

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**ACADEMIES PROGRAMME
END OF YEAR REPORT – 2023**

March 2024

School Organisation & Planning Team

For regular updates please visit our intranet site at [Academies programme |
Oxfordshire Schools](#)

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school.planning@oxfordshire.gov.uk



**OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL**

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This report identifies and analyses trends in the academies programme during 2023, and indicates changes from those noted in 2022, under the following headings:

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1. Executive Summary

- a. Academies are publicly funded schools independent of the Local Authority.
- b. By the end of 2023 there were 176 open academies in Oxfordshire: 155 conversions (29 classed as sponsored conversions) and 21 new Free Schools and Studio Schools. One academy permanently closed during 2023 (Wootton-by-Woodstock CE Primary School).
- c. There are more academies in Oxfordshire (176) than there are maintained schools (123, excluding nurseries that do not have the option to convert). 72% of Oxfordshire pupils in publicly funded provision are educated in academies. 51% of primary pupils and 98% of secondary pupils attend an academy.
- d. There are 34 Academy Trusts operating in Oxfordshire, seven of which are Single Academy Trusts.
- e. There were no new Academy Trusts established in 2023 in Oxfordshire.
- f. Church of England schools have several options for joining a MAT in the county. Catholic schools in Oxfordshire may still only convert to academy status with other catholic schools.
- g. 23 Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) operating in Oxfordshire are approved Sponsor Trusts. The supply of sponsors in Oxfordshire remains good and officers continue to intimate to the DfE Regional Director that there is potential from within trusts operating in the county to meet the need to support schools with standards issues.
- h. A managed conversion process is in place to ensure schools convert with all business issues relating to the Council set out in transfer documentation. The cost per conversion to the Council remains approximately £12,000. A one-off contribution to the costs of the Council per conversion has been levied on voluntary converting schools since 1st April 2016. This is set at £6,000 per school and is met from the DfE grant they receive to meet costs of the conversion process.
- i. After two years of very low levels of conversion activity, there was increased activity in 2023.
- j. All new provision schools are now designated as Free Schools and may be provided either through the Local Authority led 'Presumption' process or through a 'central' (DfE-led) process whereby sponsors can make direct bids to open new schools to the Secretary of State. Since 2013, 22 new academies have opened in Oxfordshire, through a mixture of procurement routes, with a further two academies (both special schools) currently programmed to open in the next three years. One of those new academies subsequently closed in 2021.
- k. The authority is required to provide revenue support funding to LA-Presumption new academies both in the pre-opening stage and during the time it takes for the school to be open in all year groups.
- l. In 2022, the system of Regional Schools Commissioners was reorganised by the DfE into nine Regional Directors, with slight changes in geographic coverage. Oxfordshire is located in the South East region, and the Regional Director for this Oxfordshire remains Dame Kate Dethridge.

2. Introduction

Academies are publicly funded schools independent of local authority control. Between 2001 and 2010, there was only one kind of academy, a Sponsored Academy, where an existing school was closed and re-opened as a new legal entity in response to low attainment and judgements made by Ofsted. In Oxfordshire, three academies of this kind were established prior to 2010 (North Oxfordshire Academy, Banbury, The Oxford Academy and Oxford Spires Academy). Since then, further sponsored academies have been created as a result of Ofsted judgements.

The Academies Act 2010 paved the way for a new education landscape, enabling strong schools to voluntarily choose to become an academy, converting under a different process (Converter Academies). Initially, strong schools were able to apply to the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) to convert as a Single Academy Trust (SAT), but increasingly it is acknowledged that for financial sustainability and school effectiveness reasons, schools must now either seek to join an established Multi Academy Trusts (MAT) or work in partnership to establish their own.

New schools are also expected to be academies, categorised as Free Schools, which can be set up through different routes: an LA-driven Presumption Competition, or the open national competition managed by the DfE (Central Route).

Oxfordshire County Council continues to implement its policy on academies through an Academies Programme as part of its overarching Education Strategy, detailed in the Cabinet Report on 20 October 2015¹. This recognised that the Council has a strong track record of supporting schools to become academies.

Officers continue to follow many of the principles set out in that report:

- a. No school 'left behind' by virtue of ethos or size.
- b. Consideration of geographical proximity of schools.
- c. Recognition of active formal partnership links.
- d. Robust consideration of potential of Multi Academy Trusts to promote good and better standards of education and effective working with the Council in carrying out its statutory duties such as place planning.
- e. Recognition that a strategic plan for school groupings is required to maintain standards and accountability amongst education providers in the county.
- f. Recognition that too many different trust arrangements will potentially dilute the local effectiveness of schools and adversely affect the Council in fulfilling its statutory duties, for example, to provide sufficient good quality pupil places.
- g. Seek dialogue about expansion opportunities in the county sought by trusts located in the county.
- h. Engage with academies in all phases that meet the criteria to be approved as a sponsor with a view to encouraging them to seek such status and offer local solutions in education provision.
- i. Work with Regional Director and her team to hold non performing trusts to account.
- j. Work with Regional Director and her team to promote expansion of good performing trusts in county.

¹http://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/documents/s31331/CA_OCT2015R15%20Strategic%20Groupings%20o%20Academies%202015-20.doc.pdf

- k. Free School bids from suitable approved sponsors to be encouraged in areas where no basic need solutions are available from current resources and to promote diversity of choice for parents throughout the county.
- l. Recognition of the formal position of the three Dioceses represented in Oxfordshire schools regarding consent for those schools to convert to academy status.
- m. Engagement at county level about appropriate academy solutions for Church of England schools with ODST. (Schools are currently advised to pursue individual solutions direct with the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education).
- n. To adopt a more assertive policy in identifying appropriate sponsors for schools required to convert to academy status.
- o. To promote appropriate groupings to form new Multi Academy Trusts and encourage the growth of existing Multi Academy Trusts based in the county.

Officers continue to develop and strengthen relationships with existing trusts in the County with a view to maintaining a strong market enabling choice for schools.

