

Success of the academy approach?

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A complex picture is emerging about the controversial Academies programme. Researchers analyse and report findings about Academies in a special issue of the journal *Management in Education* (MIE), published today by SAGE. Amongst the issues addressed are whether Academies are leading to improved student performance and higher levels of student satisfaction.

The Academies programme was launched in 2000, with the first Academies opening in 2002. Their aim was to create schools that are both 'independent' (being sponsored by private individuals and organisations) and state funded. Currently there are 133 Academies open, the aim being to create 400.

Focussing on two distinct areas, the articles in MIE review the policy framework for Academies, and report on research studies examining how they are working. Findings from a five-year longitudinal evaluation (Armstrong, Bunting and Larsen) suggest that improvements across Academies are mixed. They show that while there have been notable improvements to student performance as a whole - markedly so in comparison to the national average - the improvements have not been uniform, and there is considerable diversity between and within Academies. The authors conclude that there is "insufficient evidence to make a definitive judgement about the Academies as a model for school improvement."

The issue includes examination of the Trinity Academy in Yorkshire: the 'Most improved Academy in England', and 'Most Improved School in

Yorkshire and Humberside' (Pike). Sponsored by the Emmanuel Schools Foundation, this case study argues that the Academy's combination of private business sponsorship, core values, emphasis on character and distinctive Christian ethos is a highly significant factor in bringing about the sharp increase in GCSE attainment at the Academy.

Another case study examining a single Academy (Woods and Woods) shows that a broader approach to enterprise than just concentrating on business is possible. As well as instilling a culture of enterprise by promoting generic entrepreneurial skills and values, this Academy is also encouraging a greater level of public entrepreneurialism, with students and staff actively engaging with the local community.

"The academy sees itself not only promoting core enterprise skills but also public and participative forms of enterprise that involve students and the community," said lead author and joint Editor of the special issue, Philip Woods. "Only 22 per cent of staff in the academy see enterprise as about acting more like a private business. Public entrepreneurialism seeks to advance values such as participation, deliberative democracy and social justice."

Commenting on the special issue, Philip Woods said, "Contributions draw attention to the vital importance of critically examining the power of sponsors, the impact of Academies on local democracy and accountability, and the concerns of local popular campaigns against proposed Academies".

The system in England is becoming more complex and the number of private sponsors and partners is expanding. This special issue highlights some of the diverse perspectives and experiences of Academies, puts on the record emerging findings about these new types of [school](#) and makes a valuable contribution to ongoing dialogue between researchers, practitioners and policy-makers.

Source: SAGE Publications

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