

What are co-operative schools?



There are currently three formal ways that schools can embed a co-operative ethos into their schools: trust schools, specialist schools and co-operative academies.

WHAT ARE CO-OPERATIVE TRUST SCHOOLS?

Trust schools are maintained schools supported by a charitable foundation (popularly known as a trust) which appoints some of the governors. The trust involves one or more partners and can help schools build long term, sustainable relationships with partners and, using their experience and expertise, strengthen leadership and governance to help raise standards.

The Government has indicated that there are no plans to close off the option for community and foundation schools to convert to trust schools, where they would remain within the LA maintained sector.

HOW IS A CO-OPERATIVE TRUST SCHOOL DIFFERENT?

The co-operative trust model embeds co-operative values and principles into schools. These include open membership, equal democratic participation (one member, one vote) and a clear line of accountability from those who manage the schools to those that use the school and its extended services. Importantly this offers schools the opportunity to involve the wider community in the running of the school, including local people, businesses, voluntary groups, charities, parents, pupils and staff through membership of a 'Council' or 'Forum'. The 'Council' appoints trustees to the trust which, in turn, appoints governors to the governing body of the school. The Council plays a pivotal role in delivering the trust's objectives in accordance with the core co-operative values.

FUNDING

ONCE A TRUST IS SET UP, WHO IS FINANCIALLY RESPONSIBLE?

The trust is managed by the Board of Trustees, which is financially responsible for the trust. The school remains funded in the same way as previously and the finances are managed by the Governing Body.

A trust school is a Local Authority maintained school and will continue to be financed in the same way as other maintained schools.

MEMBERSHIP

WHO ARE THE MEMBERS?

There are different categories of membership; parent, staff (anyone who works for the school, from caretakers to teachers), learners and community members (aimed at small community groups who don't carry enough weight to be a full blown partner in the Trust but still have an interest in the school). Some schools also have the option for individuals from the local community to become members.

The members of a co-operative trust elect a stakeholder forum. Members of the trust have a direct say in the trust, electing a number of Trustees (usually a minority).

Governance mechanisms ensure key stakeholders – parents/carers, staff, learners and the local community – have a voice through membership.

ETHOS

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY A 'CO-OPERATIVE ETHOS' IN SCHOOLS?

The College works with co-operative schools to look at how the globally shared co-operative values and ethos can have a real impact on the running of the school and curriculum and develop a co-operative pedagogy.

RAISING ACHIEVEMENT

HOW CAN CO-OPERATIVE VALUES HELP SCHOOLS IMPROVE STANDARDS?

Co-operative values can help schools raise standards in a variety of ways including through developing partnerships, helping to engage the local community in the strategic direction of schools and strengthening the curriculum. They can also help students gain a better understanding of their role as citizens and how they can help build a fairer society.

PARTNERS

WHAT IS A TRUST PARTNER?

The Charitable Trust is formed with a number of partners, who become part of the trust. These often include a local college, HE establishment or university, a prominent local business, national organisations, the NHS at a local level, sporting organisations, voluntary or community organisations and other organisations with a general concern about the education and welfare of young people. Sustainable relationships with external partners can bring renewed drive and expertise to the school and help improve standards. Some representatives from the partners sit on the trust board.

WILL THE TRUST PARTNERS MAKE A PROFIT OUT OF THE SCHOOL?

No. The school budget will continue to go directly to the governing body, not to the trust. Trusts must be constituted as not-for-profit charities – any income must be used to support their charitable aims, which must focus on the advancement of education and community cohesion.

PARENTS

DO PARENTS HAVE A SAY ABOUT TRUST SCHOOLS?

Yes. Parents will be consulted about the proposed trust and will be able to express their views.

STAFF

WILL THE GOVERNING BODY AND HEADTEACHER HAVE LESS CONTROL IN RUNNING THE SCHOOL?

There will be no reduction in the role and responsibilities of the governing body of trust schools. The governing body of a trust school (which retains parents, staff, community and local authority governors) remains responsible for all major decisions about the school and its future as well as all aspects of the conduct of the school (including the school's budget and staff) and so responsibilities and accountabilities remain clear. The trust holds the land and capital assets on trust for the Governing Body of the school.

Headteachers will retain their responsibility for the day-to-day running of their schools.

LAND AND ASSETS

CAN THE SCHOOL'S LAND AND ASSETS BE SOLD IF THE SCHOOL BECOMES A TRUST?

The Land and Assets are held in trust and cannot be sold without permission of the LA and/or the Secretary of State. If the Land and Assets are sold the proceeds can only be used for the purposes of the trust – ie to promote education and for no other purpose.

