

Frequently asked questions about Free Schools Rotherham Special Free School

The information in this fact sheet is intended to help answer some of the questions which may arise when setting up a new Free School and have been produced in conjunction with Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council. This information cannot in any way replace the informal conversations and the statutory consultation that takes place during the pre-opening phase.

What is a Free School?

A Free School is a type of Academy that is directly funded by central government and independent of direct control by local government. Free Schools/ Academies are self-governing.

What is a Multi-Academy Trust?

A Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) is a charitable company limited by guarantee which is formed to oversee a group of schools that are free schools and/or academies. The MAT is the employer of staff and holds the land and buildings of each school in Trust.

How does governance work?

Governance can vary and this is driven by the Board of Trustees of the MAT who are ultimately responsible for the work of the Trust and the academies that are members. The Board decides what responsibilities they are delegating to local governors and it can cover areas such as progress and achievement, community relations, property, finance, staffing and pupil welfare. Any responsibilities delegated to a local governance structure is through a document called a Scheme of Delegation.

Why do Aspire and the Rowan Centre have to join a MAT?

The decision to form the new Rotherham Special Free School came from the local authority review of SEND provision in the borough. As part of this review the decision was taken for the current Rowan Centre provision and elements of Aspire to be brought together to create one new school for children with Social Emotional and Mental Health needs. To open a new school, local authorities can only open free schools or academies and they must be run by a multi academy trust following a local competition. The Rotherham Free School is the proposed new school; Ethos Academy Trust is the chosen sponsor / partner who will run the school.

How long does the pre-opening phase take and how will the process affect the day-to-day running of the school?

Because this project is a Free School Local Authority Presumption, planning has been underway for some time. There is no prescribed length of time however a minimum of 6 months is usual to enable the academy trust to complete all pre-opening tasks which includes the transfer of staff, communications with parents/ carers and wider stakeholders and set up all necessary policies, systems and procedures.

What is the role of the MAT Chief Executive Officer (CEO)?

They are the Accounting Officer for the Trust and the strategic lead for the whole Trust. The CEO is the key contact for the Regional Schools Commissioner and the DfE and acts as the point of first contact to ensure schools are not distracted from their core purpose of teaching and learning.

The priority for our school is the education of pupils. How will you ensure that the Free School formation does not distract us from this?

Part of the work of the RMBC, the Department for Education and the MAT, will be to carry out 'due diligence' exercises which will make clear what extra support may be needed. Ethos Academy Trust will work with partners to ensure we can continue to focus on teaching and learning and the progress of children.

What parents and carers need to know

- There will be a School Leadership team and Academy Performance Review Committee (local tier of governance) when the academy opens.
- The school, with the 'in principle' agreement of the Trust Board, is proposing a change of name and we would welcome your views on our proposals by completing our online survey: <https://www.eat.uk.com/free-school-consultation/have-your-say/> or completing the reply slip at the end and returning to reception.
- The school will admit pupils with an education health care plan and follow a Statement of Provision as set out by the DFE.
- The multi-academy trust arrangements will share some central services across the schools which will help them be more efficient and make sure that funding is focused on teaching, learning and support for children.
- Ethos Academy Trust was established in 2018 and currently runs 4 schools in the West Yorkshire region, providing wide-ranging high quality support and educational opportunities for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs.
- Ethos Academy Trust will work very closely and co-productively with local partners, including other schools, community groups, wider partner organisations, and the local authority.

Is a Free School / Academy like a business?

No. A business makes profit for its shareholders. An academy is a charitable trust which cannot make profit. It does report annually into the public domain on financial and academic performance.

Are academies bound by the same rules and regulations as other schools?

Academies are required to follow the law and guidance on admissions, special educational needs and exclusions.

Will the school follow the National Curriculum?

Yes, but it will have more freedom to try different things in the curriculum and make sure that what is taught is relevant to our pupils and their specific needs. The curriculum must be broad and balanced.

Does becoming a Free School change the relationship with local schools and the community?

No. Free School funding agreements state that they must ensure that the school will be at the heart of its community, collaborating and sharing facilities and expertise with other local schools and the wider community.

As a Free School, will it still work with the local authority (LA)?

Academies are independent of the local authority. However, we wish to continue working with the LA, other local schools and local partners.

What about funding?

The Department for Education via the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) meets the running costs for a free school. The funding is calculated on a like-for-like basis with local authority schools. Therefore, the school will have a similar budget to that of its predecessor schools. With greater freedom to procure services from other providers and to realise cost efficiencies across the Trust, the academy will be able to make more efficient use of resources to support school improvement. Like other schools, a free school cannot run at a loss or agree a deficit budget, i.e. it must break-even.

How will the school be accountable financially?

The school and academy trust are governed by the rules and regulations for charitable trusts and company law, e.g. we will be required to produce and file accounts and trustees cannot be paid. There will be robust and transparent systems, with an audit conducted regularly by an external independent auditor.

What functions would remain the statutory responsibility of the LA?

- Home to school transport
- Education psychology, SEND assessment processes
- Monitoring of SEND provision
- Prosecution of parents for non-attendance
- Assigned SEND resources for pupils with rare conditions needing individually tailored provision
- Provision of specialist facilities for a pupil who is no longer registered at a school

Who will be responsible, and pay for assessments of pupils with additional needs?

The LA retains the same statutory responsibility for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in free schools/academies as they would for a maintained school. We will continue to work closely with the LA to ensure that our SEND pupils are well provided for and to ensure that the LA meets their statutory commitments with regard to pupils.

Who will own the school building and land?

The academy trust will hold a 125-year lease for the land and buildings.

Will the staff stay the same?

When a school converts from a local authority maintained school to a new academy, all permanent staff are entitled to transfer to it under the same employment terms and conditions.

Will you consult with staff, community and parents?

Yes, we will consult with all key stakeholder groups during the transition phase. This will include the sharing of the trust’s plans and an opportunity to gather feedback and suggestions, as well as addressing any questions or concerns. A clear consultation will take place.

When will the new school name be confirmed?

We have consulted with all stakeholders, including staff, parents/carers and pupils on suggestions for the new school name. Consultation on the name for the new school took place from 25 March to 1 April 2022.

Once all the votes are counted and verified, we will officially announce the new school name on Friday 8th April.

Will there be a new uniform?

As part of the new school proposal, we would like to consult on the detail of a new school uniform. One sweatshirt per pupil will be provided free of charge by the Trust and additional uniform items can be purchased. These would be kept to a minimum and we would not expect parents and carers to buy a new uniform immediately on the day of the conversion; we would phase this in over a period of time.

What date would the Free School open?

The proposal, subject to approval from the Department for Education, is for the school to open on the 1 September 2022.

To have your say please complete the reply slip below or complete our online survey at

<https://www.eat.uk.com/free-school-consultation/have-your-say/>

REPLY SLIP

Any other comments (please insert)

Child’s name _____ Class _____

Parent/carer _____

Please return this slip by Friday 27 May 2022 or drop it into either of the main school receptions or email Consultation@eat.uk.com