

Converting to an Academy
Information for Parents –
Deaf Hill and Kelloe Primary Federation



The Governing Board of Deaf Hill and Kelloe Primary Federation have agreed to convert both schools to academy status. Please read the information below which will hopefully answer any question you may have.

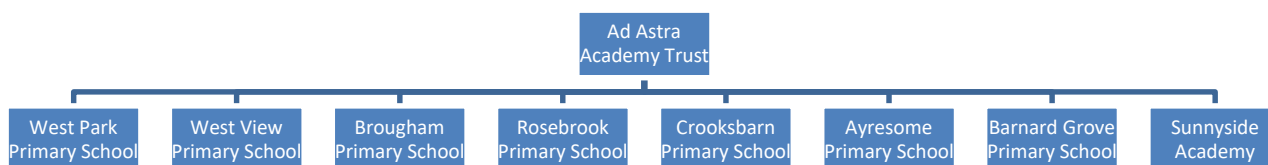
1. What is an Academy?

An Academy is a state-funded independent school. Legally they are companies limited by guarantee and are registered charities. At the moment Deaf Hill and Kelloe Primary Schools are community schools which are maintained by Durham County Council. The council controls the schools and also provides funding to the schools from central government, having first top sliced an agreed amount for some central services.

If Deaf Hill and Kelloe convert to an academy this would mean that funding would be received directly from the Department for Education, including the proportion that has in the past been top sliced for council services. Academies are allowed more freedom (as they are not within the control of the council) to provide an education that best suits the children in their care.

At Deaf Hill and Kelloe, we feel that we know our children best and would welcome the freedom to provide an education that meets the needs of our children without the restrictions that the current system brings.

While in the past there were various different ways in which schools could convert to academy status, the model now is that schools convert as part of a 'Multi Academy Trust' (MAT for short). This means an overarching Trust is responsible for all the schools within it. So where now the council currently controls our schools, once we convert it would be a 'Trust.' Through detailed research and discussions with lots of Trusts in the area, the governors and I have chosen Ad Astra Academy Trust as our preferred option. Ad Astra and their current schools share a similar ethos and have similar values to us. This gives us all reassurance that we will be joining an organisation that not only is aligned to our fundamental beliefs in what is right for our children but will also complement and enhance the work we do to make things even better. Our staff will not only benefit from wider opportunities for collaboration and professional development themselves, but they will also be able to contribute their fantastic skills and expertise for the benefit of all schools within the Trust. The current Ad Astra MAT structure can be illustrated by the diagram below.



It is our intention that both schools convert at the same time so that we can continue the close relationship that is already in place within our Deaf Hill and Kelloe Federation.

At the moment there are four schools from Hartlepool that are part of Ad Astra Academy Trust which are West Park Primary School, West View Primary School, Brougham Primary School and Barnard Grove Primary

School. There are also two schools from Stockton which are Rosebrook Primary School and Crooksbar Primary School, as well as two schools in Middlesbrough, Ayresome Primary School and Sunnyside Academy. Deaf Hill and Kelloe would be the ninth and tenth schools to join Ad Astra respectively and the first two schools in Durham. We think this is a very exciting prospect.

More generally, schools may join a Trust voluntarily as they share the same vision for their children as we do for ours and wish to convert. However occasionally, schools that are not performing as well as they should are able to join the Trust in order to help them raise standards in their schools, learning from good or outstanding schools within the Trust. As OfSTED 'good' schools, Deaf Hill and Kelloe would fall into the first category; this would be a voluntary conversion which we believe is in the best interests of the schools and the communities they serve.

The Trust is governed by a board of 'trustees' which is a group of educational and business people that are experts in governing academies. Parents and carers can therefore be reassured that the interests of Deaf Hill and Kelloe Primary Schools will be represented at the highest level. By having people with these skills, it ensures that they provide challenge to the schools within the Trust so that they are continuously improving what they do. It also acts as a quality assurance mechanism to everyone involved, such as parents and carers, that the school is being well led and is providing the best possible education.

As part of this model, it is anticipated that funding would go directly to each school as it does currently via a funding agreement with the Department for Education. Therefore, parents and carers can be assured that conversion to academy would not result in a reduction in funding to Deaf Hill and Kelloe in order to financially support other schools within the Trust. It is important that each school receives the funding due to it to support their own development plans and continue to raise standards in their own school.

2. Does this mean that Deaf Hill and Kelloe Primary Schools are amalgamating with these other schools?

No, not at all. All schools within the Trust will remain separate entities and operate in their own way as they do at the moment. Each school will retain its own budget and staff and have their own priorities as part of the school development plan. This is not an amalgamation.

3. What are the benefits of converting to an Academy for the children at Deaf Hill and Kelloe?

From the moment we first began to explore this opportunity the fundamental principle that has governed our discussions is that potential conversion will only be considered if it is right for the children at Deaf Hill and Kelloe Primary Schools. Only if this can be assured will we progress this issue. We cannot emphasise this enough. As a school we understand that parents are concerned about the quality of the educational and pastoral care and any change to how this is delivered can be greeted with a certain level of apprehension. However, we firmly believe that converting to an academy will benefit the children in the following ways:

- More financial freedom and opportunities to purchase goods and services cheaper will free up resources to invest in the children and the curriculum.
- More freedom to deliver a curriculum that meets the needs of the children whilst keeping the core subjects will allow a more personalised education.

