

Canterbury Diocesan Board of Education – Academy Strategy

1. Introduction

It is the ambition of the Canterbury Diocesan Board of Education (CDBE) to continue to deliver effective and inclusive Church of England (CE) schools to our communities, maintaining a cohesive diocesan family of schools in a changing landscape, focused on transforming the lives of children and young people.

The CDBE remains neutral about the academies agenda, whilst attentive to the political landscape for education. Above all, it supports the creativity and diversity of a school-led system, in which all CE schools and academies instinctively seek advice and support from the diocesan Children, Schools and Young People team, aspiring to shape and promote a distinctive Christian vision which enables pupils and adults to flourish.

The strategy and activity of the CDBE is rooted in the following principles:

- Promoting distinctively Christian communities of learning that seek to be underpinned by values sourced in the Gospel narrative. Schools that are run on Christian principles exist to serve the whole community, for children of all faiths and none. This distinctive approach enriches the whole educational experience, serving young people in ways that relate to their humanity in all its fullness.
- A responsibility to safeguard the vulnerable and those marginalised by society; aspiring to provide positive social capital and listening together to the insistent, challenging young voices speaking out against injustice and oppression, advocating for victims and those with no voice.
- Schools remain at the centre of the Church’s mission to the nation, the heart of local communities, for children of all faiths and none.
- Modelling healthy, holistic relationships and bringing people to a place of relationship with God and with one another.

2. Statutory position of the CDBE

2.1 The CDBE is the legally responsible organisation for CE schools within the Diocese of Canterbury as set out in the Diocesan Boards of Education Measure, 1991. Two of its core functions under the DBE Measure are:

‘2 (1) (a) to promote or assist in the promotion of education in the diocese, being education which is consistent with the faith and practice of the Church of England

2 (1) (c) to promote or assist in the promotion of church schools in the diocese and to advise the governors of such schools and trustees of church educational endowments and any other body or person concerned on any matter affecting church schools in the diocese'

- 2.2 By law, the CDBE acts as the Diocesan Authority for its church schools and as such, must be consulted in all school organisation matters and give its approval before any diocesan Church of England school can become an academy and/or sponsor.

3. Considering academy status

- 3.1 The CDBE will continue to encourage Headteachers and Governing Bodies of schools and Single Academy Trusts to review their formal status as appropriate, mindful of their unique local situation and the county and national context. Diocesan officers will support leaders in reviewing viable options and considering which partnerships might be most suitable: focused on local collaboration, mutual accountability and delivering school improvement.
- 3.2 Schools wishing to explore academy status and join a Church MAT must first have an informal conversation with the Diocesan Director of Education, in order to discuss protocols and determine the scope and schedule for preliminary meetings.

4. Church Multi-Academy Trusts

- 4.1 In determining its previous MAT strategy, the CDBE was keen to ensure that constitutional arrangements are established on a 'once for all' basis, thereby keeping legal costs and unnecessary negotiations to a minimum.
- 4.2 It has since sought to grow and strengthen Aquila (The Diocese of Canterbury Academies Trust) as a leading Trust and responded to situations where the most appropriate route for a geographical group of schools was deemed to be to establish a new Church MAT.
- 4.3 The CDBE previously resolved that new MATs would be based on nationally agreed CE Model Articles, which determine a Church majority at Member level. The CDBE still believes that such MATs provide the most appropriate safeguard for the religious character of church schools (see paragraphs 7.1 – 7.3), and facilitate the widest range of options for schools, irrespective of status.
- 4.4 Reflecting the Anglican stress on the local, the CDBE also advocates that Church MATs should provide for local governance of schools, such governance reflecting previous VC or VA status, and for maximum delegation of powers.
- 4.5 The CDBE has reviewed the location and size of existing Church MATs and noted the importance of growth in pupil numbers or the development of MAT partnership arrangements in supporting each of these Trusts to achieve a point of sustainability. Therefore, the CDBE **will not currently accept applications for academy consent which imply the creation of a new Church MAT.**

