

## **Chester Diocesan Board of Education's Strategy for Multi-Academy Trusts**

### **Introduction**

The Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) recognises that the Department for Education's (DfE) aspiration and vision is for every school to be part of a family of schools in strong academy trusts and to this end feels it important to clarify the Board's position and vision for the future of its church schools within such a system.

The Board has determined an inspiring vision for its schools that reflects the Church of England's Vision for Education in being deeply Christian, serving the common good. The vision has at its heart an education that encourages human flourishing for both children and adults and an experience of life in all its fullness. The DBE believes that this can be best achieved where our schools are working with each other in effective collaborations and formal partnerships, creating school communities that are loving in relationships, ambitious in aspirations and bold in actions.

The DBE is committed to maintaining a cohesive Diocesan family of schools, and believes this is where our schools work best, striving to achieve the best possible educational outcomes, working together within a strong Christian ethos that transform the lives of children and young people. In light of the DfE's vision and strategy on academisation and establishing strong Multi-Academy Trusts (MAT), the DBE has reviewed and reflected on the current status of its schools and academies as well as its approach to academy conversion.

Church schools that wish to convert to academy status must have the approval of the DBE and an approval process has been developed by the DBE to support this. The DBE's and the Regional Schools Commissioner's (RSC) expectation is that the governing body of any maintained Church of England school wishing to become an academy will approach the DBE as early as possible to discuss their options for conversion and agree the process for securing the consent of the DBE.

## Current Position

The DBE adopted, in its entirety, the 2016 Memorandum of Understanding between the National Society (Church of England Education Office) and Department for Education which sets out the key principles and working arrangements for all Church of England schools taking on academy status and joining a Multi-Academy Trust.

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/517423/Memorandum\\_of\\_understanding\\_between\\_the\\_National\\_Society\\_and\\_DfE.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/517423/Memorandum_of_understanding_between_the_National_Society_and_DfE.pdf)

Schools are encouraged to read this strategy in conjunction with the MoU, which determines the parameters in which the DBE would give its consent on becoming an academy only when the criterion below is met, (MoU p.6):-

Our shared expectation is that, in the vast majority of cases, church schools that wish to convert will do so as part of a MAT with governance arrangements that reflect, at member and director level, no dilution of the level of church governance and involvement as it was immediately prior to conversion.

That is that voluntary-aided schools would join a MAT that is on majority church papers and voluntary-controlled schools would join a MAT that is on either majority or minority church papers. This is explained in more detail in the section 'Academy Conversion.'

The DBE recognises the need to review and consolidate the existing academies structure within the diocese to prevent fragmentation of its church school family. There is a commitment to work with current academy trusts to ascertain their future plans and offer support around governance.

The DBE offers advice and support to all of its academy trusts as part of the family of diocesan schools and aims to further strengthen this by working in partnership with trust leaders.

### **The DBE & Chester Diocesan Academies Trust (CDAT)**

In 2013, at the early stage of academisation the Diocese set up its own Trust, Chester Diocesan Academies Trust (CDAT). At this time, schools were encouraged to consider joining CDAT whilst exploring all academy options available to them including being a Single Academy Trust (SAT) or creating a new MAT of their own.

Over time, CDAT has grown to become a strong MAT with 11 academies, spread across the Diocese. The DBE has supported this development and growth, working closely with CDAT's executive and non-executive teams. As the Trust which has Chester DBE as its named sponsor, with Members all sourced from the DBE who then appoint Directors, a close working relationship and strong partnership between CDAT and the DBE has been established. This in turn has meant that the DBE is better able to support and ensure the distinct church school character is at the heart of the Trust and thus its schools.

### **Looking Forward**

As the government sets out the department's vision and principles for the academies programme, it is clear that central to this is strong academy trusts. The DBE therefore wishes to clarify its position in safeguarding the future and continued success of its church schools within such a system.

Options 1-4 below are listed in order of preference:

- 1. The DBE's strong preference is that CDAT would be the Trust of choice for any diocesan school wishing to convert to an academy and that schools would consider this option in the first instance.**

If a school wishes to explore an option other than CDAT, it will need to make a clear case for one of the following options (listed in order of preference):

- 2. Schools consider joining an alternative majority church school MAT in the Diocese, in which all of the academies are church schools.**
- 3. Schools consider joining an alternative minority church school MAT in the Diocese, in which all of the academies are church schools.**
- 4. Schools consider joining an alternative mixed church school MAT (on church school papers) in which there is a majority or, at least a strong representation, of church schools within the MAT.**

Schools are advised that from the outset they should contact the Diocesan Director of Education, or Deputy Director, prior to any discussion regarding academy status. They will be able to provide advice and guidance in more detail.

