



Diocese of Worcester Board of Education

Diocesan Strategy

‘Towards a Strong Multi-Academy Trust Home for All Church Schools’

2023-2024



1 Peter 4:10

Each of you should use whatever gifts you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms

