



SHOULD RATTON SCHOOL BECOME AN ACADEMY?

Consultation Document

The Department for Education (DfE) has offered schools in England and Wales the opportunity to join the new academies programme. It says that becoming an academy would “give schools the freedoms and flexibilities to continue to drive up standards”. As a school judged to be good with outstanding features in its most recent OfSTED Inspection (May 2010), Ratton can make an application to the DfE to become an Academy.

Having carefully considered the issues, the Governing Body and Trust Partners believe that becoming an academy may now be in the best interests of the school, its children and the local community. Governors wish to start consulting over whether to become an academy school or not; therefore, they need to know what you think.

So that you can find out more about the academies programme, the reasons why the Governing Body are considering a change in status and some of the common concerns about academies, governors have developed this Consultation Document. We hope it will help you to formulate your own view on this important issue.

It has been organised under the topics that we think will be the most important factors in helping you to form your opinion. The document has been subdivided into the following sections:

1. The Consultation Process: how you can have your say
2. The main reasons for the Governing Body’s proposal
3. Considerations about becoming an academy school
4. Information about the academies programme, including:
 - Finance
 - Special Educational Needs (SEN)
 - Admissions and Term Dates
 - Governance including the future of the Ratton Trust
 - Building and Emergency Contingency Plans

If you need any help in translating or understanding this document, then please contact the office where we will make arrangements to help you.

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 and Trust's decision as to whether or not Ratton becomes an academy
2. How the academy will be set up should the decision be taken to convert

Who will we consult with?

The Governing Body and Trust will seek the views of:

- Students
- Parents/carers
- Local East Sussex schools
- The Local Authority
- Staff and their union representatives
- 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@ratton.e-sussex.sch.uk. Letters should be marked 'Private and Confidential Academy Proposal' so they can be quickly forwarded on. All correspondence will be acknowledged (unless, of course, it is anonymous).

In addition, an Open Academy Consultation Meeting will be held at the school on Tuesday 17th January at 6pm. This will be an opportunity to:

- Hear why the Governing Body took the decision to initiate the academy conversion process
- Ask questions and/or raise concerns
- Share your views on the proposal

Governors also plan to hold meetings with staff and union representatives.

Consultation documentation and links to useful websites will be posted on the school website: <http://www.ratton.e-sussex.sch.uk>

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 Monday 27th February 2012. The Governing Body will reconvene on Tuesday 6th March 2012 to make a final recommendation to the Trust Partners 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 and is ratified by the Ratton Trust, Ratton School is likely to become an academy on Monday 3rd September 2012.

Yours sincerely

Peter Lindsey
Chair of Governors

Laurence Smith
Chair of the Ratton Trust

Main Reasons for the Governing Body's Proposal

The Governing Body's primary function is to ensure that Ratton School delivers the best possible education for its students. Governors also take their responsibility to serve the local community very seriously. After much thought and discussion, governors now believe the new academies programme could be a natural progression from Trust status with significant benefits that could support the school's drive for continuous improvement. These include:

Developing Partnerships

The work of the Trust Partners has already been enormously beneficial to Ratton School. It has allowed our school to:

- Access resources that would otherwise not have been available to us
- Share expertise with our partners
- Strengthen Governance and Leadership

Ratton School's partnership with the Eastbourne Federation of Secondary Schools has also been of significant mutual benefit, as has our partnership with Primary Schools through our specialist status community programme. These partnerships allow schools to:

- save money by sharing resources
- share expertise
- provide excellent professional development opportunities
- support retention and recruitment

As an Academy, Ratton School will be able to preserve and strengthen our existing partnerships and have the opportunity to develop lasting new partnerships with other schools and academies.

Freedoms and Flexibility

When Ratton became a Trust school it assumed a number of new freedoms and flexibilities which would be extended if Ratton were to become an Academy. Governors believe that acquiring greater freedom as a Trust school and as an Academy has the dual benefit of encouraging innovation (such as to develop a dynamic curriculum designed to meet the needs of our own students) but also enabling us to preserve what we believe to be important (for example, the integrity of the Ratton school site).

Greater Flexibility to Purchase Services

As an academy, Ratton School would receive resources previously retained by the Local Authority (LA) to run its services - about 10% of its overall budget. Although the school would still need to purchase a number of services, governors would welcome the freedom to decide which and to "shop around" to achieve best value.

A Different Relationship with the Local Authority

The Governing Body views the academies programme as an opportunity to further develop its new relationship with the LA. Although independent, the school would seek to work in partnership with the LA.

Potential Capital Funding Stream

There have been significant cuts in funding for capital building programmes, needed to preserve and develop Ratton's site. Academy schools will, in time, have their own capital programme; this may represent a potential capital investment opportunity.