- Sharing good practice with schools within the Trust will complement the existing provision and allow our staff to undertake professional development opportunities to increase their own knowledge and experience.

4. Are there any other benefits of converting to an academy?

Yes absolutely! By entering into a formal Trust with other schools, this will allow Deaf Hill and Kelloe access to a business support function including areas such as financial management, human resources, site and facilities and health and safety management. This will free up key members of the leadership team to concentrate on teaching and learning as well as pastoral priorities.

5. Who runs the school?

As explained above, a Board of Trustees is ultimately responsible for the strategic direction of the Academy Trust and the schools within it. On a day-to-day basis the Trust is lead and managed by a Chief Executive Officer who has a team of specialist officers, and each school would be led and managed much as it is now with the same Headteacher and leadership team. All staff transfer their employment to the academy and therefore from this point of view everything remains the same.

The Board of Trustees would be ultimately accountable to OfSTED and the Department for Education (DfE). The local governance layer (known as a Local Academy Committee) will also continue to monitor the educational and financial performance of both schools and they will report directly into the Trustee board.

6. Will you still teach the National Curriculum?

As an academy we would be required to have a broad and balanced curriculum which promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of our children and prepares them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.

For our children in reception and nursery we are required to follow the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

If we converted to an academy, we would not be required to follow the National Curriculum however we would be required to ensure the curriculum:

- included English, maths and science;
- included Religious Education;
- included sex and relationship education (SRE).

7. Will OfSTED still inspect the school?

Academies continue to be subject to OfSTED inspections and are also accountable through the achievement and attainment of pupils in the same way as all other state-funded schools.

8. Will converting to an Academy affect the quality of teaching and learning?

No. All staff will transfer to the academy on the same terms and conditions that they have now. Therefore, we will continue to have the highest quality teaching and support staff delivering excellent education to your children.

Parents and carers can be absolutely sure that conversion to academy status would not detriment the education of the children. Indeed, this is the reason we are considering this change in the first place.

9. Will my child still have to do SATS?

Academies are required to take part in all relevant monitoring arrangements as prescribed by the Secretary of State and the Department for Education. This will include SATs.

10. Who is responsible for admissions?

If we became an academy, the Trust would become our admissions authority, which means that we will manage our own admissions process, including periodic consultation, regularly publishing the school's admission arrangements, and conducting the admissions process as part of wider Local Authority (Durham County Council) coordination.

We will be able to retain the admission criteria that we currently use as these arrangements must comply with the Admissions Code.

If there were any objections to an academy admission, then the school's adjudicator would consider any objections in the same way as they consider those now.

11. My child has a special educational need, will anything change?

No. If we convert to an academy, we will continue to be a fully inclusive school and accept that we have an important part to play in the education of our children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). We have a duty in law to fulfil our duty to children with SEND and this also forms part of our funding agreement with the Department for Education. Specifically, we will:

- Inform parents that their child has SEND and the provision being made;
- Admit a pupil where the academy is named in the pupil's statement of SEND;
- Appoint a person as Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinator (SENDCO) who is a qualified teacher and ensure that new SENDCOs undertake prescribed training; and
- Have regard to the SEND Code of Practice.

12. How will converting to an academy affect out of school clubs?

We are not anticipating any changes to our current out of school clubs.

13. Will my child still get a report home and will there still be parent's evenings where I can discuss my child's progress?

Absolutely! We are committed to providing parents with the opportunity to discuss their child's progress and these are just two ways that we will continue to do so. We know that parents are important in supporting their children's learning and are continuously looking for ways to help this process.

14. Are you going to change the term dates or the timing of the school day?

We could actually change the term dates and the times of the school day, subject to the necessary consultation. At the moment there are no plans to change either of these but that may change in the future if we felt it was to benefit the learning of our children.

That said, we would consult with parents and carers about this and be mindful about the impact that this would have on our families and partner organisations (e.g. feeder secondary schools).

15. Will I need to buy a new school uniform?

There are currently no plans to change the school uniform however should there be any proposed changes to uniform in the future, then this would be subject to consultation with you, as parents and carers, at the earliest opportunity.

16. Will the costs of school meals, trips and clubs etc. increase?

As explained above, each school will receive its own funding. As a school we are always looking for ways to reduce the financial burden for parents of children attending school by securing value for money in the goods and service we buy – this will not change if we convert to an academy.

17. Will the school be called something different?

The names 'Deaf Hill and Kelloe Primary Schools' will stay the same; however, the Trust name is 'Ad Astra Academy Trust.' The Trust wanted an overarching brand that links all schools within the Trust whilst allowing each school to retain its own unique identity. We also think that as this is a big change in the history of the school and an exciting opportunity, that it is good to have something which signifies a new beginning.