

Q What will happen to staff at the school whose roles may be replicated in the Trust?

A When a school joins a Trust all the staff together become employed by the Trust. The central team employs professionals/or consultants across the core functions of HR/Finance/Infrastructure Management/Procurement/GDPR. These staff will work with existing school staff to ensure that the statutory responsibilities in each area are being met. It is probable that some functions in the school will require less resource freeing up some capacity to use elsewhere, supporting reduced workloads, or offering opportunities for staff members to work alongside or within the central team. The trust use 365 functionality extensively, and host all core software in the cloud, with the exception of SIMS. Therefore, working as part of the Trust team would not necessarily involve working in an alternate physical location on a regular basis. Crucially this can bring about opportunities for rationalisation of some aspects, and consequently an improvement in service as well as some savings in the long run. This process tends to be phased in once a school has joined the Trust and aligns itself with the rest of the ELT team.