3. National and Local Statistics

As of December 2023, 10,553 English schools had become academies of which 7,171 are converters, 2,617 are sponsored and 765 are new Free Schools.

By the end of 2023 there were 176 open academies in Oxfordshire (155 conversions and 21 new Free Schools), of which 30 are classed as sponsored conversions.

The graph below compares the percentage of academies by the way they were formed (Voluntary, Sponsored or new Free School).

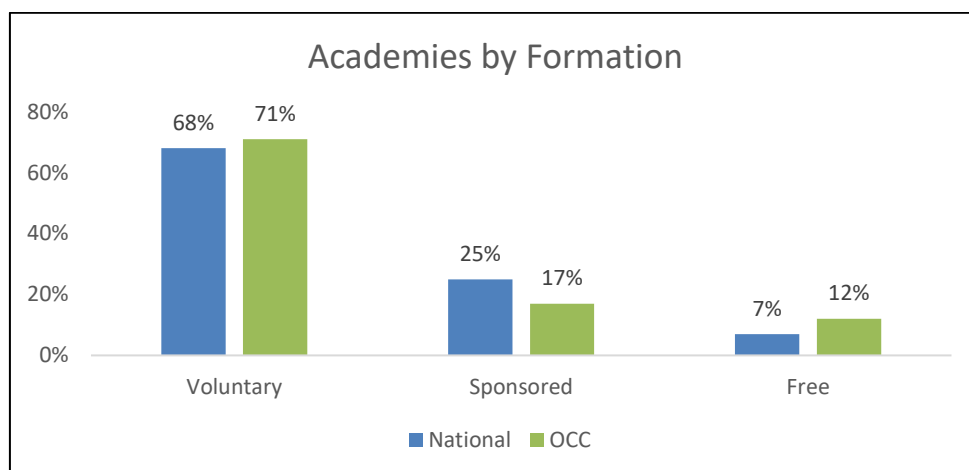


Figure 1: academies by formation

Oxfordshire is above national average for the number of voluntary conversions and free schools, and below national average for the number of sponsored conversions.

The graph below compares the percentage of academy schools nationally and locally during 2023.² Oxfordshire has more academies than the national average in all sectors.

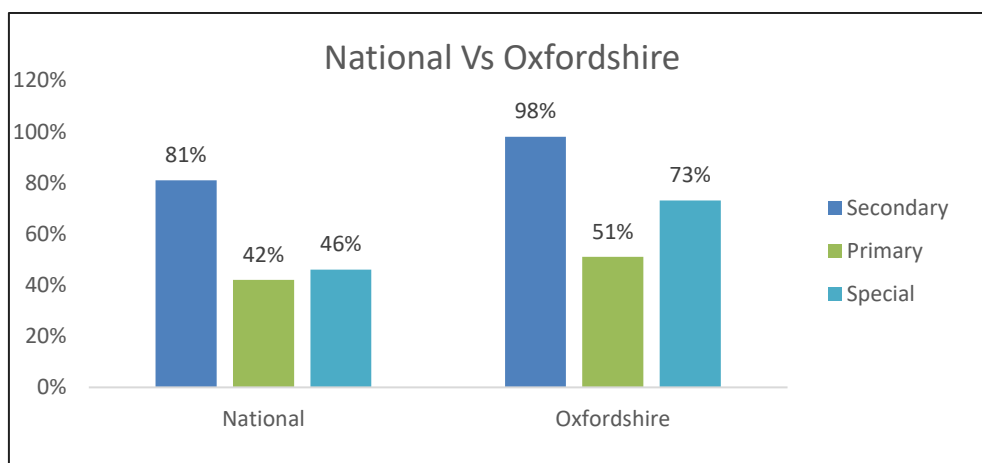


Figure 2: percentage of schools which are academies in each sector

² Source: DfE Transparency Data Transparency data Open academies, free schools, studio schools and UTCs <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/open-academies-and-academy-projects-in-development>

4. Analysis of Oxfordshire Conversions

a. Number of academy converters

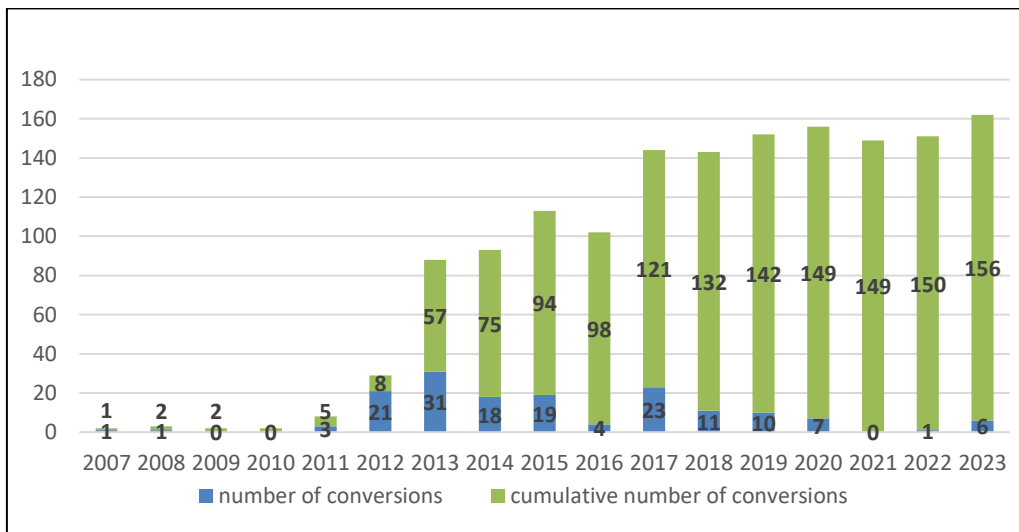


Figure 3: percentage of schools which are academies in each sector

There have been 156 conversions since the start of the academies programme in 2007; one of these schools has subsequently closed, leaving 155 open academy conversions. Over the most recent ten-year period there has been an average of 12 conversions per calendar year, with peaks in 2013-2015 and 2017. There were no conversions in 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