- 4.6 Additionally, Church of England schools will not, at this time, be given consent to join minority mixed MATs, because the CDBE considers the risks to trustees being in breach of trust are too significant. Such consent could only be given in the most exceptional of circumstances, where a proposal not only offers appropriate protection for the religious character of the school, but demonstrates existing, dynamic school/parish partnerships, serves to enhance its Christian character and provides continued formal engagement with the CDBE.
- 4.7 Church of England schools will not be given consent to join any MAT where there is no Church Corporate Body representation at Member level.
- 4.8 The CDBE welcomes Community and Foundation schools into Aquila and other Church MATs, believing that many will be attracted to the Church of England's ethos and commitment to local communities. Church majority MATs are structured to protect each school's integrity and status, with an emphasis on partnership, interdependence and well-being. Partnership working between all schools is highly valued by the CDBE and creative solutions will be encouraged to ensure such partnerships can continue.
- 4.9 The CDBE has formed a Diocesan Strategic Schools Group (DSSG); a gathering of senior representatives from Church MATs to assist the CDBE in strategic organisational planning for Trusts, church schools and academies, with a particular focus on sharing leadership, school improvement and professional development projects and expertise.

5. Sponsorship

- 5.1 Where the DfE requires a school to be sponsored due to underperformance, the sponsorship arrangement will be brokered by the CDBE, through our Church MATs. Initial dialogue will be with Aquila; the DDE and Chief Executive Officer of Aquila will work with the Local Authority and the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) to determine the most appropriate solution and improvement package.

6. National Society/Department for Education Memorandum of Understanding

- 6.1 A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the National Society and Department for Education was published on 18 April 2016. The MoU is a framework that has been negotiated to set consistent national expectations for DBEs and RSCs; it was originally set in the context of the Education and Adoption Act 2016 and will continue to be relevant to emerging legislation.
- 6.2 The MoU covers a number of areas including strategic planning, RSCs and DBEs working together in relation to new schools, the use of national model documentation, schools joining MATs and church schools requiring intervention.
- 6.3 The CDBE has endorsed the MoU and diocesan officers will operate within this national framework and set of expectations.

7. Safeguarding Religious Character

Safeguards are rooted within the governing documents for CE Academy Trusts:

- 7.1 The **Articles of Association** (Articles), being the rules that govern the running of the company and set out its Objects, include the commitment to ensure that: *‘Church of England schools designated as such are conducted in accordance with the principles, practices and tenets of the Church of England both generally and in particular in relation to arranging for religious education and daily acts of worship, and having regard to any advice issued by the Diocesan Board of Education’*
- 7.2 The Articles also define the **Members** of the Trust, who are the ‘guarantors’ of the company and have limited but important powers. These include the right to wind up the Academy Trust, amend the Articles, change the name of the company, appoint other Members and appoint and remove one or more Directors.

In Church Academy Trusts:

- There are usually four or five Members, and a particular body associated with the school may be entitled to appoint a specified number of Members. In a Church majority Trust, the DBE will appoint the majority of the Members - the Diocese of Canterbury Academies Company Ltd. (DCACL) is empowered by the DBE to undertake this function
 - The responsibilities of a CE Member are to: ensure that the Trust is acting within its Objects as set out in the Articles; safeguard and promote the values of the Trust and its Christian ethos; support the Trust and be an advocate for it; carry out their business effectively, including induction of new Members and a commitment to the continued professional development of Members; appoint (and where necessary remove) Trust Directors
- 7.3 The **Church Supplemental Agreement** (an agreement between the Academy Trust, the Secretary of State for Education and the Diocese) sets out the respective rights and responsibilities of each party for oversight of the Academy Trust, in particular its duties to uphold the principles, practices and tenets of the Church of England, and the use of any church lands by the Academy Trust.