

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why does the school want to become a full member of The Societas Trust?

Having worked closely with The Societas Trust for almost a year, including as an associate member for over six months, we have seen clear benefits for pupils and staff through collaboration, shared expertise, professional development, and school improvement support. Full membership would strengthen these opportunities and provide longer-term stability and support.

2. Will the school's identity, values, and ethos change?

No. Sandford Hill Primary School will retain its unique identity, values, traditions, and commitment to serving its local community. Joining the trust would enable us to benefit from wider collaboration while maintaining what makes our school special.

3. How will pupils benefit from joining the trust?

Pupils will benefit from improved access to expertise across the trust, enhanced curriculum opportunities, stronger school improvement support, and greater sharing of effective practice between schools. Our aim is to further improve educational outcomes and experiences for all children.

4. Will there be any changes to staffing or leadership?

There are no planned changes to staffing or day-to-day leadership as a result of joining the trust. School leaders will continue to lead the school, supported by the wider expertise and resources available through the trust.

5. How will parents continue to have a voice in the school's future?

Parents will continue to be an important part of the school community. The school will maintain regular communication and opportunities for engagement, and local governance arrangements will ensure that the views of parents, staff, and the wider community continue to be represented.

6. Will joining the trust save money or cost the school money?

The school's funding will continue to be used for the benefit of its pupils, while membership provides access to shared services, expertise, and economies of scale that can improve value for money.

7. Will the school uniform change?

No, the uniform at Sandford Hill will remain the same.

8. Will Sandford Hill's name change?

Upon conversation we would likely become known as **Sandford Hill Primary Academy** (rather than Sandford Hill Primary School). All other aspects of our school identity would remain the same.

9. Sandford Hill is currently a 'local authority-maintained school'. What are the key differences between maintained schools and academies?

Local authority maintained schools (also known as community schools) and academies are both state-funded schools in England, but they differ mainly in how they are governed and funded.

Maintained schools are funded through and overseen by their local authority (i.e. Stoke-on-Trent City Council), which has responsibilities for areas such as admissions co-ordination, school improvement, and certain employment matters. They must follow the national curriculum (with some exceptions) and are subject to local authority oversight.

Academies are funded directly by the central government through the Department for Education and operate under a funding agreement. They have greater autonomy over areas such as curriculum design, staff pay and conditions, and the structure of the school day and term dates. Most academies are part of a multi-academy trust, which is responsible for governance and strategic oversight rather than the local authority. While academies must still meet national standards and are inspected by Ofsted, they generally have more freedom in how they organise and deliver education.

10. Why/how has The Societas Trust been selected?

Lots of work has gone into identifying the trust that leaders and governors feel would be the best fit for Sandford Hill.

Over the past two years, school leaders have gone through a very detailed and comprehensive exercise looking at national, regional and local trusts – this included reviewing trust websites and performance data, speaking to representatives from trusts, and thinking carefully about the things that Sandford Hill would benefit most from.

The request and recommendation to collaborate more closely with The Societas Trust was made to Governors in spring/summer 2025, who were supportive. Members of our [Governing](#)

[Body](#) also have experience of working/volunteering with multi-academy trusts, including Societas.

Sandford Hill started to collaborate with The Societas Trust informally in September 2025 and became an associate member in November 2025. This period has allowed us to experience first-hand the opportunities and benefits of being part of a trust.

11. Does converting to an academy improve pupil outcomes?

While there have been several studies looking at the impact of academisation on pupil outcomes, the evidence base is still developing, especially for primary schools. It's therefore not possible to say that academy conversion alone is a direct cause for improvement.

Instead, the benefits of academisation are more likely to depend on the quality of school leadership, governance, teaching, capacity for school improvement and, importantly, the support provided by the academy trust. Other factors such as the local context also need to be considered.

These are our main reasons for joining The Societas Trust. The support that we have already received as an associate member has been incredibly valuable, and we are able to draw upon lots of extra resource and expertise to continually improve teaching and learning. In turn, we expect this to benefit all of the children at Sandford Hill.

12. Will converting to an academy mean that local control and accountability is lost?

As a local authority-maintained school, we currently receive our funding from Stoke-on-Trent City Council, who are also the employer for our staff. The school's Governing Body is legally responsible for the school's strategic direction, educational performance, financial oversight and safeguarding. They also appoint the headteacher and hold them to account.

As an academy, funding is provided directly by central government to the multi-academy trust who distribute it between its member settings. The responsibility for educational performance, finances, safeguarding, strategy and compliance across sits with the academy trust board, who also hold the trust CEO and executive team to account.

The amount of local control (i.e. at school level) varies considerably between academy trusts. One of the numerous reasons for us choosing to join The Societas Trust is the level of local control that we can expect to retain, as set out in the trust's Scheme of Delegation.

Local Governing Boards in the trust are responsible for the standards achieved and for their own academy improvement. They are also responsible for the internal organisation, management and control of the academy in conjunction with the headteacher. Subject to discussions and agreement with the trust, we expect Sandford Hill's current Governing Body to transition to the Local Governing Board on conversion.

The executive board (the senior group which plays a leading role in raising achievement, challenging performance and developing school improvement strategies) of The Societas Trust is made up of the headteachers from each of the trust settings, to ensure that all academies are equally represented.

In addition to the above, the local authority will continue to have statutory responsibilities in relation to school/academy functions, including admissions and exclusions, SEND and inclusion. We will continue to work with them in relation to these areas as we do currently.