

Policy Statement on Academies and Free Schools

Support to the establishment of Academies and Free Schools

1. The Authority has a responsibility to ensure that all children in Suffolk have access to a good school which can make the best of their talents. We welcome diversity of provision including a range of different types of schools managed in different ways and with a variety of teaching approaches.
2. We support parental choice, not simply to help children find the school that best suits their needs but also to help improve the system as a whole. We have responsibility for the whole system, and will “manage the market”; encouraging collaboration to ensure the system works well for all children.
3. We will have a presumption of support for the creation of academies and free schools, and will take our responsibility to actively manage their introduction into the existing system of schools.
4. We will actively support academy proposals in the following circumstances. The level of support will vary according to the particular proposal.
 - (a) The authority will promote the conversion of a school to an academy where performance is consistently below floor targets and other interventions have failed. We will do this by linking the academy to a high performing school or other partner who can help turn the school round and raise attainment.
 - (b) The authority will support the conversion to an academy where this is a way of enabling the move to a two-tier system and so removing the main structural barrier to attainment. Proposals for an academy on this basis would need to demonstrate that they would have this impact on the whole system in the schools locality, and would really reduce transitions, rather than ‘re-badge’ three-tier provision.
 - (c) The authority will also support academies as part of restructuring local schools in a creative or different way to meet the specific needs of a place. For example we would support a group of small primary schools and a secondary school in a rural area to come together into an ‘all through’ academy to allow local provision to be maintained in a cost effective way.

- (d) Finally, the authority will support the formation of academies where schools are rated as 'Outstanding' or 'Good' with Outstanding features'.
- 5. When a demand for a free school emerges, the authority will always offer information and advice to the parental sponsorship group. It will offer positive support to the proposal in the following circumstances:
 - (a) where they are required to meet basic need for school places in an area and are a more cost effective way of doing so than alternatives.
 - (b) where a free school is part of a system-wide plan to move to two-tier education in a locality.
 - (c) where a free school is adding to diversity of provision is being promoted.
- 6. The authority will provide advice, support and data to enable decisions on free school proposals to be taken on a sound basis. It will also facilitate consultation on proposals.
- 7. The authority will not support proposals for academies or free schools designed to maintain the three-tier system or protect underperforming schools from challenge. We will make this clear to the schools involved and to the Department for Education (DfE), and will try to help find alternatives which do meet our objectives of raising attainment.
- 8. Once established, academies and free schools are outside of the remit of the local authority, being responsible to the Secretary of State through the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA). However, they would continue to be part of the family of Suffolk schools. Academies and free schools are also represented on the Schools Forum which is a key decision-making body. They also have a place on the Suffolk Admissions Forum. The authority will champion standards and the interests of pupils, including vulnerable children, in all Suffolk schools.