



WinckworthSherwood

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Sponsored Academies

BRIEFING

Introduction

Driving forward school improvement and raising pupil attainment remains the key focus for the Department for Education (DfE). Targets for schools are being continually raised and the inspection regime is becoming more challenging.

Underperforming schools are being asked to work with sponsors to provide support and challenge.

Sponsors come in all shapes and sizes, ranging from other education institutions and charities to businesses and non government organisations, whose remit includes supporting education within the community, as well as community and religious bodies. Sponsors include newly formed education trusts (e.g. umbrella trusts) which often emerge from school to school collaboration.

The Office of the School Commissioner (OSC) supports the aims of the DfE in relation to academies; developing and supporting the emergence of sponsors and brokering relationships between sponsors and schools who require support. The OSC approves sponsors and will assist in the development of an Academy Action Plan.

The Sponsor Division of the DfE provides support for the conversion of a school to become a sponsored academy and regulates the process to ensure Ministerial policy is followed.

Sponsors

Sponsors provide vision as well as support. There is no requirement for sponsors to contribute financially to the academy by providing an endowment but sponsors are expected to provide time and resources. Sponsors may provide services but are not expected to profit from their involvement. Grants are available to sponsors to assist with building capacity (which may involve the back filling of resources) and to implement organisational change.

The cost of specific school support will also attract funding which may take the form of a grant as well as financial assistance from a Local Authority, generally in relation to any restructuring that needs to take place on or around conversion as well as the write off of debts owed by the sponsored academy. The details of this support will be outlined in the Academy Action Plan and sponsors should ensure this provides a comprehensive picture of what needs to be done where. There is no long term funding

for school improvement once sponsored on the assumption that it shouldn't be needed.

The conversion grant of £25k is also available.

EC Harris Top Tips for Sponsors

- Check all key milestones are agreed before starting and keep checking they haven't changed – the expectations of all parties can be different and conflicting
- Check school budget information is available and reliable. You need to be sure the school is sustainable early in the process
- If the school has an Interim Board in charge get control of it
- Check if staffing changes are needed or in hand – do you have sufficient information to assess? Are there staff who are going to be difficult to deal with in the process
- Understand the Local Authority position – are they really supportive or going through the motions?
- Remember that at the start you and all major stakeholders will have the same overall objective (DfE, LA, School) but once the process starts they will all have their own agenda which may not replicate yours

EC Harris LLP project manage the conversion of sponsored academies and are on the DfE panel of approved project managers.

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place a governance structure that achieves a clear allocation of responsibilities and thus establish accountability.

All models involve the school becoming an academy. It's not uncommon for this to be as a single academy trust but the far more common route and the DfE's strong preference is for a multi academy trust, particularly so where the Sponsor is another school.

In establishing an Academy Trust, sponsors are expected to be involved in the governance of the Trust, appointing members and trustees, and in appropriate cases sometimes acting themselves as a corporate member and/or trustee. It is not unusual for this involvement to be written into the constitution of the Trust and the relationship recognised to ensure that the Trust's mission and values are sympathetic to those of the Sponsor. This is particularly important when the Sponsor is another charity as the support to be provided must be appropriate in light of the objects of the Sponsor charity. It is also common for the two organisations to have similar names in order to reinforce the connection and provide public accountability.

The detail of the relationship will be different for each Sponsor and its Academy Trust but it is advisable for this detail to be articulated in some way. The Articles of Association will provide for governance and control. There may be a separate contract or memorandum of understanding or Scheme of Delegation which sets out behaviours and commitments, including any services to be provided and financial support.

Governance

There are a variety of ways in which a Sponsor may provide support and put in

Winckworth Sherwood Top Tips for sustaining improvement:

- Have clarity from the outset – whatever it is write it down
- Develop the vision - understand what that means to each other and to the outside world
- Make a change
- Think about control – strike the right balance between flexibility and accountability
- Identify the right individuals to support and serve in the right places
- Have consistency in management processes – light touch supervision comes from being able to compare easily
- Identify roles and responsibilities and stick to them
- Think about funding carefully – develop a budget from the outset even if the expectation is that little is done centrally
- Do hold some reserve centrally
- Take advice and develop relationships that might provide additional support
- Ensure there is challenge – separate roles and try to avoid the same people fulfilling all functions
- Think about succession planning and carry out a regular skills audit
- Don't be scared of intervention

For further information - please contact:



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