**All schools to become academies by 2030**

**The Government has outlined plans for all schools to convert to academies by 2030.**



The Schools Bill announced in the Queen’s Speech last week says that all schools should become part of a “family of schools in a strong trust to level up school standards”.

The motive is to meet the Government’s target of “90% of primary school children achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and maths, and the percentage of children meeting the expected standard in the worst performing areas increasing by a third”.

Critics argued that supporting all schools to join a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) would not guarantee meeting these targets, however.

Research has shown a mixed picture on results, for example a study published by the [**Education Policy Institute**](https://epi.org.uk/) in 2017 concluded that while MATs accounted for many of the highest-performing school groups at primary and secondary level, MATs were also over-represented amongst the lowest-performing school groups.

This is the second time that conversion to academies has been announced, the Government having failed to make headway after the 2016 Budget set a target of 2020 for every primary and secondary school to be an academy, or in the process of becoming one.

In the 2020/21 academic year there were 4.5 million pupils attending academies, out of a total school population of 8.9 million pupils.

**What is the Government proposing?**

The Schools Bill confirms plans set out in the Schools White Paper published in March 2022.

It emphasises that, under the plans, all schools would be part of a “strong” trust. Strength will be judged by assessing the quality of the education delivered, the rate at which standards improve, whether there is effective governance, if finances are managed effectively and if the MAT recruits and retains good teachers and leaders.

The Government argues that:

* MATs are better than standalone trusts and maintained schools because they can “share good practice, support their schools to improve, and provide opportunities for staff”.
* Larger MATs can achieve economies of scale, enabling them to be “financially stable, maximise the impact of a well-supported workforce and drive school improvement”.
* “MATs can pool resource and expertise to benefit children with SEND [special educational needs or disability]”.

Under the proposals:

* Current standalone academies will be expected to transfer to a MAT.
* MATs will be encouraged to run a minimum of ten schools to achieve advantages of scale.
* Smaller MATs will be encouraged to merge with other MATs or secure growth on a school-by-school basis.
* Local authorities will be able to establish new MATs where too few strong trusts exist.
* A new MAT Chief Executive Officer development programme will be run for established leaders, such as executive headteachers and senior staff in trusts.

**What about funding?**

The Schools Bill promises improved access to specialist provision for pupils with SEND, including £2.6bn in high-needs capital investment over the next three years to deliver new places and improve existing provision.

The Government has also identified 55 Education Investment Areas (EIAs, areas of poor outcomes with urgent need for intervention) where efforts will initially be targeted with £86m committed in trust capacity funding over the next three years. There will be £40m more to provide further support to 24 Priority EIAs to tackle entrenched underperformance.

**What do the critics say?**

The Schools Bill includes the statistic that: "More than 7 out of 10 sponsored academies are now rated Good or Outstanding compared to about 1 in 10 of the local authority maintained schools they replaced."

The policy has been criticised by some, however, who argue that MATs are not more effective or efficient than other types of school.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders ([**ASCL**](https://www.ascl.org.uk/)), said: “To say this will support the arbitrary target of 90% of primary school children achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and maths by 2030 is a complete non-sequitur.

“What is needed to achieve that target is a massive injection of funding and resources to provide more individualised and specialist support for children with special educational needs and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. It is totally unrealistic to think this will happen within the current financial constraints.”

The National Foundation for Educational Research ([**NFER**](https://www.nfer.ac.uk/)) criticised the Government’s claim that large MATs can manage their finances more effectively than other types of structure. This argument was “difficult to evidence”, NFER said, because families of schools are able to pool their finances, making it difficult to compare the real circumstances of an individual MAT school with single trusts or maintained schools.

There are clearly strong arguments for and against the Government’s plans for all schools to convert to academies by 2030 but one thing is clear that there will be increasing pressure on schools for this to happen.

If you have any concerns as to how this development will affect your estate and its funding please do not hesitate to get in touch with the team at Surveyors to Education who would be more than willing to answer any questions you might have. We can be contacted on  **0116 5070130** or email **enquire@s2e.org.uk**.

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