

‘Shaping Our Future Together to 2030’

Academy Policy for Church of England Schools and Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) in the Diocese of Guildford



Guildford Diocesan Board of Education (GDBE)

September 2022

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1. Introduction

The DBE is the religious authority for all Church of England schools in the Diocese and acts as the legally responsible body for setting the academy strategy and policy for Church schools and academy trusts under the DBE Measure 2021.

This policy will be used by the DBE to consider requests from Church schools to become academies and join (or form) a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT). The policy will be reviewed once the Schools Bill has completed its passage through Parliament and when the primary and secondary legislation is settled.

The DBE's consent is required before a Church of England school can become an academy or form an academy trust. The DBE will not provide its consent to a Church school to become a Single Academy Trust (SATs) and the DBE will require existing SATs to join or merge with a Church MAT which has 'Majority' Articles of Association.

The DBE will continue to seek assurances on the legal protection for the status and character of its Church schools and the ongoing protections for freehold land and site trusts of Church of England Schools.

2. Key Principles (which will guide DBE decision making)

The DBE Executive has identified a set of principles which they will use when reviewing proposals from Church schools wishing to become academies and join a MAT. The DBE will seek assurances from governing bodies of Church schools and Multi-Academy Trusts on the following areas:

- **Christian Character**

The Christian character of our Church schools and the religious denomination status is sacrosanct; the DBE will only approve academy conversions of its Church schools where it has absolute confidence that the Christian character of the school will be protected, developed and enhanced by MATs who fully understand and respect this. The DBE expects all MATs who wish to take Church of England schools to adopt Church 'Majority' Articles of Association

- **Quality of Education & School Improvement capacity**

The DBE will always consider the quality of education offered to pupils (especially those children who are most disadvantaged) within their school and local communities as a key aspect of its decision-making; Church schools and MATs seeking academy status must be able to demonstrate that educational outcomes will improve for all children as a result of the change to join a MAT

- **Commitment to mission**

The DBE is committed to the wider missional objectives of the diocesan strategy '*Transforming Church & Transforming Lives*' and the Church of England's vision for education '[Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good](#)'.

- **Sustainability**

Proposals from Church schools to become academies and join a MAT must be able to demonstrate that the future of the school in the parish/community is sustainable in the long term; MATs will also be required to demonstrate that their growth strategy and business plan enables the MAT to get to a sustainable position in the longer term (within 8 years)

- **Serving the disadvantaged**

The DBE will consider the impact of any proposal of a Church school to become an academy and join a MAT on the approach to tackling disadvantage and vulnerable groups of pupils; our Church schools should be '*scandalously inclusive*' offering high quality education within a Christian ethos to all children regardless of their background, gender, sexual orientation and ethnicity

- **Subsidiarity**

The decision to become an academy remains with the Governing Body of our Church schools unless, the school is required to become an academy through the direct intervention of the Regional Director due to an inspection judgement/s

3. DBE criteria for academy trusts seeking to admit church schools

The following criteria form the basis of the DBE's approval in principle (its conditional consent) which will become final when the DBE is satisfied that all the correct legal documentation is in place and it executes the Church Supplemental Agreement (CSA) with the Department of Education (DFE).

The criteria apply both to academy trusts which already have Church of England character and those which are currently constituted as community (secular) MATs.

a) Model academy documentation for church schools

All Church schools must join a MAT which has Church of England 'Majority' Articles of Association agreed by the National Society and the Department of Education. Example of Majority Articles of Association can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/church-academies-model-documents>

Specifically, a MAT seeking to take Church schools should

- Already have/be prepared to adopt 'Majority' model Articles of Association agreed between the Church of England and the DfE
- Adopt the agreed form of the Church Supplemental Agreement in respect of any church school in the trust
- If currently constituted as a community MAT, adopt a Members' agreement confirming the role and powers of the diocesan corporate member(s) to enshrine the Christian character of Church of England schools for the long term.

These documents, alongside the DfE's Funding Agreement for the school, will ensure that:

- The Objects of the trust protect the Church of England character of any church school
- The Church of England character of both our VA and VCs schools are protected by using 'Majority' Articles of Association
- The Directors appoint the Trust's CEO 'with the involvement and consent of the Diocesan Corporate Member'
- The Directors appoint the headteacher of any formerly voluntary controlled school 'with the involvement and consent of the Diocesan Corporate Member'
- Arrangements for RE and collective worship must be subject to the advice and directives of the DBE
- The school's occupation of the site, which continues to be held by the site trustees, is dependent on the trust ensuring that its Christian character is protected. The SIAMS inspection process is used to judge whether the trust has been successful in discharging this responsibility.

b) Christian Distinctiveness

The GDBE expects any academy trust seeking to admit church schools **either** to have a Church of England character already **or** already to have a trust wide vision, values and culture which are congruent with the Church of England's Vision for Education.

