

[News story: Education Secretary calls on more schools to become an academy](#)

More than 50% of children in state-funded schools in England are now taught in an academy or free school, new figures published today reveal – with standards rising faster in many academies than in similar council-run schools.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds has hailed the milestone as a decisive moment and urged more schools to consider the freedom and opportunities offered by becoming an academy.

Today's [figures](#), published by the Department for Education, reflect school leaders' recognition of the autonomy and freedom to innovate offered by the academies programme, alongside the increased ability to make decisions in the interests of staff and pupils. This has included measures such as altering the length of the school day or adapting the curriculum to help every child access a school that meets their needs, interests and abilities. More than 8,300 schools in the country have become an academy or opened as a free school, with hundreds of schools making the positive choice to convert to become an academy in the last 12 months alone.

The academies programme was introduced by the last Government in 2000 with the aim "to improve pupil performance and break the cycle of low expectation". By 2010, there were 203 academies – mostly in inner cities.

The 2010 Academies Act gave all schools in England the freedom to choose to become an academy and now over 50% of pupils in the state funded education system are taught in an academy or free school.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds said:

In everything we've been doing to improve education these last few years, we have put a strong focus on handing power back to schools, back to school leaders – recognising that they are the ones best placed to make the right decisions for their pupils and their communities.

It is fantastic that 50% of the pupils in state-funded schools in the country are now benefitting from the freedom and autonomy that an academy trust enjoys. But the academies programme has never really been about structures – it has been about trusting head teachers and school leaders to run schools.

Whilst there is a huge amount of diversity in our school system – and there are great schools of all types – I want more schools to choose to become an academy and enjoy the enormous benefits it provides to schools, their staff and pupils.

Alongside “converter” academies – those schools who have chosen to become an academy – “sponsored” academies are typically schools that have been taken out of Local Authority control through government intervention because of educational underperformance. Many of these schools are improving in their inspections from inadequate to good or outstanding after they became sponsored academies. At the end of 2017, only 1 in 10 sponsored academy predecessor schools were judged good or outstanding before they converted, compared to almost 7 in 10 after they became an academy, of those who had been inspected.

Also published today is an analysis of schools that have become sponsored academies in recent years. It matches sponsored academies with similar non-academies based on inspection results and the make-up of their pupils. It shows that sponsored academies that have been open for longer have made substantial gains in performance. The data shows, in many cases, standards have risen more quickly in under-performing schools that have become academies than in similar council-run schools.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds continued:

In the past, schools that failed were allowed to stay under local authority control for far too long. Academies have changed all that – failing schools can now be taken away from local bureaucracies who have not been able to improve them and given to school leaders who can.

We have seen many of these sponsored academies dramatically improve their Ofsted results following conversion, and this new research shows the improvements many schools have made since they became an academy.

As part of our effort to improve school standards across the country, it is important that we are clear that no school will be left to fail their pupils.

The research [report](#) on sponsored academies, commissioned by the Department for Education, summarises the latest performance data available, up to and including 2018. The key findings are:

- Thousands of pupils are benefiting from higher standards in their schools after converting to become academies;
- Standards in under-performing schools that have become academies in recent years have, in many cases, risen more quickly than in similar LA schools; and
- Sponsored academies, previously under-performing local authority-run schools, that have been open for the longest have made substantial gains in performance and are now in line with similar non-academies.

Mark Lehain, founder and former Principal of Bedford Free School, said:

I have been fortunate enough to set up both a free school in 2012 and a multi-academy trust in 2017. I've also worked with dozens of academies and trusts across the country in a number of roles.

Again and again I have seen how the greater responsibility and additional freedom that comes with academisation enables brilliant leaders and teachers to achieve things with pupils that many thought couldn't be done. As schools continue to convert, and more children benefit from teachers being in the driving seat, we can look forward to standards rising even higher in the future.

Leora Cruddas, Chief Executive of the Confederation of School Trusts, said:

This is an important moment. School trusts are no longer a policy initiative – a small project in a much larger education system. Half of children and young people in England are educated in the academy sector. We have come of age.

Academies are making a positive difference by turning around schools which have failed children for generations.