



## BRIEFING PAPER

Number 07169, 20 April 2017

# The School System in England

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# 1. The School System in England

This briefing offers a short introduction to the types of state-funded schools in England and how they differ from each other. Schools policy is a devolved area, and different arrangements are in place in the other countries of the UK.

Separate Library briefings include an overview of the school systems in Scotland and Wales:

- [Constituency casework: schools in Scotland](#), CBP 7819
- [Constituency casework: schools in Wales](#), CBP 7904

## Local authority maintained schools

A maintained school is one that is funded by central government through the local education authority.

Within this grouping are the following types of schools:

- community schools – controlled by the local council and not influenced by business or religious groups
- foundation schools – similar, but with more freedom than community schools to change the way they do things
- voluntary aided schools – a foundation or trust (usually a religious organisation), contributes to building costs and has a substantial influence in the running of the school
- voluntary controlled schools – similar to VA schools (and also most often faith schools) but without building cost responsibilities and with less autonomy than VA schools

The Library's [Constituency work: Schools in England](#) briefing and [gov.uk](#) provide detail on the distinctions between these types of school.

In most aspects local authority maintained schools are governed in the same way. However, these finer distinctions may impact on particular areas, such as who can sit on a school's board of governors, who owns the buildings or is responsible for funding capital work, or who is the admissions authority.

## Academies and Free Schools

Academies and free schools are state-funded, non-fee paying schools that are independent of local authorities. They are funded directly by the Department for Education (through the Education Funding Agency) and sign a funding agreement with the Secretary of State to receive that money. Many have sponsors, but this is no longer a requirement.

At January 2016, 65.5 per cent of secondary pupils and 19.5 per cent of primary pupils in England were attending academies.<sup>1</sup>

Free schools are academies in law. They are normally new schools ('additional schools' in the *Academies Act 2010*), whereas existing state schools that converted to academy status are referred to only as academies. They are funded and governed in the same way.

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<sup>1</sup> DfE, [Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2016 SFR 20/2016](#), 28 June 2016, p3

Academies and free schools have many significant differences from local authority maintained schools:

- They do not have to follow the National Curriculum
- They are not required to hire teachers with Qualified Teacher Status
- Different funding mechanisms exist, and they have greater control of their own finances
- They are subject to the Independent School Standards

Maintained schools may apply to convert to academy status.

Maintained schools that are rated as 'inadequate' by Ofsted will be required to convert by the Secretary of State. Academies that are rated inadequate may be transferred to another sponsor.

## Other types of schools

**Technical academies, university technical colleges (UTCs) and studio schools** focus on vocational and technical skills for 11-18 year olds. They operate as academies.

**Grammar schools** select all or most of their pupils based on examination of their academic ability, usually at age 11. No new grammar schools are currently allowed, although existing ones may expand. They may have academy status or be maintained by a local authority.

**Faith schools** ('schools with a religious character'). Around one third of state-funded schools in England have a faith designation. Faith schools can either be maintained by the local authority, or have academy status. Faith schools are mostly run like other state schools, but they have particular freedoms, for instance in teaching religious studies, where they are free to teach only about their own religion. Their admissions and staffing policies may use faith-based criteria, although anyone can apply for a place.

**City technology colleges** are independent schools in urban areas that focus on technological and practical skills. No fees may be charged. They are owned and funded by companies as well as central government (but not local authorities). Most of these colleges have now converted to academy status.

## Useful Library briefings

- [Constituency work: schools in England](#) (includes a more detailed overview of school types), SN 05396
- [Academies and Free Schools FAQs](#), SN 07059
- [Faith Schools FAQs](#), SN 06972
- [Grammar Schools in England](#), SN 07070
- [University Technical Colleges](#), CBP 07250
- [School funding in England. Current system and proposals for 'fairer school funding'](#), CBP 6702

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