With regard to any church schools a trust might admit, the trust should demonstrate that it is fully committed to developing and enhancing their Christian distinctiveness. The DBE will seek assurances that:

- The principles of the Church of England's Vision for Education will be integrated into the school's vision and values

- The school's development plan will include a plan to develop Christian distinctiveness based on the SIAMS (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools) framework
- The academy trust's monitoring and evaluation frameworks will incorporate review of the Christian distinctiveness of the school

With regard to a trust which currently has a community ethos, the DBE will seek assurances that:

- The academy trust will embrace a new identity as a 'mixed MAT' which includes both community and church schools and draws on the strengths of both in its overarching character and practice (rather than as a 'community MAT which includes a church school')

The DBE will continue to make available a wide range of support, training and resources to both church schools and academy trusts in support of Christian distinctiveness.

c) Quality of education

The DBE will expect an academy trust to be able to demonstrate a track record of improved outcomes for pupils in its schools as a result of the trust's work and to provide evidence of school improvement capacity which will improve the quality of provision in the church school. In addition, the DBE will seek the view of the Regional Director (RD) (formerly the RSC) to ensure that the DFE is satisfied with the school improvement model of the trust/group of schools and has the capacity to improve schools

d) Business planning

The DBE will expect the trust to demonstrate a clear strategic plan which evidences how it will develop its capacity and capability to deliver its strategic objectives. The DBE would require re-assurances that every Church school that seeks to join a MAT will be in sustainable position for the next 3 years and that their school budgets take into account the fall in primary pupils and rising costs related to energy and staff pay awards.

In addition, the DBE would expect to see a long term business plan for the groups of schools becoming a MAT, which demonstrates that when the budgets of the schools are aggregated together, the MAT can afford to continue to run each of the schools in a sustainable way – the business plan would need to demonstrate how each school will meet the challenge of reduction in pupil numbers as well as showing how individual school costs could be reduced by central commissioning/provision of services such as school improvement, HR, finance and governance/clerking support with an indicative top slice contribution from each school (normally a percentage of each school's budget allocation once they become an academy and leave the Local Authority)

e) Financial sustainability and good governance

The DBE will expect the trust's annual report and accounts to demonstrate its capacity to operate on a financially sustainable basis and that the trust's operations meet the DfE's expectations as set out in the Academies Handbook.

f) Commitment to the Diocesan Family of Church schools

Relationships are at the heart of the diocesan family of Church schools so Church MATs must:

- Protect local governance arrangements through Articles of Association
- Commit to ongoing engagement with the GDBE through the use of the GDBE Elevate services
- Commit to developing collaborations with other Church MATs
- Commit to the ongoing development of relationships between churches and schools which are supportive, sustainable and mutually beneficial for learning
- Are outward looking, working with other stakeholders whenever it benefits children

4. Application Process

The following process will be followed when a MAT that does not already have Church schools within the Trust, receives an application from a Church school to join their trust; or a group of Church schools wish to form a Church MAT,

- a) The DBE will invite representatives of the trust and the schools to a meeting to discuss the school's application and the criteria set out above.
- b) This meeting will provide an opportunity for the MAT or group of schools to demonstrate that it can meet all of the DBE criteria set out in the academy policy; this should be supported by appropriate documentation to accompany the proposal including detail of the:
 - Christian vision, ethos and values of the MAT/group of schools
 - School Improvement Model
 - Business plan with central services and operating model
 - Governance arrangements including local governance at the school level
 - Financial sustainability of the MAT and the Church schools within it
 - Commitment to the Diocesan Family of Schools
- c) After the meeting, the DBE may request further information before it makes a decision
- d) Once the DBE has all the information it needs it will make a decision and communicate this to the MAT/group of schools; the DBE may decide to accept or reject the proposal or ask the MAT/group of schools to do some further work
- e) If accepted, the DBE will then seek a written response from the MAT or group of schools asking them to confirm their acceptance of the academy conversion criteria and any further conditions that the DBE requires before giving its conditional consent.

The DBE's decision will be final and is not open to appeal.

5. Policy Review Date

This policy was approved by the Guildford Diocesan Board of Education (GDBE) on 27th September 2022 and will be reviewed on an annual basis.

Alex Tear

Diocesan Director of Education (September 2022)