## **Academy Conversion**

In the context of the principles outlined above, the options for diocesan schools are as follows;

### Applications from Voluntary Aided schools

Consent will only be considered for Voluntary Aided (VA) school applications to join Chester Diocesan Academies Trust (CDAT) or join or an academy trust where conversion is on majority articles (VA model). The model requires 75% of members to be appointed by the DBE with the members appointing the majority of directors. This reflects the existing governance structures of VA schools.

Such Multi-Academy Trusts may also include Voluntary-Controlled (VC) and/or community schools, known as a mixed MAT. These schools would convert on majority articles, whilst retaining their existing character (VC / Community) as reflected in the supplemental funding agreement (SFA).

### Applications from Voluntary Controlled schools

Consent will only be considered for Voluntary Controlled school applications to join Chester Diocesan Academies Trust (CDAT) or join or an academy trust that is formed on the church articles. This could either be one based on the voluntary aided model with overall CE majority at Member level (as above) or an academy Trust with 25% of Members and 25% of directors appointed by the DBE (VC model). This reflects the existing governance of Voluntary Controlled schools.

Such Multi-Academy Trusts may also include community schools. These schools would convert on the church minority papers whilst retaining their existing character as reflected in the Supplemental Funding Agreement.

## **Applications to become an academy (Academy Order)**

The DBE works with CDAT for schools wishing to join the trust. The DBE will hear requests from schools wishing to join an alternative MAT, under the Academies Act 2010 Section 3 iv, for consent to apply for an Academy Order. The Diocese will only hear such a request following a resolution of the governing body and the consent to apply from any other foundations (ie the PCC and trustees). The DBE will expect the governing body to consider joining CDAT in the first instance and have a clear rationale for its chosen MAT. The DBE will also wish to be reassured that the decision made is in the best interests of the children and students and the long term future of the school.

Once an application has been received, representatives from the school will be invited to present their application to a panel of the Board who will make a decision as to whether to support the application and give conditional consent.

Schools that are looking to join CDAT are not required to go before such a panel.

## Steps towards academy conversion

### Application process

1. Governing body researches academy status
2. Headteacher/Chair of Governors contacts the Diocesan Director of Education or Deputy Director to discuss possibilities and plans
3. Governing body decides to move towards academy status and minutes this resolution
4. Governing body consults with Stakeholders (this is not required by the DfE prior to application but the DBE recommends that it is done at this stage)
5. Application form completed and returned to the DBE
6. School representatives (usually the headteacher and chair) present case to DBE panel
7. If agreed the DBE gives conditional consent using the DFE model letter
8. If not agreed the school may appeal the decision and the application will be heard by DBE members not involved in the initial panel. The decision of this body is final.
9. Legal work is undertaken and final approval of documentation given by the DBE.

*Please note: Steps 5 - 9 are not required by schools joining CDAT.*

To access an application form and for further information please contact Sue Noakes on 07540 722668 or [sue.noakes@chester.anglican.org](mailto:sue.noakes@chester.anglican.org)

## Appendix I : Church school Academies in the Chester Diocese

At the start of the academic year 2021-22, of the 115 church schools in the Diocese, just under 25% were academies. These can be categorised under the following headings.

Academy Type	Primary schools	Secondary schools
Multi-Academy Trusts	21	2
Single Academy Trusts	1	2
Empty MATs (only 1 school in the Trust)	2	0
Local Authority maintained schools	85	2

### Multi-Academy Trusts

Twenty-three church academies within the Diocese are in a Multi Academy Trust. These are detailed in the table below.

MAT Name	MAT Type	Schools in the Trust	Primary		Secondary	
			church schools	other schools	church schools	other schools
CDAT	Majority	11	11	0	0	0
Rural Church Schools Academy Trust	Majority	3	3	0	0	0
Brine Academy Trust	Minority	2	1	0	0	1
Frank Field Education Trust	Minority	3	0	1	1	1
North West Academies Trust	Minority	11	3	7	0	1
Samara Trust	Minority	3	3	0	0	0
The Challenge Academy Trust	Minority	10	0	4	1	5