Be Proactive

It is likely that a large number of schools will become academies over the coming months and academy status will become the norm. The Governing Body believes it is in the school's interests to be proactive ensuring that Ratton School is able to remain in control of its own destiny.

Moral Purpose

Whilst the Governing Body recognises its first responsibility is to provide the best possible education for its own students, there is also a strong belief that Ratton has a moral obligation, wherever possible, to further the life chances of young people who do not attend our school. Ratton School has already demonstrated skills, experience and capacity needed to support others both nationally and locally. Becoming an academy would give the school additional resources to continue and extend this work, potentially benefiting more young people and their families. Such work has already generated additional funding which has been used to improve the quality of the education offered at Ratton.

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 headteacher, 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 trade unions, 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” - 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:

Potential Changes to Staff Conditions

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.

When Ratton became a Trust school it gained the power to alter conditions of service for non-teaching staff. Although as an academy Governors have the freedom to adopt their own conditions of work for all staff, the Governing Body has no plans to make changes to national pay and conditions for all its school workers.

Two-tier School System

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 possibly receive better funding from Government. 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, beyond that of a Trust school:

- Change of this nature will occupy the governors and leadership team of Ratton School for some time. If we are not careful, there is a danger of everyone “taking their eye off the ball” as the school converts. However, the school has a good track record of managing change (we achieved our best ever results during conversion to a Trust school) and governors are confident that the conversion process would be effectively managed by school leaders. Governors will also carry out a full impact assessment 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. Whilst the Governing Body acknowledges there are increased risks, it has ensured as a Trust school that Ratton is adequately insured.
- Some staff may feel unsettled by this process of change and seek jobs elsewhere even though there will be fewer opportunities in non-academy schools. However, governors believe this risk would be offset by the increased professional development opportunities for staff

Information about the Academies Programme

Finance

What happens now?

Central Government, through the DfE provides Local Authorities (LA) with a sum of money each year known as the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). The LA uses this grant to:

- Fund nursery provision in their area
- Fund individual school budgets
- Provide a range of services for schools such as free school meals entitlement, education welfare services and special educational needs services
- The LA may also top up the funding for its centrally provided services through the Council Tax

The LA is responsible for setting its own formula for determining each school's fair share of the total money delegated to schools.

After the LA has taken some of the money, the remainder is given to the school to be spent on things such as staff salaries, computer equipment, books, heating, building maintenance and cleaning. The DfE also provides a range of grants to LA's, some of which are for the LA to spend on services that support education and some of which are to be passed on to schools for them to decide how best to spend it. The two most important grants for schools are known as the Schools Standards Grants and the Schools Development Grants. The LA funds the additional support required for children with Statements of Special Educational Need. Unlike LA schools, the Ratton Trust and not the LA own all of the schools buildings.

The money paid to the school is accounted for in a set of accounts prepared by office staff. A special committee of the Governing Body, called the Resources Committee, is accountable for how the money is spent and for making sure that the accounts are accurate. The school's accounts can be inspected by the LA at any time.

Ratton School also raises additional money through its work as a Local Leader of Education.

What would happen if Ratton were to become an academy?

Academies are funded by the DfE through the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA). If Ratton were to become an Academy, the YPLA would provide it with a General Allocation Grant (GAG) made up of two components:

- Core funding which is exactly the same as the school would have received from the LA using its funding formula
- Local Authority Central Spend Equivalent Grant (LACSEG) which would be Ratton's share of the money, based on student numbers, which the LA

currently spends centrally on those services that the academy would now be responsible for.

The LACSEG is the additional money that Ratton would receive in comparison to an LA maintained school. On receipt of this money, Ratton would need to decide how and where to buy the services that it needs. The school may be able to get those services less expensively than the LA currently charges, or it may have to pay more for them or it may decide that the service is not needed. Because the school would be buying services directly, the quality of the services it receives could improve.

Using the DfE calculator on the internet, the school has calculated that it would receive an additional £427,000 each year in LACSEG funding if it becomes an academy. Other schools that have already converted have found that they need to spend between 20-40% of this additional funding on essential services. Although this is a substantial amount of money, it should not be the only factor considered when making the judgement on whether or not Ratton should convert. The academy would receive School Standards Grants and School Development Grant in the same way as a maintained school.

The LA also continues to fund support for children with Statements of Special Educational Needs (SEN). The work that Ratton currently does as a Local Leader of Education would continue. Indeed, this work would probably expand, raising more money to be used for the benefit of the school.

The LA would no longer have the right to inspect the school's accounts at any time. Instead, the school would need to have its accounts audited by a firm of accountants at least yearly.

If Ratton becomes an academy, the Governing Body would undertake to ensure that the terms and conditions for all existing staff remain at least as good as those for staff in equivalent posts in schools which are still bound by national and local agreements, as it has done as a Trust School. The school buildings and equipment would be owned by a special type of charity called a trust, similar to the existing Ratton Trust. A trust is described in the Governance section of this document.

