Co-operative Schools: Stronger together
All over England schools are using co-operative values to unlock relationships with parents, staff and students and are achieving real change through mutual support.

The co-operative approach is a real alternative to the top down one size fits all society which has dominated in recent years. It develops social responsibility, balancing the needs of consumers with those of providers, giving stakeholders a real say.

This new bottom up approach is already resulting in sustained improvements, through a real sense of ownership by staff, students, and other stakeholders.

Much of this experience is shared with other countries, from Sweden to Malaysia and from Spain to North America, where co-operation is playing a central role in reforming public services, building communities and dealing with social problems.
A new emphasis on co-operation is encouraging teachers to develop what they have always thought was so important - working with colleagues, strengthening engagement with students and students supporting each other through self-help to build success.

This movement is really starting to take hold, and building a distinct values driven co-operative grouping within the school system.

Co-operation within and between schools is sweeping across England, with more schools joining every month.

Co-operative schools are starting to release the huge pent up potential for schools to take more responsibility to improve themselves: to build a strong sense of a school and professional community of teachers and support staff working together to help one another. This is based on embedding co-operative values into the curriculum, life and ethos of schools and building it into their governance.

This wave of self improvement is also driven by schools interacting with their communities and with society as a whole and is helping them realise their potential to be a true hub for their communities.

**What are co-operative values?**

Co-operatives the world over share the values of self help, self responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity.

The experience of the schools that have adopted co-operative governance models demonstrates that through the adoption of these values, children and young people can gain a better understanding of their role as citizens and how they can help build a fairer society.

**How can co-operative values help schools improve standards?**

Co-operative values can help schools raise standards in a variety of ways including through developing partnerships, helping to engage the local community in the strategic direction of schools and strengthening the curriculum.
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It’s your choice

Schools now have more choice to decide what type of ethos and school improvement strategy is right for them. And, there is certainly no shortage of options.

Perhaps that is why there are now over 200 co-operative schools in England, including a growing number of clusters of trusts and academies.

Co-operative schools use a range of the legal frameworks now available – trusts and academies – to build in a democratic element to their governance structures.

Co-operative schools are run using the same values and principles as the one billion member strong co-operative enterprises throughout the world – from local co-operative shops to fair trade – they are democratic organisations where students, staff, parents and stakeholders can have a voice by becoming members.

Co-operative Trust schools

Trust schools
Trust schools are maintained schools supported by a charitable foundation (popularly known as a Trust) which appoints some of the governors. The Trust involves one or more partners and may include, for example, a local college, university, business, and voluntary or community organisation.

Acquiring a Trust can help schools build long term, sustainable relationships with partners and, using their experience and expertise, strengthen leadership and governance to help raise standards. Any maintained school can become a Trust school¹ and the decision to adopt Trust status is taken by the governing body.

What is a co-operative Trust school?
The Co-operative College adapted the Trust model to embed co-operative values and principles into schools and provide mechanisms to directly involve key stakeholders, parents/carers, learners, staff and the local community in the governance of the Trust through a members’ forum.

The Forum plays an important role in delivering the Trust’s objectives.

How is a co-operative Trust school set up?
Becoming a co-operative Trust school requires a formal process that is undertaken by the governing body of the school.

¹ Although this is more complex where the school already has a Trust or foundation (as is the case with voluntary schools).
**The Trust Process**

**Stage 1 - Decide who to work with and how**
The school’s governing body will meet to explore questions like: What benefits will this bring to the school? Who would the Trust partners be and which partners can help the school build a co-operative ethos? The Co-operative College can help schools firm up those plans and find potential partners.

**Stage 2 - Consultation**
It’s important that schools canvass the opinion of all those who could be affected by the school’s change of status. The consultation stage is the turn of parents, staff, trade unions and the local community to give their views on the school’s Trust plans. A minimum four week consultation period during term time is required.

**Stage 3 - Publish statutory proposals and invite representations**
The school publishes formal proposals, which include specific details on the Trust. It must post notices in public places, so all the school’s stakeholders are able to express their views. Any objections or comments must be addressed to the governing body within the four week period.

