



Shoreham Village School and The Pioneer Academy



Academy conversion Questions and Answers

This document has been issued by Shoreham Village School and The Pioneer Academy as part of the consultation about whether Shoreham Village School should convert to academy status within The Pioneer Academy.

Why has this proposal been put forward?

1. Why is Shoreham Village School considering converting to academy status?

The primary focus of every school is on providing the highest possible quality education to its pupils. Governors believe that being part of a primary-school multi-academy trust would provide benefits to staff and pupils in terms of sharing best practice, joint curriculum and staff development, a broader range of staff expertise, and more resilience within the staffing structure.

Shoreham Village School wants to secure its future by continuing to focus on providing the highest quality education for children – building on its strengths and continuing to be an Ofsted-rated Good school, and looking to develop this to become an Outstanding school in the future. It also wants to build on its strong ethos of nurture and aspiration.

Shoreham Village School wants to be part of a strong and diverse cluster of schools which shares its ethos and is ambitious for its children (current and future) in terms of well-being, academic success and social mobility.

After reviewing a wide range of options on what is in the best interests of all children, the governors decided that joining an academy trust was the preferred option since a MAT, smaller and more flexible than a local authority but bigger than a small one-form-entry school, will have the motivation and capacity to better champion Shoreham Village School.

After considering a number of academy trusts in the local area, the governors feel that the values, ethos and educational vision and expertise of The Pioneer Academy trust (TPA) are an excellent fit with those Shoreham Village School.

2. Why does The Pioneer Academy want to work with Shoreham Village School?

The Pioneer Academy is a richly diverse and inclusive Trust that has seventeen primary-phase schools (twelve primary, three junior and two infants) across the South East. The CEO is a former Head Teacher, who is passionate about making schools centres of excellence and learning hubs in their communities.

The Pioneer Academy has a strong moral purpose to raise achievement and attainment in all of the schools that it works with. It has established a track record of rapid and sustainable improvement in schools, through a combination of strong leadership, effective curriculum, high quality teaching, and rigorous planning and tracking.

The Pioneer Academy Trust vision is that 'We put children first, pioneering excellence and championing each and every child' and promotes our motto; 'Safe – Happy – Learning'. The Pioneer Academy adopts the following expectations:

Safe:

- Schools are safe and secure.
- Safeguarding is effective and robust
- Similarities and differences are celebrated; everyone thrives and flourishes

Happy:

- Pupils and staff are positive and succeed in a supportive environment
- Wellbeing for all
- High standards of attendance and enjoyment are outcomes of an inclusive TPA school

Learning:

- Learning is achieved by the successful sequencing of memorable experiences
- Learners are engaged, resilient and enthusiastic
- Learning outcomes are ambitious due to knowledgeable and effective teaching

What is an academy?

3. What is an Academy?

An Academy is an independent state school, funded directly from central government rather than through a local authority. A charitable company limited by guarantee (the Academy Trust) is responsible for the academy, and the Academy Trust signs the Funding Agreement (the contract) with the Secretary of State as part of the establishment of the academy.

Legislation requires that an academy has the following characteristics:

- That it offers a balanced and broadly-based curriculum;
- That it provides education for pupils of different abilities; and
- That it provides education for pupils who are wholly or mainly drawn from the area in which the school is situated

4. How is an academy different from a community school?

An academy has several differences to a community school, including:

- Admissions – an academy is responsible for setting and implementing its admissions policy and for prioritising applications. An academy must continue to operate within the requirements of the national School Admissions Code in the same way as maintained schools, including full participation in the local coordinated admissions scheme administered by the local authority;
- Land and Buildings – the land and buildings of the school are leased to the Academy Trust for 125 years at a peppercorn rent from the Local Authority and the academy would be responsible for the land and buildings (and reliant on the Secretary of State for capital funding);
- Curriculum – an academy has to offer a broad and balanced curriculum for pupils of differing abilities, including Maths, English, and Science, but it does not have to follow the National Curriculum; the Funding Agreement requires that an academy teaches Religious Education;
- Employment – the Academy Trust becomes the employer of school staff, rather than the local authority. Academies also have freedom to set new terms and conditions for future staff;
- Funding – the academy receives its existing school budget and also its share of the funding that is retained by the local authority for maintained schools; and
- Governance – The Pioneer Academy (which is a charitable company) would be responsible for all the schools within the Trust. School Boards provide local governance, and support and challenge to the Headteacher and leadership team, and include parents and staff. For Shoreham Village School, the School Board would be formed from the current Governing Body.

Some of these responsibilities are already held by Foundation and Voluntary-Aided Schools – Voluntary-Aided schools, for instance, are already responsible for their admissions, own their land and buildings (often through a Diocese) and employ their staff directly.