Things to think about

- Does it concern me that the LA would have less money to spend on providing shared services to a smaller number of schools in the County?
- Do I trust the Resources Committee to continue to look after the school's money and to make sure that it is used for the benefit of the children if Ratton becomes an academy?

Special Educational Needs (SEN)

What happens now?

Currently the LA has responsibility for assessing students and maintaining their Statements of SEN. The Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) of the school has a responsibility to identify students that might need additional help and then work with a range of school staff and outside agencies to develop an individual education programme that will help.

The LA has responsibility for students with Statements. They have to:

- Ensure that students are appropriately assessed and statemented where necessary
- Fund any individually assigned SEN resources
- Monitor arrangements for SEN students in academies
- Conduct reviews of the Statements of children in academies at least annually

The school has to comply with the Admissions Code and any SEN obligations set by the LA.

What would happen if Ratton were to become an academy?

The school would still have to comply with the Admissions Code and any SEN obligations. The LA would retain responsibility for students with Statements in an academy on the same basis as for statemented students in maintained schools.

They would still have to:

- Ensure that academy students are appropriately assessed and statemented where necessary
- Consider parents' representations for an academy to be named on a Statement and act reasonably in considering those representations
- Fund any individually assigned SEN resources
- Monitor arrangements for SEN students in academies
- Conduct reviews of the Statements of children in academies at least annually
- Monitor SEN provision and educational psychology services in the school
- Fund pupil referral units
- Fund education out of schools
- Fund education for excluded students

If it converted into an academy, Ratton would receive a share of funding for other provision in relation to SEN including: behaviour support services; licences and subscriptions (for instance for software); therapies and other health related, education and welfare services. There are obligations on schools which convert to academies which are equivalent to those placed on maintained schools. In practical terms, this would require new academies to:

- Inform parents that their child has SEN and the special educational provision being made

- An unqualified obligation to admit a child to the school if the school is named in the Statement
- Appoint a qualified teacher as SEN coordinator (SENCO) and ensure that any new SENCO would undertake prescribed training

As academies are classed as state-funded independent schools, the LA should consider representations to attend the school from parents/carers of SEN children, just as it would for any other independent school.

Academies are required by their funding agreements to consent to being named in a child's Statement unless they can demonstrate that admitting the child would be incompatible with the efficient education of other children and that there are no reasonable steps they could take, together with the LA, to prevent the incompatibility.

If Ratton becomes an academy, the Governing Body would retain the ethos of inclusion through which there is a commitment to providing the best possible education for young people of all abilities and backgrounds from our community.

Things to think about

Do I believe that if Ratton converts to an academy, it would continue to provide SEN services for the community?

Admissions and Term Dates

What happens now?

As a Trust School Ratton's admissions criteria and catchment areas are set by the Governors. The Governors decided to follow the East Sussex criteria for allocating school places when there are more applicants than places available:

1. Students looked after by the Local Education Authority (LEA). This applies to all students who are in the care of the LEA or are provided with accommodation by the LEA (see section 22 of the Children Act 1989)
2. Students with an exceptional medical or social need for whom attendance at any other school would be inappropriate. Parents/carers must submit supporting evidence, such as a letter from a doctor or social worker, which clearly demonstrates that the needs of the child can only be met by attending a particular school. Officers of the Children's Services Authority will decide whether or not the evidence provided is sufficient to allocate a place under this admission priority. This may include seeking their own professional advice. The evidence must conclusively show that no other school than the preferred school can meet the student's needs
3. Students who will have a brother or sister at the school at the time of admission. Children are 'siblings' if they are full, half, adoptive or foster brother or sister living in the same household
4. Students living within a pre-defined community area prescribed by the LEA. Each home address in the county falls within a community area although living in a community area does not guarantee a place can be allocated
5. Other students living outside any such area. This relates to students who do meet any of the previous criteria

Term dates are set centrally by the LA. Schools have little or no discretion in changing those dates.

What would happen if Ratton were to become an academy?

If Ratton were to become an academy it would continue to be bound by the national admissions code, would continue to be part of the LA co-ordinated admissions, and envisages no changes to criteria as it has done as a Trust school.

The academy would have the power to set its own term dates if it chose to do so; however, if Ratton became an academy it is highly unlikely that governors would choose to set term dates which did not match local schools. Should the Governing Body wish to deviate from LA term dates in the future, it would undertake a full consultation process prior to any change.

Things to think about

Are you happy for governors to have the power, following consultation, to alter term dates?

Governance

Governance is about how the school operates and ensures a good quality of education for all its students, including those with special needs. At Ratton governance is shared between the Ratton Trust and the Governing Body of Ratton School.