CLUSTERS

WHAT IS A CLUSTER?

A trust can be formed for a number of schools working together, which has the potential to be very powerful – often one or more high schools plus partner primaries. Over the past year, it has been more and more common to be approached by clusters of schools hoping to become Trusts. One benefit is resourcing can be used a lot more efficiently – a cluster of schools has increased purchasing power, for example.

SCHOOLS CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY

WHAT IS THE SCHOOLS CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY?

The Schools Co-operative Society is an independent body that is a secondary co-operative run and owned by the co-operative schools. The Network has practical and administrative benefits, such as procurement of services and teacher training, but it also acts as a voice for the group of schools.

ACADEMIES AND FREE SCHOOLS

HOW DO ACADEMIES AND FREE SCHOOLS FIT IN?

With the rapidly changing educational landscape and the heavy promotion of the new academies by the Coalition Government, a growing number of schools have approached us about a co-operative model for the 'type 2' academies. Whilst not advocating or promoting academies, we recognise that many schools are now seriously considering the option in view of local circumstances and competitive pressures, expectations from local authorities, and the financial advantages. As a result, a group of schools, some existing co-operative trust schools and some interested in a co-operative model for academies, are now working with the Co-operative College and Cobbetts to develop a model that retains the critical elements of co-operative schools identified through our work with trusts.

There are currently two 'Type 1' co-operative academies in Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent, with another opening soon in Leeds, sponsored by the Co-operative Group.

HOW WILL THE CO-OPERATIVE MODEL WORK IN ACADEMIES AND FREE SCHOOLS?

The co-operative model for academies will have a clear co-operative governance methodology that gives key stakeholders a central voice and role in ownership of the school (whilst recognising that for free schools those key stakeholder groups can vary).

The Articles of Government for the institution will embed an ethos of co-operation linked to the ICA Statement on the Co-operative Identity.

There will be a commitment to embed co-operation in the curriculum and pedagogy of the school.

WHO CAN BECOME AN ACADEMY?

The DfE has announced that applications will now be considered for academy orders from maintained schools where one of the following applies:

- **The school's Ofsted rating is good with outstanding features.**
- **The school formally agrees to work in partnership with a low-performing school (or schools) to help drive improvement.**
- **The school is a maintained special school rated outstanding by Ofsted.**

The government is keen to spread academies into the primary sector.

CHAINS

ACADEMY CHAINS

The White Paper says that schools working together leads to better results, so recommends placing less well-performing schools under the wing of either established providers or within new collaborative groups.

Some sponsors already oversee several academies in a geographical group, or in chains across the country, Chains are seen as a means for schools to improve more rapidly – by providing a common approach to professional development, sharing good practice, and providing shared 'back-office' support.

FREE SCHOOLS

BACKGROUND TO FREE SCHOOLS

Free schools can be set up under the Academies Act 2010 in both primary and secondary phases. These are academy schools that are entirely new institutions established in response to parental demand where parents are dissatisfied with what is currently available or where an LA has a need for additional school places, and a wide range of kinds of proposers can set them up. To all intents and purposes free schools are simply a different type of academy, as their legal structures are the same.

Like all academies they will have:

- **The ability to set their own pay and conditions for staff.**
- **Greater control of their budget paid as direct grant.**
- **No requirement to follow the National Curriculum.**
- **The ability to change the length of terms and school days.**

WHO CAN SET UP FREE SCHOOLS?

There must be evidence of parental demand such as a petition or declaration from interested parents. Proposers might include: Charities, existing academy sponsors, universities, independent schools, community and faith groups, teachers, parents, businesses. They might also include parents and community groups affected by school closures or other organisational changes, looking for alternatives to improve provision.

A group of willing but insufficiently experienced parents lacking the expertise to develop proposals and take them forward could commission the running of their proposed free school through an external service provider. This could include an existing academy sponsor or a commercial education sector operator.

Some established co-operative trust schools or academies might also wish to set up satellite provision to meet particular pedagogical needs – eg to develop specific provision for excluded

groups such as provision for NEETs (not in employment education or training) and PRUs – pupil referral units – generally for pupils excluded from main stream schools;

HOW DOES CO-OPERATION LINK WITH FREE SCHOOLS?

Increased accountability to parents and communities – parents and communities can maintain a democratic or community engagement through a co-operative model for schools.

Source: The \co-operative College web-site - <http://www.co-op.ac.uk/schools-and-young-people/co-operative-trusts-academies/co-operative-trust-schools-faqs/>