



NASUWT
The Teachers' Union



To: All Chairs of School Governing Bodies

Dear Colleague

As you may know, Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Education, has written to all headteachers in England inviting them to register their interest in transferring their school to academy status.

We are writing to you today because we recognise your critically important statutory responsibilities for educating children and young people. The decision to become an academy school is a highly significant and irreversible step for any school. We believe that governing bodies should be fully informed and involved in any decisions affecting the future legal status and operation of their school. We are sure that you would share our concern that any decision to seek to transfer to academy status should be a matter that, in the first instance, is brought before the school's governing body. In the final analysis, it is the governing body that will be held to account for decisions taken that affect the provision of education in the school.

The Government's proposed Academies Bill, inviting schools to become academies, would have profound implications for your school, your local community and for the future of state education.

The Secretary of State has written separately to the headteachers of outstanding schools and those in all other schools setting out a number of claims as to the benefits for schools in acquiring academy 'freedoms'. However, it is important to be clear about the facts and to understand fully the realities for you if your school chooses to become an academy. To that end, we attach a briefing note that we would encourage you to share with members of your governing body.

If you would like further information about the issue raised in this letter or would like someone from our organisations to meet with you or your governing body, please contact us on the e-mail addresses below.

Yours sincerely

Mary Boustead
ATL General Secretary
communications@atl.org.uk

Chris Keates
NASUWT General Secretary
nasuwt@mail.nasuwt.org.uk

Christine Blower
NUT General Secretary
academies@nut.org.uk



BRIEFING FOR SCHOOL GOVERNORS ON ACADEMIES BILL

Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Education, has written to all headteachers in England inviting them to register their interest in transferring their school to academy status.

Some headteachers and schools may believe that becoming an academy would provide them with greater freedom, less bureaucracy and more financial advantages. However, the reality is very different.

For individual schools, whilst initially there may be an increase in the school's budgetary allocation, the reality is that any additional money would need to be offset against the additional cost to schools of paying for services no longer provided by local authorities because of the reallocation of funding to the school. As an academy school, the local authority would be under no obligation to provide you with the support services currently available to you, including governor information and support, financial services, audit, school improvement, advice on health and safety regulations, legal advice, representation and employment support. Your school would need to consider how it would access such support in future and contend with having to access such services at a much higher cost.

The Government claims that becoming an academy school will lead to reduced bureaucratic burdens on headteachers and teachers. This is a fallacy. Moreover, the reality for already hard-pressed governing bodies is that becoming an academy school will drastically increase the bureaucratic burdens on volunteer school governors as they undertake a raft of statutory functions that previously were discharged on behalf of the school by the local authority or other relevant body. Independence for academy schools, therefore, comes at a price and could add to and compound the existing difficulties faced by schools in finding people to serve on the governing body.

There is also no evidence of a public clamour for the creation of new academy schools. Schools that choose to become an academy could find they come into conflict with parents and the local community, the vast majority of whom do not support the creation of academy schools. Indeed, a recent public opinion survey conducted by Ipsos MORI found that 96% of parents did not want state-funded schools to be run as academies.

A decision to become an academy school would also mean:

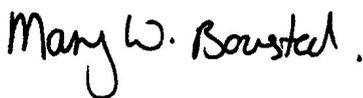
- no certainty that your governing body in its current form would continue. Previous experience from the existing 200 academies has shown that the majority of members of the governing body before the school became an academy (particularly parent governors) have been replaced by unelected corporate and business sponsors;
- your school having to raise additional money in order to enable future investment in developing or expanding your school site and for any other capital projects. You should be aware that the Government has not given any assurances about how recurrent capital costs of any new academy schools would be paid for;
- no guarantee on future revenue funding. No guarantee has been given to any school beyond March 2011. In a harsher public spending context, a new academy school would need to ensure that it could remain financially solvent and self-sufficient. Your school, if it became an academy, would not be able to rely on support from the local authority if circumstances beyond your control were to change (e.g. changing demographic trends);

- there would be no protection for the governing body if your school encountered a future financial overspend or budget deficit. Currently, all local authorities have statutory powers that enable them to provide financial support to schools in financial difficulty. Such support would no longer be available and, moreover, individual governors might not be fully indemnified against any financial liability or loss arising from a failure of the school's provision.

We believe that these are major risks that no governing body should take lightly. We also believe that schools work best when they work together, collaboratively, rather than in competition with each other. Indeed, thousands of schools judged by Ofsted as 'good' and 'outstanding' have achieved this high status without the need to become an academy.

We hope that you will agree that the Government's invitation to all primary, special and secondary schools to transfer to academy status is a complete distraction at a time when schools want to focus on delivering high educational standards and when the future financial position of schools, local authorities and other public services is so uncertain.

If you would like further information about any of the issues raised in this briefing or would like someone from our organisations to meet with you or your governing body, please contact us on the e-mail addresses below.



Mary Boustead
ATL General Secretary
communications@atl.org.uk



Chris Keates
NASUWT General Secretary
nasuwt@mail.nasuwt.org.uk



Christine Blower
NUT General Secretary
academies@nut.org.uk



NASUWT
The Teachers' Union



Dear Headteacher

You will have recently received a letter from the Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, inviting your school to register an interest in transferring to academy status. You will have noted from his letter that no such transfer can take place without a resolution passed by your governing body. Accordingly, please find attached a copy of the joint letter and briefing note we have sent to all Chairs of governors, expressing our shared view that any such transfer to academy status would have a detrimental and irreversible impact on all your schools' stakeholders – pupils, parents, staff and the governors themselves.

The attached letter and briefing note explains our common belief that academy status would bring neither you nor your school greater freedom, nor reduced bureaucracy, nor any long-term financial advantages. We are sure that you understand that no governing body should take lightly a decision with such profound implications for the school, nor without undertaking a full consultation with parents, staff and their unions. We hope that you also share our view that the Government's invitation is a complete distraction from what should be our core focus on delivering high educational standards, especially at a time of such financial insecurity for schools, local authorities and other public services.

If you would like further information about the issue raised in this letter or would like someone from our organisations to meet with you or your governing body, please speak to our Representatives in your school or contact us on the e-mail addresses below.

Yours sincerely

Mary Boustead
ATL General Secretary
communications@atl.org.uk

Chris Keates
NASUWT General Secretary
nasuwt@mail.nasuwt.org.uk

Christine Blower
NUT General Secretary
academies@nut.org.uk