What happens now?

School governors and trust partners bring a range of experience and interests from many walks of life. They work closely with others to make good decisions about school aims and policies. The Trust operates as a charity protecting the interests of the school to provide additional opportunities for Ratton students. Governors work as a team of volunteers who are responsible for making sure the school provides a good quality of education. They do this together with the headteacher, who is responsible for the day-to-day management of the school.

The Trust consists of representation from each of the five partners, the Chair of Governors and the Headteacher.

The Governing Body includes:

- 6 Parents elected by other parents in the school
- 3 Staff governors elected by the teaching and non-teaching staff
- 4 Local Authority governors
- 4 Community governors appointed by other members of the Governing Body
- The Headteacher

Governor appointments are for up to four years.

What would happen if Ratton were to become an academy?

The Governing Body and the Ratton Trust would be responsible for establishing an Academy Trust. The Trust and Governors wish to create a governance model that is structured similarly to the existing model with a separate but linked Trust and Governing Body. The Academy Trust (a charitable company limited by guarantee) would then enter into a funding agreement with the Secretary of State for the running of the academy. The Academy Trust has a strategic role in running the academy and would be responsible for appointing the governors to the Governing Body and the trustees (partners) to the 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
- Employ staff

It would be for the members of the Governing Body and Trust 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 a *governor*. The Ratton Trust would need to dissolve itself at the time of conversion and then reform within the Academy Trust.

The Academy governing body would continue to be the direct employers of staff, have direct health and safety responsibilities, remain the school's admission authority and become responsible for ensuring that the school undergoes an external financial audit.

The DfE model Articles of Association have set a minimum of three governors, but not a maximum, appointed by the Academy Trust. The basic governance model envisioned by the DfE includes: one LA governor, a minimum of two elected parent governors and optional staff governors appointed by the Academy Trust. There may also be up to three co-opted governors appointed by the Governing Body. The Secretary of State may also appoint additional governors in certain circumstances.

It is likely that the make-up of the Governing Body would be different once converted to academy status. It may be that many of the same people would be members of the academy Governing Body and that Ratton will retain the same Trust Partners. The make-up of the Governing Body of an academy is determined by its Articles of Association.

As the Academy Trust is a charitable company, the Governors would also be directors and charitable Trustees, and would therefore need to comply with obligations under company and charity law.

Things to think about

- Would academy governance arrangements be more or less effective than the current arrangements?
- What Governance structure best meets the needs of Ratton School and its community?

Building and Emergency Contingency Plans

What effects would Ratton becoming an academy have on the building?

As a Trust School Ratton already owns the site and buildings.

What happens if something happens to the building if we become an Academy?

There would be a General Annual Grant that would be paid by the Government to the Academy Trust. This would cover the normal running costs of the academy including: repairs; servicing and maintenance of buildings (including redecoration, heating, plumbing, lighting etc); maintenance of grounds (including boundary fences and walls); cleaning materials and contract cleaning; water and sewage; fuel and light (including fuel oil, solid and other fuel, electricity and gas); rents and rates; purchase, maintenance, repairs and replacement of furniture and fittings; and insurance.

If the academy building suffers damage which means that it cannot be used as a school, the LA would be required to provide facilities for the children to continue their education. This is the same requirement that the LA currently has because its duty is to provide for the children and not the Academy Trust.

Would there be a specific insurance grant to cover for emergencies?

Academies are required to provide insurance at specified minimum levels of cover. They are also eligible to seek an Earmarked Annual Grant from the YPLA (Young People's Learning Agency) for emergencies, in the same way that an LA can pay a maintained school a contingency payment.

By becoming an academy, would Ratton's building be more or less likely to be upgraded?

In the same way that LA's have a capital building programme, so there will be an academies building programme. If Ratton's need for capital investment was prioritised and met agreed criteria, it could be earmarked for investment. However, becoming an academy would not guarantee capital investment.

In order to make an informed decision, there are many factors to be considered. However, we hope the information provided has given you a summary of the Governing Body's position and a useful overview of the key issues. For more information visit:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/academies>

If you do have queries that have not been answered here or on the website above, then please raise them by emailing the school at: academyconsultation@ratton.e-sussex.sch.uk. Mark your email, 'Academies Question' and someone will respond to your query. Alternatively you can write to the Governing Body c/o the School, marking the envelope 'Academies Question'.

IMPORTANT DATES FOR THE CONSULTATION

CONSULTATION START	6 th January 2012
CONSULTATION FINISH	27 th February 2012
PARENTS' CONSULTATION MEETING	6:00 PM School Hall 17 th January 2012
STAFF CONSULTATION MEETING	3:45 PM School Hall 24 th January 2012
PUBLICATION OF RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION	2 nd March 2012
FULL GOVERNORS' MEETING	6 th March 2012