The Pioneer Academy is a multi-academy trust. This means that a single academy trust is responsible for several schools, who work together in close partnership to improve outcomes for pupils at all of the schools. Being part of The Pioneer Academy provides access to a greater range of staffing expertise, provides greater resilience in staffing if staff

are ill, on maternity leave or change job, provides more career development and training opportunities, and enables greater sustainability.

5. Does Ofsted inspect academies?

Yes, in exactly the same way as for maintained schools.

6. How can the Secretary of State intervene in an academy?

The Secretary of State has the ability to terminate the Funding Agreement for each of the schools within the Academy Trust if specified situations, predominantly if a school is eligible for ‘special measures’ or ‘requires significant improvement’ following an Ofsted inspection, student performance unacceptably low, there has been a serious breakdown in the governance or management of the academy, or the safety of pupils or staff is threatened. In this situation the Secretary of State would be able to enter into a Funding Agreement with another Academy Trust to take over the governance and management of the academy.

Academy governance

7. How would the academy be governed?

The Pioneer Academy is already an Academy Trust. The Academy Trust signs a Funding Agreement (the contract) with the Secretary of State for each school within the Academy Trust.

The Pioneer Academy has a Board of Trustees that would be legally responsible for the schools within the Trust (technically they are the legal Governing Body for each school).

School Boards provide local governance, and support and challenge to the Headteacher and leadership team, and include parents and staff. For Shoreham Village School, the School Board would be formed from the current Governing Body.

An Academy Trust also has a small number of Members. These Members have a similar role to ‘shareholders’ in a private company limited by shares, with the ability to appoint some of the Trustees.

8. How would parents become part of the School Board?

The same process as for the school currently. When there is a vacancy, applications are sought from the parents at the school, which may outline particular skill sets that would be useful to the School Board. If there are the same number or fewer applications than vacancies then those individuals who applied are appointed. If there are more applications than vacancies, the parents vote to decide who becomes a governor.

Academy funding and services

9. Do academies receive extra funding?

Academies receive their funding direct from the Government rather than via their local authority. The budget is calculated in the same way as now, with a few (fairly small) technical changes for areas such as rates. The academy financial year runs from September to August.

Academy policies

10. Would there be changes to the number of pupils admitted into the school?

It is not expected that the number of places at Shoreham Village School would change – there would continue to be 15 places in Reception each year.

11. Would there be changes to the admissions over-subscription criteria?

The criteria used to determine applications for Reception (the over-subscription criteria that apply if there are more applications than places) would remain the same for Reception entry in September 2025 and September 2026. For September 2027 and subsequent years, The Pioneer Academy proposes to include a ‘children of staff’ criteria – this would need to be consulted upon in Autumn 2025 and then a decision made in early 2026.

Educational implications

12. What are the safeguards for vulnerable pupils?

Under the terms of the Funding Agreement (which is the contract between the Academy Trust and the Secretary of State), an academy has to act in exactly the same way as a maintained school in relation to Special Education Needs, behaviour, and exclusions. The Pioneer Academy has an excellent track record of provision for vulnerable pupils.

13. Who is responsible for deciding if a student needs an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan?

The local authority would retain the legal responsibility for leading these processes, and for determining whether Shoreham Village School is named on the EHCP.

Land and buildings

14. What happens to the land of Shoreham Village School?

As a community school, the land is currently owned by Kent County Council, who would grant a lease to the Academy Trust. The local authority would retain the freehold title to the land. The Academy Trust would become responsible for the land and buildings in accordance with the lease.

15. How does an academy access capital funding?

Academies receive some capital funding, called Devolved Formula Capital, according to the same methodology as maintained schools. This funding is provided directly to the academy. Whereas Shoreham Village School currently relies on the local authority for funding for more substantial works, whether these are for repair / maintenance or for improvements, academies are generally reliant on central government.

What could change in the future?

16. What could change in the future?

If Shoreham Village School remains as a maintained school, changes in the future could originate from central government, Kent County Council, or the Governing Body. The Governing Body already has the powers to propose changes to the school day or year, curriculum, or how the budget is spent. Kent County Council could propose changes to the admissions number and policy, and support staff terms and conditions.

If Shoreham Village School converts to academy status, The Pioneer Academy could propose changes in the future. Many of these changes would require formal consultation with parents and / or staff and their Unions. The Governors could decide some changes, while others would require the agreement of the Secretary of State. At all times, and on all issues, the Trustees' are required to act in the best interests of the academy.

Consultation process

17. Who is being consulted?

The consultation document has been issued to parents and staff at Shoreham Village School, Kent County Council, local primary schools, the local MP, and the Trade Unions recognised by Kent County Council.

18. Will the Governors' listen to the views from the consultation?

Yes, every response will be considered. Responses might include arguments for and against Shoreham Village School conversion and / or the choice of The Pioneer Academy as the academy trust to join, as well as questions or concerns about conversion.