

Schools

Walker Morris provides a full range of legal services to all types of schools throughout the UK. The Education Group's 37 lawyers provide clients with established expertise and a national education resource delivered from our centre of excellence in Leeds. Through our capability and experience, our aim is to deliver timely, pragmatic and effective support to the highest standards of client service.

HOW WE CAN HELP

As a commercial law firm, we offer a full package of services to our school clients. We offer support to all types of schools including community, VC, VA and foundation schools, whether local education authority controlled, academies (including converters, free schools, studio schools, technical colleges, and alternative provision) or independent schools.

Structures and Governance

We are experienced in supporting established schools converting to academy status through the single or multi-academy route and have good links with the various local authorities and diocesan boards of education. Our Schools Team, is aware of the complexities and practical issues that can arise when converting particular types of school and deals with these efficiently to achieve a smooth conversion process.

We recognise the need for schools to work together and can advise on options for joint working to achieve common goals, including multi-academy trusts, collaborations (informal and formal) and federations. We understand the importance of schools engaging with key stakeholders and offer advice on any consultations required. If a school wants to recognise its key stakeholders within its governance structure; we can assist with setting up a co-operative trust.

Schools need to be governed effectively and efficiently to achieve the correct outputs. We can assist by revising governance structures: drafting governing body agreements, by-laws, charters, standing orders, memorandum of understanding and providing advice on decision making and powers. We are also well-versed in advising upon the establishment of trading companies for schools and academies.

In respect of academies, we understand the duties of governors as both company director and charity trustee and the implications of regulation under the regulation of Companies and Charities Law. We can advise on the role of the company secretary and assist with the drafting of company documentation. Our Education Group includes charity law specialists, who understand the nuances of charity law and add depth to our advice for schools linked with charitable foundations and our advice to academies (exempt charities).

Employment & Pensions

The Education Group includes lawyers highly experienced in every aspect of contentious and non-contentious employment and pensions law. We recognise the importance to schools of fostering strong employment relations with staff, being careful to handle any employment issues in a sensitive manner and within the rules of a tightly regulated area of law and policy. We can advise on employment contracts, TUPE, TPS, LGPS and all other HR related issues including disciplinary and grievance procedures, equal pay, equality, wrongful and unfair dismissal claims and redundancy.

Construction & Engineering

We can support schools on any government-funded school build project, including the Priority School Building Programme. We also recognise that as more academies are being established (whether converters or otherwise), there is more scope for construction and refurbishment works. We can provide support on negotiating building, construction and refurbishment contracts as well as ancillary documents, including collateral warranties from the professional team to protect the school's interests.

Commercial Dispute Resolution

Unfortunately there are occasions when a school may have disputes with a contractor who is providing goods or services. We can help schools resolve such issues in a pragmatic and effective manner.





Procurement and Contracts

Effective procurement and management of commercial risk should be a cornerstone for any school's external activities recognising the savings and efficiencies that can be achieved when purchasing goods and services or undertaking works and alterations. We can advise schools on procurement best practice including ensuring compliance with the EU procurement regulations. Schools might want to join together to achieve the best efficiencies and we can advise on proposed joint working relationships and any joint procurements for shared services or supplies.

Schools need to ensure that the contracts they are party to are suitable for their organisation and the services and supplies required. We can provide advice on any type of commercial contract a school may need including: catering, maintenance and cleaning; grant/funding agreements; community use agreements; dual use; shared services; service level agreements; consultancy appointments and IT services.

We can also provide support in respect of capital build projects, and have advised various schools and local authorities on PFI, PPP and BSF schemes. We are keen to support schools successfully shortlisted for the Priority Schools Building Programme.

Regulatory

The education sector carries a heavy burden of regulation which therefore requires a high level of compliance. We advise schools on all regulatory issues, including compliance with the DfE's regulatory requirements, freedom of information, data protection obligations, and health and safety obligations.

Renewable Energy

Energy intensive school facilities face rising energy costs whilst often facing diminishing budgets. Reducing a school's carbon footprint can decrease energy bills, reduce taxes and generate significant revenue from various financial incentives available for renewable energy schemes. Energy efficiency measures available include: onsite generation; installation of solar panels, ground source heat pumps, wind turbines, CHP units or biomass boilers; using energy efficiency measures such as the Green Deal to pay for improvements. Walker Morris advises on all aspects of renewable energy, including installation projects, energy performance contracts, offtake agreements and operation and maintenance agreements.

Property / Land / Property Litigation

Schools often occupy a third party's land, whether local authority, diocese or some other charitable body. We provide support on property issues and can draft property documentation relating to sales/acquisitions of land, leases, licences, easements and bank security matters. We also advise in relation to property related disputes. Our Planning & Environment Team can also provide schools with a full range of planning and environment law related services. Our expertise in property, planning and environment law supports our commercial contracts work when advising on shared use arrangements and capital build projects or considering repairs and maintenance obligations.

WALKER MORRIS

"A distinctive law firm valued by its clients for consistently delivering excellent results."

We offer our clients a full service commercial law firm focused on providing a wide range of clients, nationally and internationally, with partner led high quality advice. The national centre of excellence in Leeds that we have built offers significant advantages in terms of developing a strong team-based culture within the Firm, with the inherent value and cost effectiveness that a Leeds base brings.

The success of our model is reflected by our clients, which are drawn from a broad range of sectors. We are recognised for our strong multi-disciplinary teamwork and straight forward advice. Both the Firm and our lawyers are recognised as leaders in their fields with 96 per cent of our partners recommended in either Chambers or Legal 500 for their expertise.

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