b. Academies as a percentage of school estate

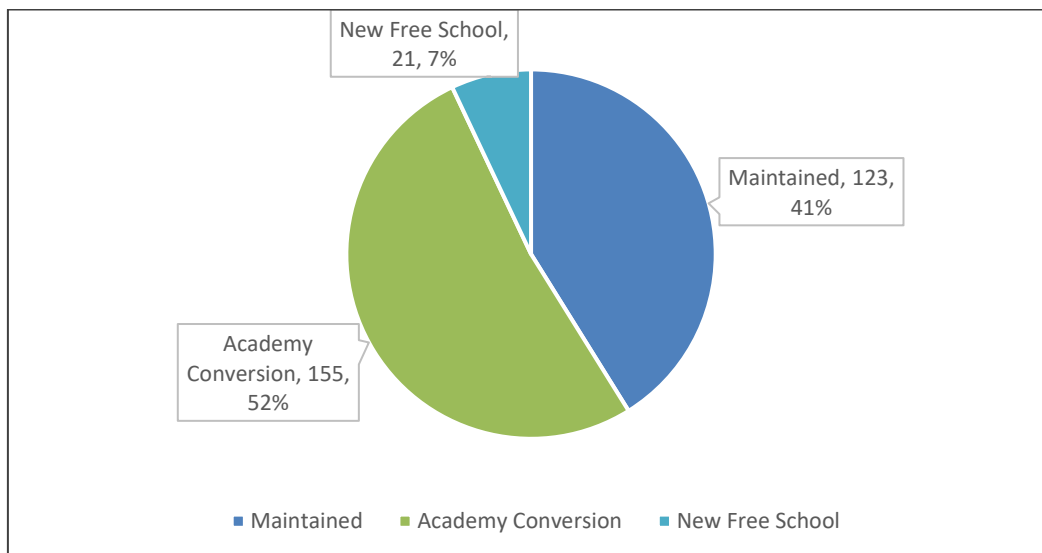


Figure 4: percentage of all schools by academy status, end of 2023

As of December 2023, 33 secondary schools, 112 primaries, and 10 special schools across the county had converted to academy status. There are more academies in Oxfordshire (176) than there are maintained schools (123). The number of academies has exceeded maintained schools since mid-2019.

The following graphs show the breakdown of school status by phase.

c. Primary school Academy status

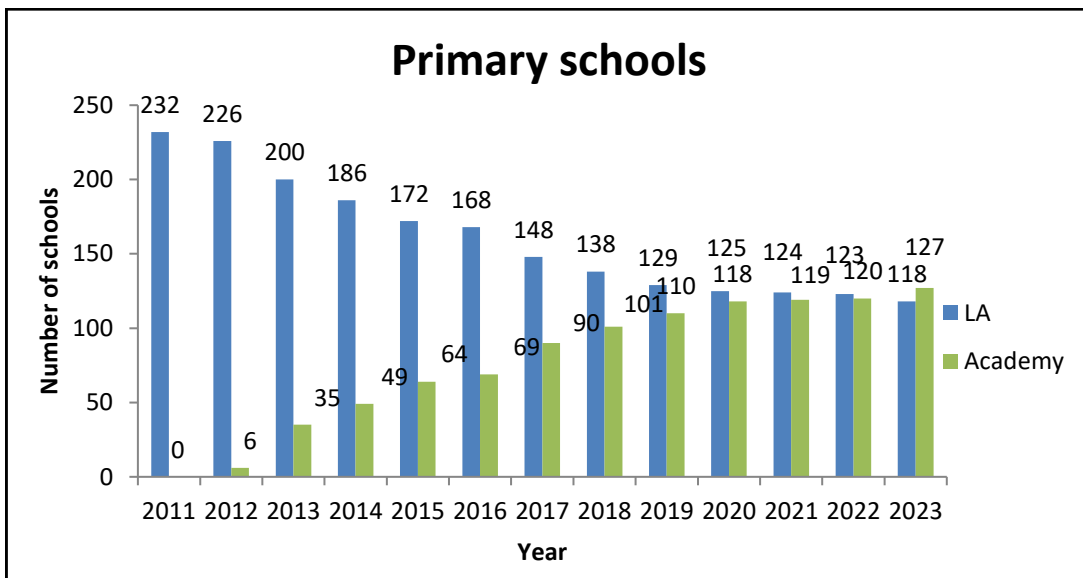


Figure 5: primary schools by academy status, 2011-2023

Note: figures include the new, free, and all-through schools, but not foundation stage settings. The all-through schools are Europa and Heyford Park, and St John’s Academy which opened in 2023 (only primary phase until 2025).

d. Secondary school Academy status

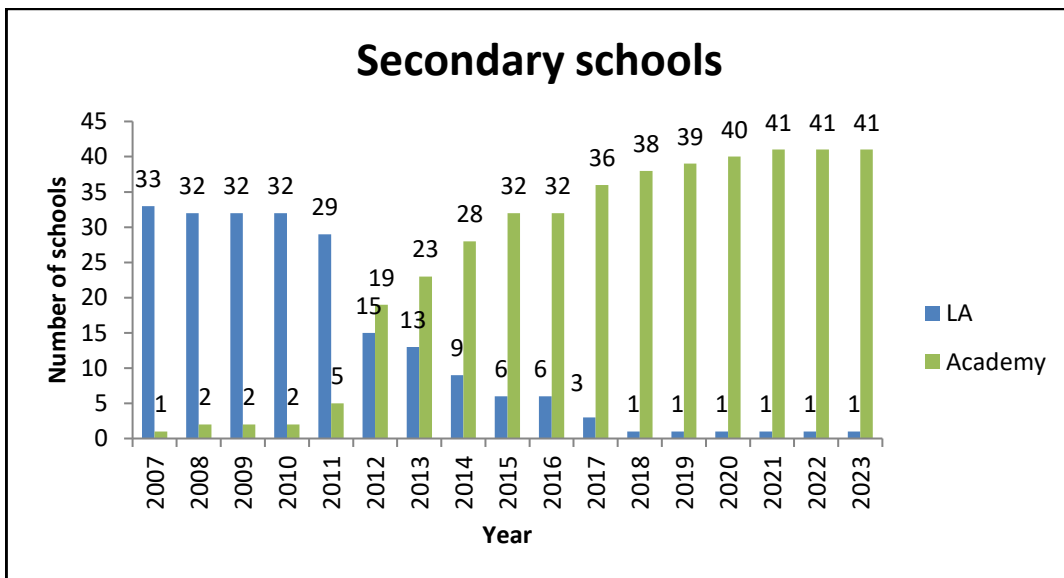


Figure 6: secondary schools by academy status, 2007-2023

Note: figures include the new, free, and all-through schools. The all-through schools are Europa and Heyford Park, and St John’s Academy which opened in 2023 (secondary phase due to open 2025).

Note: Bicester Technology Studio closed in August 21 and is now part of The Bicester School.

e. Special school Academy status

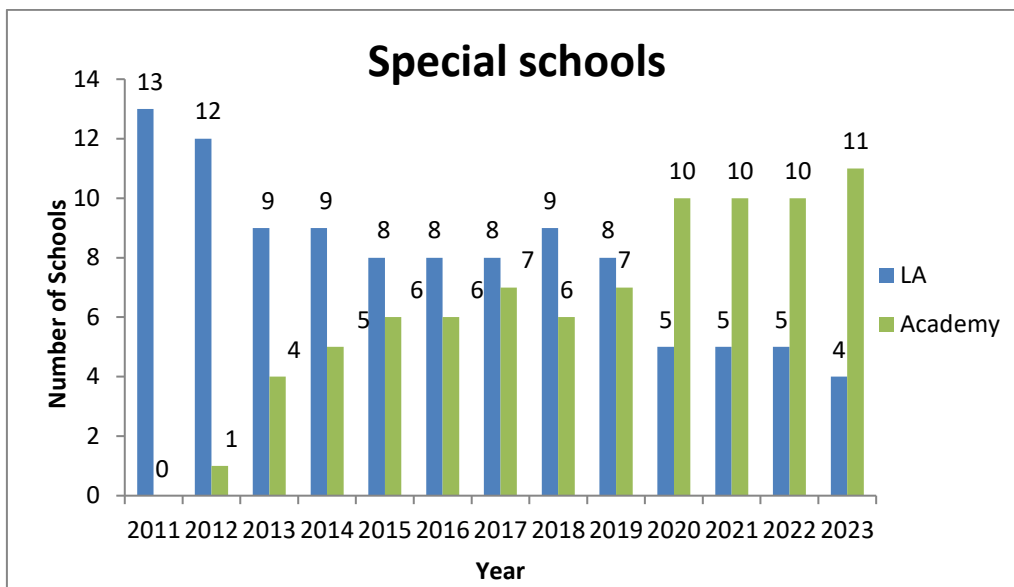


Figure 7: special schools by academy status, 2011-2023

Note: Bloxham Grove Academy is not included, as that did not open until January 2024.

f. Numbers of pupils in academies

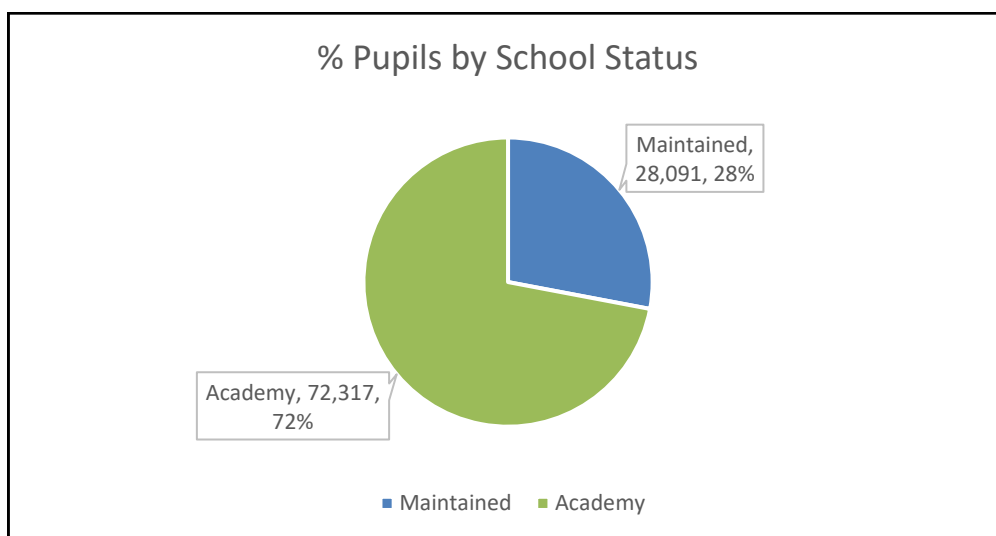


Figure 7: pupils by academy status, Oct 23 Census

By December 2023 there were 61, 919 pupils of statutory school age in open academies. When Foundation Stage 1,957 and post 16 pupils 6,478 are also included, this number increases to 72,311 (72%) of all pupils in Oxfordshire.

42,343 (97%) secondary aged pupils attend an academy.

27,035 (51%) primary pupils attend an academy.

5. Academy Trusts

Below is a table of all Academy Trusts currently operating in Oxfordshire, showing the type of trust (MAT, MAC or SAT) and the number of schools operated by each trust both in and out of Oxfordshire.

| Academy Trusts | Trust Type (MAT, MAC, SAT) | No. of Oxon schools | No. of other schools | Includes Faith Schools | Sponsor status |
|--|----------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|------------------------|----------------|
| Abingdon Learning Trust | MAT | 3 | | | |
| Acer Trust | MAT | 7 | | | Y |
| Activate Learning Education Trust | MAT | 2 | 4 | | Y |
| Anthem Schools Trust | MAT | 2 | 14 | | Y |
| Aspirations Academies Trust | MAT | 4 | 12 | | Y |
| Bernwode Schools Trust | MAT | 2 | | | |
| Burford School | SAT | 1 | | | |
| Cholsey Primary Academy Trust | SAT | 1 | | | |
| Europa School Trust | SAT | 1 | | | |
| Eynsham Partnership Academy Trust | MAT | 10 | | Y | Y |
| Faringdon Learning Trust | MAT | 9 | | Y | Y |
| Gillotts School | SAT | 1 | | | Y |
| GLF Schools | MAT | 7 | 37 | | Y |
| Ladygrove Park Primary School | SAT | 1 | | | |
| Macintyre Academies Trust | MAT | 1 | | | Y |
| Maiden Erlegh Trust | MAT | 1 | 5 | | Y |
| Omnia Learning Trust | MAT | 3 | 2 | | Y |
| Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust (ODST) | MAT | 33 | 10 | | Y |
| Pope Francis Multi-Academy Company | MAC | 11 | | | Y |
| Propeller Academy Trust | MAT | 3 | | | Y |
| Radcliffe Academy Trust | MAT | 1 | | | |
| Ridgeway Education Trust | MAT | 5 | | Y | Y |
| River Learning Trust (RLT) | MAT | 26 | 2 | Y | Y |
| St John's Academy Trust | SAT | 1 | | | |
| Thame Partnership Academy Trust | MAT | 1 | | | |
| The Gallery Trust | MAT | 6 | | | Y |
| The Langtree School Academy Trust | MAT | 1 | | | |
| The Merchant Taylors Oxfordshire Academy Trust Ltd | MAT | 2 | 1 | Y | |
| The Mill Academy | MAT | 3 | | Y | Y |
| The Warriner MAT | MAT | 7 | 1 | Y | Y |
| The White Horse Federation | MAT | 4 | 27 | Y | Y |
| United Learning Trust | MAT | 6 | 84 | | Y |
| Vale Academy Trust | MAT | 9 | | Y | |
| Willowcroft Academy Trust | SAT | 1 | | | |
| Totals | 34 | 176 | 12 | 9 | 21 |

Figure 8: academy trusts operating in Oxfordshire, 2023

The expectation continues to be for schools to establish / join a MAT, rather than convert as a single academy trust (SAT). It is anticipated that the number of Single Academy trusts (SATS) will reduce further in the future as they are either re-brokered as a Sponsored Academy, electively join a MAT, or expand into a MAT.

Re-brokering academies (movement of a SAT to a MAT, or a MAT to a MAT) does not usually attract the £25K Academy Conversion Grant and incurs tax implications. This is therefore a costly exercise but is usually done to ensure appropriate school improvement support and sustainability is secured.

MATs are beginning to consolidate by joining together and Trusts that contain schools outside the county are forming Oxfordshire 'hubs'. For example, GLF Schools originally based in Surrey are growing hubs in Banbury and Didcot.

Oxfordshire grown MATs are also taking schools from outside of the county, for instance The Warriner MAT with schools in Northamptonshire, Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust with schools in Windsor and Maidenhead and River Learning Trust with schools in Swindon.

Faith Schools and Academy Conversion

Of the remaining 123 maintained schools, 70 have a religious designation (either Church of England, Archdiocese of Birmingham (RC) or Diocese of Portsmouth (RC)).

Church of England Provision

- Church of England (controlled and aided) schools require the consent of their Diocesan Board of Education to convert to academy status. Such consent will not be given to join academy chains unwilling to adopt Church of England Articles, but may be given for 'locally grown' trusts.
- The above table shows which Multi-Academy Trust have the ability to accommodate a Church of England school in their MAT.

Catholic Provision

- Catholic schools may only convert as part of a catholic academy trust.
- In January 2021 the Dominic Barberi MAC which operated seven Oxfordshire schools merged into Pope Francis MAC; this MAC forms part of the governance structure set out by the Birmingham Catholic Archdiocese. (In operational terms a MAC operates in exactly the same way as a MAT.)
- There are two Catholic primary schools in the county which fall under the auspices of the Portsmouth Catholic Diocese and cannot join with either community schools or Catholic schools from the Birmingham Catholic Archdiocese as different articles of association apply to each. The nearest academy trust provided by Portsmouth Catholic Diocese for these schools to join is Pier Giorgio Frassati Trust currently based in West Berkshire.

6. Sponsorship

a. Underperforming Schools

Practice has been that once schools are judged by Ofsted to require ‘*special measures*’ a package of local support to effect rapid change in school improvement and management structure is put in place. In April 2016 the Education and Adoption Act 2016 was enacted. The DfE also published revised statutory guidance ‘Schools Causing Concern’ in July 2023. Key action required by the 2016 Act and the 2023 statutory guidance are set out below:

- Regional Directors have powers to issue any school with a performance, standards or safety notice. Local Authorities (LAs) also have this power for maintained schools but the powers of the Regional Director now take precedence.
- Governors of maintained schools eligible for intervention are obliged to cooperate with the Regional Director, another school or school improvement agencies as directed.
- The Regional Director can direct the size and membership of Interim Executive Boards (IEB) in schools identified as eligible for intervention. The Regional Director will also determine terms of appointment and termination of appointments.
- LAs must liaise with the Regional Directors regarding schools eligible for intervention before ordering Governors to commence school improvement activities and are required to inform him/her before suspending a delegated budget. LAs cannot suspend the budget of a maintained school under an IEB set up by the Regional Director.
- Regional Directors must inform LAs if intervening in a maintained school and their plans will take precedence over any LA plans.
- The Secretary of State has a duty to make an academy order in respect of any maintained school judged as Inadequate by Ofsted, to enable it to become an academy and receive additional support from a sponsor. The Regional Director, acting on behalf of the Secretary of State, will take responsibility for ensuring that the maintained school becomes a sponsored academy, including identifying the most suitable academy trust and brokering the new relationship between that academy trust and the maintained school. An exception can be made where the school is judged Inadequate for Leadership and Management solely due to safeguarding (but judged Good or Outstanding in other key areas) if, when Ofsted carry out an early monitoring visit within 3 months of publication of the Inadequate judgement it determines sufficient improvements have been made for the school to be regraded.
- The Secretary of State has a discretionary power to intervene in maintained schools that are “coasting” (not making necessary improvements). Schools are defined as eligible for intervention if they have 2,3 or 4 consecutive Ofsted judgments of less than Good and have received their most recent Ofsted inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 since 1 May 2021, or 5 or more consecutive less than Good Ofsted judgments regardless of the date of their last Ofsted inspection. For eligible maintained schools, there will be a presumption in favour of issuing the maintained school with an academy order so that it may join a strong multi-academy trust unless exceptional circumstances apply.
- Regional Directors will also take action if an academy is rated inadequate by Ofsted. This may include terminating the academy’s funding agreement to bring about a change of academy trust. The Secretary of State (via Regional Directors) has a discretionary power to intervene in academies that fall under the definition of “coasting” (including judgments of below ‘Good’ that were issued to predecessor schools).

- There is no requirement for a consultation on becoming an academy or sponsor if the school is a community school. There is a requirement for Regional Directors to hold a consultation with key stakeholders in foundation, trust and religious schools.
- LAs and Governors of maintained schools are obliged to facilitate directed conversions.
- In seeking new sponsors for religious schools there must be consultation with the responsible faith body.
- Schools identified as being of concern by the Council continue to be offered support to raise standards.
- The most significant barrier to conversion to academy status of a school requiring special measures is building related issues. The regional director has, as yet not addressed this matter.

b. Sponsored Conversions in Oxfordshire

Sponsored academies are schools that have been issued with a Directive Academy Order (DAO) following an Ofsted judgement of Inadequate. Since the beginning of the academies programme, on average there have been two sponsored conversions per calendar year.

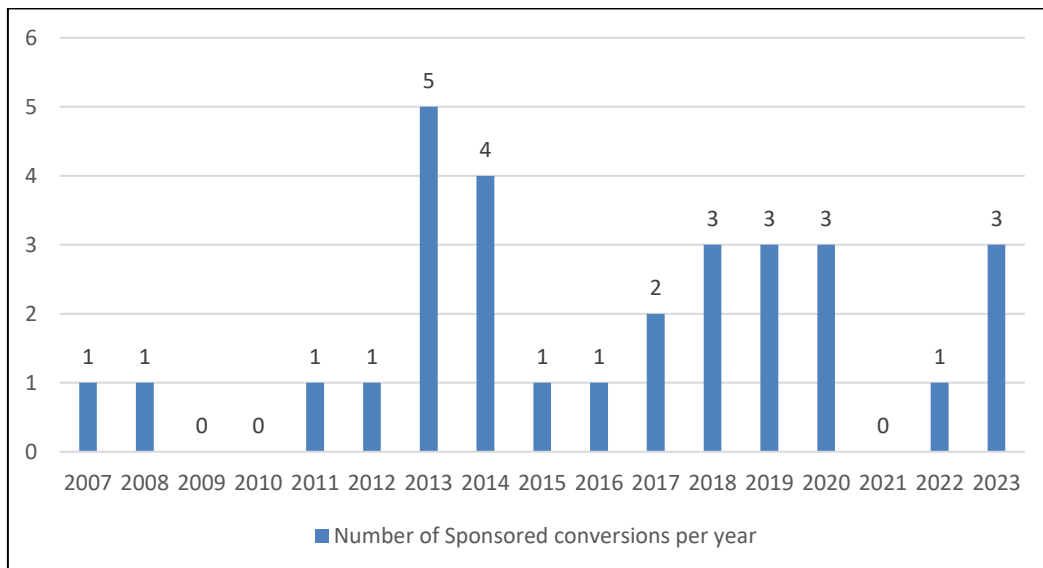


Figure 9: sponsored conversions per year, 2007-2023

- Of the 155 Oxfordshire Academies, 30 needed a ‘sponsor’ to originally convert. There are further academies who have voluntarily converted and then required sponsoring and have been re-brokered by the DfE into a new Trust.
- The availability of sponsors to pick up schools causing concern is determined by the Regional Director, who considers capacity and sustainability when approving the identified sponsor (see table of Academy Trusts, Figure 8, for details of trusts operating in the county that currently have sponsorship status).
- As yet, no Oxfordshire trusts has lost sponsor status when standards are not maintained in their schools. Sponsors are not automatically approved to add more schools to their trust and will always need Regional Director approval to do so.

c. Strategy to increase pool of sponsors locally

- As the supply of good sponsors within the county has improved, largely due to ‘locally grown’ providers acquiring sponsor status and growing in size, the Council has taken the stance that there are sufficient good Trusts in the county at present to cope with demand for intervention for schools in difficulties.
- It remains the decision of the Regional Director which Trust is appointed to support individual schools in difficulties.
- In July 2023, the DfE published “*Commissioning High-Quality Trusts*”, which provides detail on how the DfE takes decisions about the creation, consolidation and growth of academy trusts, and how they will work collaboratively with school and trust leaders, as well as local authorities, to grow the number of high-quality trusts across all areas of the country.

