

Questions and Answers Raised from the Conference

Question:

By Changing to Academy school, how will this affect Staff Pension.

Local Government Pensions Scheme – DfE briefing note

1. Non-teaching staff in a maintained school converting to academy status are likely to belong to the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) and have their pension dealt with by the administering authority applicable to schools in that Local Authority (LA). The pensions authority is sometimes the same local authority as that maintaining the school, but in London there is a separate pensions authority, and in areas affected by local government reorganisation there is often a lead authority which acts as pensions authority for several LAs. When a school is about to convert to academy status, the relevant pensions authority should be contacted at the earliest possible stage.
2. Academies are separate scheme employers under the LGPS. Academies are 'scheduled body' employers, being listed in Part 1 of Schedule 2 to the LGPS Administration Regulations 2008 [SI2008/239] (as amended). They are not 'admitted bodies'.
3. Academies' funding agreements require them to offer LGPS membership to all non-teaching staff. Where maintained schools apply to convert to Academies under section 3 of the Academies Act 2010 and an Academy order is made under section 4, those existing staff who are already members of the LGPS by virtue of the Administration Regulations would not be affected by the conversion. Their membership of the LGPS would continue unaffected. After conversion, new non-teaching staff will be eligible to join the LGPS and will be automatically enrolled in the Scheme when employed, but will have the option to opt out of the Scheme if he or she gives notice within three months. It is also open to an Academy to pay contributions into private pension schemes, but this normally happens only if an academy was previously an independent school and some staff wish to remain in the private scheme.
4. The pensions authority should be asked for a calculation of the employer contribution rate for the academy. The actuarial assessment will be done by the LGPS administering authority's fund actuary but the school may wish to have their own assessment performed by an independent actuary. The employer contribution rate will be calculated on the basis of the academy's staff profile and relates only to the academy, whereas nearly all maintained schools in an LA pay the same pooled rate. This means the rate can be higher than the rate which applied to the school when maintained. There is likely to be a charge for the actuarial calculation.
5. Unlike the Teachers Pension Scheme (TPS), LGPS is a funded scheme and can be in surplus or deficit according to investment performance. Most pension funds are currently managing a deficit, and the deficit in respect of pensionable service prior to conversion transfers from the LA to the academy through the transfer agreement signed prior to conversion. The actuarial calculation of the employer contribution rate will take into account the amount needed to pay off any past service deficit and meet future accruals over a specified period, which is normally taken to be 20 years for Academies, although it is for the actuary to take a view on this.

6. Whatever arrangements apply currently for remitting contributions as a maintained school, the academy will itself be responsible for remitting employer and employee contributions to the pensions authority, although a payroll provider may do this on its behalf. The LA may itself be the payroll provider if the academy decides to use its services.

7. If there is a deficit in the relevant pension fund, the Charities Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) requires that the academy's statutory accounts show the deficit as a liability in the balance sheet. The total deficit can be substantial. However, the Charity Commission has advised that this liability, even if it exceeds the academy's assets, does not mean that the academy is trading while insolvent, because the deficit is being reduced by the contributions made, using the grant payable to the academy. See the advice at http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/Charity_requirements_guidance/Charity_governance/Managing_resources/pensions.aspx#2 especially paragraphs 2 and 3.

Conclusion

8. When a school is converting, it is therefore vital to obtain details of the pension authority contacts as quickly as possible (usually from the HR/pay department of the maintaining LA), to ensure that staffing information required by the pension authority's actuary can be supplied by the school or the maintaining authority, and to ensure that the implications for the academy have been fully discussed with the pensions authority.

DfE

August 2010

Question:

We need help accessing funds to extend the school buildings – the diocese have turned down our application for LCUAP – What grants are available please.

We would need to know what you are looking to extend – if you are looking to do specific projects then have a look at the website www.staffs.ga.org.uk and follow the link to the conference workshop documents and there is a 6 page document outlining different funding pots available.

Otherwise try thinking of approaching a local business which is aligned to what you want to develop to see if it could be sponsored or co-funded and also look at phasing the project to make it manageable.

Question:

How do we get to work with other governors?

Especially Special Schools

Heads don't meet governors

- If want to work with other Governors especially Special Schools suggest start by your Chair of Governors telephoning the Schools you want to work with and ask for the Chair of Governors contact details or if they will not supply it ask them to get the Chair of Governors to contact your Chair of Governors. Let your Headteacher know what you are intending to do.
- Contact the Chairs of Governors to suggest arranging working with them and take it from there.

- Not sure what context “Heads don’t meet Governors” relates to (in own School or others?)

Question:

How do we increase contact with our high schools. We have no transition between Y6/Y7. Hardly any contact at all.

- Suggest your Headteacher/Chair of Governors contact your high Schools to try to arrange a meeting to discuss transition between Y6/Y7. Sell it to the high Schools as it will help if you know what will help them in the process. Do the Y6 pupils spend a day/half day at the high School before they leave the primary School as an induction?
- There’s a great little company that specialise in hosting engaging, exciting transition days for children moving from primary to secondary school – Altogether Company. They usually work with the High Schools but I don’t see why it can’t be lead by the Primary and hosted by the High School.
- Many schools work in a cluster group to ensure that transition is smooth. Working with the SIPs, each Head could have a personal development objective to assess and develop a stronger transition model.

Question:

What support can you provide my governing body whose governance is inadequate?

Governor Services run a strategic governance course that I would recommend you do in house so that it can be tailored to suit your school.

Otherwise the Association has facilitators skilled in developing strategy and who have worked with governing bodies to structure and develop them – we would be happy to visit and discuss with you as part of our service.

Question:

How do we improve the Parent Survey return rate?

Currently below 30% and dropping year on year even though the results are always good.

- Do you do a general feedback to all parents with the results and actions the School is going to take (and also explain why in certain instances action is not being taken)?
- What information is sent out with the Parent Survey, does it explain the importance of the Parent Survey and that it will be acted upon?
- Are the same questions in it, and perhaps if Parents were happy one year and said so another year they are happy they feel already said so? Need to put across the importance of continuous feedback even if not changed.
- Also, how do your governors engage with your parents? For example – are governors there at parents’ evenings and do you hand-out and collect questionnaires there? This is a method where you will get rates close to a 100% return.

Question:

Do you have any experience of internet based systems for organising governors?

- It depends what you mean by organising your governors? The first step is to ensure that your governing body is made up of organised governors. After that, try using a weekly e-mail that updates your GB on national and local (to your school news). This may include attaching the weekly school newsletter to parents.
- Keeping the e-mail to once per week ensures that your GB have one thing to read and focus upon.
- A secure area of your website is also invaluable from a data protection and confidential info point of view. GB docs can be posted here and not sent out by e-mail. A link to the info can then be sent to your GB directing them to the documents on the secure area. All full governing body and other meeting pre-reading documents can be posted here.

SGA