**Stage 4 - Consider representations and decide whether to acquire the Trust**
Proposals must be determined – and it is the school’s governing body (if the proposals have not been referred to the Adjudicator during the period for representations), that makes the decision on whether to proceed after taking on board the views and opinions of stakeholders. The decision must be made within six months of publishing proposals.

**Stage 5 - Implementation**
Once the governing body of the school has decided to become a Trust school, the school’s land and buildings are transferred to the Trust for it to hold on the school’s behalf and the governing body is reconstituted.

For more information on co-operative schools please see: [www.co-op.ac.uk/schools-and-young-people](http://www.co-op.ac.uk/schools-and-young-people)

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2 If the local authority has concerns that the governing body has failed to consult adequately or not taken account of the consultation or if the LA has concerns that the Trust will have a negative impact on standards at the school, then it may refer proposals to the Schools Adjudicator who will decide the proposals rather than the governing body. Any referral must be made during the 4 week representation period.

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**Your questions answered**

**Will the governing body and headteacher have less control in running the school?**
There will be no reduction in the role and responsibilities of the governing body of Trust schools. Headteachers will retain their responsibility for the day-to-day running of their schools.

**Does Trust status mean that schools are selective?**
Trust schools are subject to the same rules as foundation schools. This means that they set their own admissions arrangements, but they act in accordance with the School Admissions Code and are not allowed to introduce selection by ability. Trust schools will play their full part in taking hard to place pupils, having fair admission, and working with other schools.

**What difference will being a Trust school make to the school’s funding?**
A Trust school will continue to receive its funding from the local authority on the same basis as other local schools – and funding will be delegated to the governing body, not the Trust. There will be no additional funding from the local authority on the basis that a school is a Trust school, and there is no expectation that the Trust will provide the school with additional funding.
The co-operative Academy model was developed in partnership with a group of co-operative Trust schools that wanted to pursue academy status in view of the additional freedoms and funding available, whilst maintaining the essential characteristics of co-operative Trusts:

- An ethos based on the globally-shared co-operative values – which are included in the definitions in the articles for a co-operative academy together with a specific values clause.

- Direct engagement of key stakeholders and the local community in governance through membership and a members’ forum.

In addition, the model provides a mechanism for mutual support through a network: the Schools Co-operative Society - a co-operative owned and democratically controlled by co-operative schools and supported by the Co-operative Group, Britain’s biggest co-operative, and the Co-operative College an educational charity.

Several schools that are currently members of co-operative Trusts are working towards achieving co-operative Academy status.

The Co-operative College and Cobbetts LLP, which undertook the legal work on the co-operative model, offer a comprehensive package of services to support schools throughout the process of conversion.

If your school has already converted to an Academy using the standard articles it can convert to the co-operative model - and become part of the growing network of co-operative schools.
Why we chose co-operation...

“For us the Co-operative Trust model was all about the ethos of the co-operative society and completely embedding that within our school and our traditional values as being extremely beneficial. The membership side of it again is going to bring real benefits not just to us as a school but also to all our stakeholder groups, our community, our parents, pupils, and of course our staff.”

Angela Gaywood, Parent governor, St Clere’s School and Co-operative Trust Thurrock, Essex

“Co-operative trusts are about mutualisation, not privatisation, groups of schools working strategically together towards a shared vision for educational advancement with the involvement of the wider community, and protection of educational assets, working together to make best use of resources, all striving to achieve better outcomes for children and families.”

Dr Pat McGovern, Head teacher, Helston Community College

“I do feel that we are getting better communication with a number of stakeholders who feel more engaged with the school.”

Paul Griffiths, Head teacher, St Clere’s School and Co-operative Trust, Thurrock, Essex.

“The major reason for becoming a co-operative school is local accountability. A co-operative Trust is rooted in democracy. Staff, students, parents, community groups, all have a voice in how this school is run. We want to embed the school in the local community.”

Mark Cottingham, Head teacher, daVinci Community College

The Schools Co-operative Society

The Schools Co-operative Society provides a support network, enabling both existing and prospective co-operative Trust schools to share ideas and best practice and develop services for member schools. It is owned and controlled by its member schools and its remit includes exploiting the benefits of joint procurement, sharing expertise from curriculum development to school improvement, and giving co-operative schools a voice in the national education policy agenda.

For further information see: www.co-operativeschools.coop
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