7. Cost of Conversions

a. Funding implications of academy conversions

- Since July 2022 the Academy Conversion programme has been managed by the School Organisation and Planning Team, working with colleagues from across the Council. The team ensures a managed system of conversions, and highlights policies and changes in role of the authority associated with this programme and the mixed economy of schools that now exist.
- Part of the costs of providing support is met from the CEF main budget, Since 1st April 2016 approximately 50% of costs have been charged directly to schools voluntarily converting to academy status. No charge is currently levied against sponsor-brokered conversions.
- A managed system continues to ensure schools convert with all business issues regarding the Council set out clearly in transfer documentation. Policies have been approved and followed which seek to minimise the Council's exposure to financial risk or ongoing commitments in relation to these converter schools.
- The key items of expenditure remain central co-ordination and management of this system, costs associated with land transfer documentation, and transfer of commercial interests including staff and resources.
- It has been recognised that this represents essential work which must be undertaken by the Council.
- As schools convert to academy status the Council's Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocation reduces as funding for academies is passed to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) to administer.
- When schools convert to academy status with a sponsor brokered by the DfE, any deficit at the point of conversion currently cannot be met from DSG but has to be met from the Council core funding or from other Council resources and is therefore a direct cost on Council taxpayers.
- Since April 2018, and following annual discussion with Schools Forum and all schools and academies, the local authority has used the national funding formula (NFF) criteria for allocating funding to its schools and academies.

b. Cost per conversion (average) for the year

- The cost per conversion is approximately £12,000. This includes professional advice to set out policies affecting the transfer of land and business to new companies, which is applicable to all conversions.
- The Council receives no funding for this work but has a statutory duty to comply with Academies legislation in this respect.
- Schools converting continue to be given an Academy Conversion Grant of £25,000 to meet professional costs incurred by the conversion process. There are no further grants available to schools for the conversion.
- A one-off contribution to the costs of the Council per conversion has been levied on converting schools since 1st April 2016. This is set at £6,000 per school and is payable on issue of Academy Order for voluntary converter schools only.

8. Future Conversions

There is only one maintained secondary school remaining in the county, but there remain 123 primary schools and 4 special schools which have not converted to academy status. There is, therefore, the potential for a significant resource requirement should the remaining maintained schools seek academy status.

It is expected that 2024 will continue to see an increase in the number of conversions after a drop in number in the preceding years (largely due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic). There are currently four schools scheduled to convert in the first half of 2024, and six further schools that we are aware are consulting on academisation.

Factors that might affect the pace of future voluntary conversion to academy status are:

a. School Finances

Schools need to consider the impact of conversion on their budgets, for example whether they can afford the financial commitments required from Academies as part of a Multi Academy Trust (for example the cost of the 'top slice/ central service charge') or the requirements within the Academies Financial Handbook. Any expected costs will be balanced against any potential savings from the economies of scale offered by a MAT.

b. Local Authority Service

The perceived view of the extent and quality of Council support for maintained schools, both now and how that may change in the future, will influence school decision-making.

c. National Policy

The Opportunity for All white paper, published in March 2022, set a target of "all schools to be in or joining a strong trust by 2030...to achieve a fully trust-led system". This is no longer a firm target, although the government's position remains that it would like all schools to be in a strong multi-academy trust, and that the vast majority of schools should be in trusts before 2030. The white paper also outlined plans for local authorities to set up their own academy trusts, which may have been attractive to some schools which have not yet converted: no progress on this initiative has yet been announced.

d. Role of the Regional Director

Regional Directors continue to encourage MATs to grow to a sustainable size as set out in 'Good practice guidance and expectations for growth' published by DfE in December 2016.

In addition to voluntary conversions, Directed Academy Orders may be issued with relatively short notice; directed conversion can prove more complex in nature and require more resource.

9. Free Schools (New Academies)

All new provision schools are now designated as Free Schools (legally identified as an academy). There are two routes for new free schools to open, either through an LA led “presumption project” (i.e. where the Council identifies the need to open new provision which is presumed to be a Free School and runs a competition to identify a sponsor) or as a DfE led “central project”, whereby sponsors can make direct bids to open new schools to Secretary of State.

New academies for which bids are made directly to the Secretary of State (“central projects”) do not necessarily fit with the county strategy for provision of places. The Council will always be consulted on any proposal as the responsible body for provision of sufficient pupil places and may choose to work with proposers if the places meet the requirements set out in the Pupil Place Plan and offer a cost-effective approach to meeting basic need or increasing diversity of choice in the area.

The decision to approve the bids however rests with the Secretary of State and, whether supported by the Council or not, will have a knock-on effect on capital, revenue and standards that the Council will have no direct control over.

a. New Academies since 2013

Since 2013, 22 new academies have opened in Oxfordshire, through a mixture of procurement routes, an average of two per year. One of those has since closed.

| Provision | Sponsor | Commissioning Route | Date of opening |
|---|---|-------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Europa School (all-through) | Europa School Trust | DfE Central Project | 2013 |
| Heyford Park Free School, reopened as Heyford Park School in 2020 (all-through) | The Heyfordian School Trust, since transferred to Eynsham Partnership Academy | DfE Central Project | 2013 |
| Tyndale Community Primary School | Chapel Street Community Schools, since transferred to ODST | DfE Central Project | 2013 |
| Space Studio, since renamed Futures Institute Banbury | Aspirations Academy Trust | DfE Central Project – Studio School | 2014 |
| Endeavour Academy (special school) | MacIntyre Academy Trust | LA Presumption Project | 2014 |
| UTC Oxfordshire | Activate Learning Education Trust | DfE Central Project – UTC | 2015 |
| Bicester Technology Studio – merged with The Bicester School in 2021 | Activate Learning Education Trust | DfE Central Project – Studio School | 2016 |
| Didcot Primary Academy | Omnia Learning Trust | LA Presumption Project | 2016 |
| Aureus (secondary) School | GLF Schools | LA Presumption Project | 2017 |

| | | | |
|---|---|--|------|
| Longford Park Primary School | GLF Schools | LA Presumption Project | 2017 |
| Aureus Primary School | GLF Schools | LA Presumption Project | 2018 |
| Gagle Brook Primary School | The White Horse Federation | LA Presumption Project | 2018 |
| The Swan School | River Learning Trust | DfE Central Project | 2019 |
| Barton Park Primary School | Community Schools Academy Trust, since transferred to RLT | LA Presumption Project | 2020 |
| Cherry Fields Primary School | GLF Schools | LA Presumption Project | 2020 |
| Wantage Primary School | Omnia Learning Trust | LA Presumption Project | 2020 |
| Whitelands (secondary) Academy | The White Horse Federation | LA Presumption Project | 2020 |
| St Frideswide CE Primary Academy | ODST | Formed as a result of de-amalgamation of St Gregory the Great (all-through) School | 2020 |
| Windrush CE Primary School | River Learning Trust | LA Presumption Project | 2021 |
| St Johns Cof E Academy (Primary phase opened 2023; secondary phase opens 2025/26) | Vale Academy Trust | DfE Central Project | 2023 |
| Sires Hill Primary Academy | Omnia Learning Trust | LA Presumption Project | 2023 |
| Graven Hill Primary Academy | The Warriner MAT | LA Presumption Project | 2023 |

