

EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 6 FEBRUARY 2014

ACADEMIES PROGRAMME - END OF YEAR REPORT - 2013

Report by Director for Children, Education and Families

Introduction

1. The council continues to implement its policy on academies through an Academies Programme Project as part of its overarching Education Strategy. There are three main strands of activity within the project:
2.
 - Encouraging and supporting groups of schools to convert
 - Ensuring that underperforming schools become Academies with an appropriate sponsor
 - Developing new Academies and Free Schools in response to demographic need or parental demand.

This report identifies and analyses trends in this academies programme during 2013.

Exempt Information

3. None

National and Local Statistics

4. As of October 2013, 3,444 English schools have become academies of which 2532 are converters and 912 are sponsored. The table below sets out trends in academy conversion nationally and locally during 2013.

National

Date	Secondary	Primary	Special
November 2012	55%	<5%	>5%
November 2013	55%	9%	No national % available. 112 Special /PRUs

Oxfordshire

Date	Secondary	Primary	Special
1 February 2013	20 (59%)	7(1 sponsored) (3%)	4 (33%)
1 December 2013	21 (62%)	32 (6 sponsored) (14%)	4 (33%)

5. It can be seen that the greatest volume of conversions this year In Oxfordshire has been in the primary sector and that the local conversion rate is higher than the national rate. The trend is set to continue with more primary schools currently deciding to convert in groups. Four further secondary schools have also decided to convert to academy status during 2014.
6. There were 57 academies in Oxfordshire at 1 December 2013. Thirty one of them converted in 2013. Five county schools became the first sponsored academies brokered by the DfE post 2010. 31% of the total Oxfordshire pupil population are now educated in academies.
7. There are marked differences in volume of academy conversions between locality areas. These are set out in Annex 1. At Annex 2 is the latest monthly update of individual schools which have, or are considering conversion to academy status.

Trends in conversions

8. If conversions continue at the current rate (average 3 per month) 45 more schools will have become academies by 30 April 2015. The total number of academies would be 105 and 176 (62%) schools would still be maintained by the County Council.
9. If the trend in conversions continues to increase year on year and we assume a rate of 5 per month, 80 more schools will have become academies by 30 April 2015. The total number of academies would be 137 and 144 (51%) schools would still be maintained by the County Council.
10. In 2013 most conversions were undertaken as part of groups. This trend of schools forming or joining existing Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) is expected to continue.
11. During 2013 barriers to the conversion of CE schools were identified and affected school decisions about whether to convert to academy status. New model trust articles in 2013 and more planned for 2014 will remove these barriers. The first MATs to use these models are Faringdon Academy of Schools and The Vale Academy Trust.
12. Roman Catholic schools in Oxfordshire may only convert to academy status with other RC schools.

Local Collaborative Companies

13. Local collaborative companies can be used to promote, build on and formalise existing partnership arrangements for shared support and services between schools. They can stand on their own or be used as a stepping stone for schools in considering whether and how an academy partnership may be appropriate to them. Six groups of schools are considering this option.

Sponsorship

14. In 2013 5 primary schools converted to academy status with a sponsor. Sponsors were identified early in the process and were resourced entirely from the local area including a national chain already working in the county.
15. There is a national shortage of sponsorship capacity and Oxfordshire aims to encourage successful local schools to become sponsors in the county. DfE and the County Council have highlighted a need to increase the pool of sponsors available to support under performing schools. This is a challenge nationally as DfE have also accepted the need to ensure existing approved sponsors have the capacity to support expansion before approving additional schools to join trusts. This reflects both the rapid expansion of the academies programme and the need to maintain existing standards in currently good provision.
16. In 2014 additional external sponsors are likely to commence working in Oxfordshire schools, particularly new schools.

New Academies

17. Tyndale Community Primary School and Heyford Park School (all through) opened at the start of the 2013 academic year. There are now three free schools open in the county.
18. New academies for which bids are made directly to Secretary of State (SoS) do not necessarily fit with the county strategy for provision of places but there remains a statutory duty on the Council to ensure places are provided to meet demand. Decisions in this respect can have a knock-on effect on capital, revenue and standards that the council will have no direct control over.
19. In 2013 the following new academies were approved to open in Oxfordshire through direct bids to SoS.
 - (a) A University Technical College (UTC) in Didcot/Harwell has been approved to open in September 2015. The Cabinet has supported this provision as part of the overall secondary school provision for Great Western Park, Didcot and is working with the sponsor (Activ8) in this regard.
 - (b) A 300 pupil Studio School for 14-19 year olds at Banbury School sponsored by the Aspirations Academy Trust will admit pupils from September 2014 and is included in the co-ordinated scheme of admissions.
 - (c) A bid by Activ8 for a 300 place Studio School in Bicester has just been approved.
20. New academies can also be promoted by the County Council to provide new pupil places to meet anticipated demand and there are a number of proposals currently under consideration as listed below.
 - (a) MacIntyre Academy for Autistic Children, Oxford

- (b) Didcot (Great Western Park) - Provision for School places required to meet new housing development - Two primary schools and 1 secondary school are required between September 2015 and 2017.
- (c) Various consultations at Grove and Wantage, Barton West, Bicester, and West Witney have been undertaken or are in progress to identify preferred sponsors for a significant number of new schools from September 2015.

Financial and Staff Implications

- 21. A managed system now ensures schools convert with all business issues relating to the county council set out in transfer documentation. There are insufficient funds to meet the anticipated costs of this programme in 2014/15. A budget pressure has been identified. The cost per conversion to the Council is approximately £10,000.
- 22. As schools convert to academy status the Direct Schools Grant (DSG) allocation will continue to reduce as funding for academies is passed to the Education Funding Agency to administer. As DSG reduces the overall funds from which to meet expenditure on existing schools is reduced.
- 23. The authority must provide revenue funding to new academies in the pre-opening stage and during the period of time it takes for the school to be open in all year groups. This will be a significant amount as several new academies open from September 2014 onwards.

Conclusion

- (a) Schools have begun to convert to academy status as groups and the barriers affecting their choices are being removed. There has been clear progress in this area.
 - (b) Under performing schools have been identified, early support is put in place and schools have begun to complete conversions as sponsored academies.
 - (c) New academies and free schools have been set up in the county in response to demographic need to parental demand. Procedures are in place to set up new academies as required by the County or to engage in positive dialogue with sponsors applying to open schools in the area through DfE bidding annual processes.
- 24. County Council policy is being implemented and the challenge for 2014 onwards is to establish new ways of working to reflect the mixed economy of publicly maintained schools in the area to meet statutory duties for place planning, maintaining standards of achievement, and safeguarding in all these different types of schools and academies.
 - 25. For regular updates please visit academies intranet site at <http://schools.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/node/112>

RECOMMENDATION

26. **The Education Scrutiny Committee is RECOMMENDED to note the above report.**

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Background papers: Nil

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