Figure 10: new academies 2013-2023

b. New Academies post 2023

In the next three years (2023/24 – 2025/26), two new academies are currently scheduled to open.

| Provision | Sponsor | Commissioning Route | Date of opening ³ |
|--|-------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Bloxham Grove Academy (special school) | The Gallery Trust | DfE Central Project | January 2024 |
| Special School, Faringdon | The Gallery Trust | LA-commissioned DfE Central Project | 2026/27 |

Figure 11: new academies due to open 2023-2025

Applications had been submitted by the LA during 2022 for two further new special schools through a hybrid LA-commissioned but DfE-delivered programme. In 2023, the Council was

³ Dates of opening as of 31st December 2023 and may be subject to change

informed that these applications were not successful, and the Council is now planning to open these schools through the usual LA-led Presumption process.

The need for more new schools has been identified to meet housing growth, but timescales for these schools is not yet confirmed. The longer-term forward plan is published in the Oxfordshire Pupil Place Plan⁴.

c. Funding for new schools

Capital funding and start-up revenue funding for new academies depends on whether they are LA-Presumption schools or central route DfE-led schools.

Capital funding of new schools – for site, buildings and fixed equipment – is provided by the Local Authority for LA-Presumption schools. In most cases, at least for mainstream schools, this is largely or wholly secured from housing developers through Section 106 developer funding agreements. Where this is not sufficient, the Council can draw upon DfE Basic Need allocations, or must rely on general Council capital funding. Central-route free schools are procured by the Education, Skills & Funding Agency (ESFA), although the Council may be required to make some contribution towards schools which also meet a basic need for places, or where developer funding has been secured specifically towards that project.

For central route free schools, pre-and post-opening start-up funding is provided through two main mechanisms: a Project Development Grant currently set at £220,000 for primary/special schools and £300,000 for secondary/all-through schools; and a Post-Opening Grant calculated based on the number of pupils and the number of year groups not yet in operation, to reflect the lack of economies of scale while a school is starting up.

For LA-presumption schools, the LA is required to provide the pre-and post-opening funding, and there is not currently a national formula to determine the level of this. At the end of 2021, Oxfordshire's calculation of pre-and post-opening funding was brought into line with that received by central route free schools, with a reduction in pre-opening funding to recognise that the county council does some of the work for LA-presumption schools that an academy trust needs to do for a central route free school. Start-up funding is included within the calculation of the cost of a new school used for securing developer funding. If insufficient developer funding is secured, an alternative source is the Growth Fund which is agreed annually by Schools Forum.

The LA is also required to provide “sustainable underwriting arrangements” to provide assurance of financial viability when a school opens – this is done by guaranteeing the pupil numbers which are used to calculate the school's budget as it grows.

Multi-disciplinary Council staff resources are also required to manage the programme of provision of new academies, including securing school sites and funding; managing the delivery of the new buildings; identification of sponsors; through to the opening of the school, and ongoing support to the school until it is fully established. While the resource requirement is greater for LA Presumption schools, it can also be significant for central route schools to ensure close liaison with the DfE, ESFA and academy trust.

⁴ <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/schools/our-work-schools/planning-enough-school-places>

10. Regional Director

In 2022, the system of Regional Schools Commissioners was reorganised by the DfE into nine Regional Directors, with slight changes in geographic coverage.

Regional Directors (RDs) take key operational decisions delegated to them by the Secretary of State for Education. RDs are civil servants, meaning that the Secretary of State remains accountable for, and has the power to overturn, their decisions. Their main responsibilities relating to academies include:

- addressing underperformance in schools, academies, children’s social care and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) services, offering support, and where necessary intervening, to deliver rapid improvement
- taking decisions on academy sponsor matches and significant changes to academies
- deciding on new free schools
- taking decisions on the creation, consolidation and growth of multi-academy trusts (MATs)
- supporting local authorities to ensure that every local area has sufficient places for pupils
- taking the lead on ensuring there is an appropriate response to safeguarding cases arising in academies in their region, working closely with local authorities and Ofsted
- promoting financial health in the academy trusts and free schools sectors
- leading on ensuring strong governance in academy trusts – this does not include financial governance issues as they are overseen by the ESFA.

Supporting the work of the Regional Director is the Advisory Board (AB) (formerly known as the Headteacher Board). The AB is made up of up to 8 members – 4 elected by local academy headteachers, 2 appointed by the Regional Director and 2 are co-opted with the agreement of DfE ministers. All AB members have equal status. Members of ABs tend to be former academy headteachers, CEOs of multi-academy trusts and/or business leaders, playing a non-executive role. AB members act in an advisory and non-executive capacity. Their role is to provide advice, scrutiny, and challenge to the RDs’ decision-making process. Decisions are made solely by the RD, who should take the advice of their AB members into account.

Oxfordshire is located in the South East region, and the Regional Director for South East is Dame Kate Dethridge, who was previously the Regional Schools Commissioner for the north-west London and south central region.

The Council has established a good working relationship with our Regional Director and her team to allow the Council to carry out its statutory duties regarding academies in a co-ordinated manner. The Regional Director and her team meet regularly with senior officers to discuss schools and academies.⁵

⁵ For further information about Regional Directors, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/regional-department-for-education-dfe-directors/about>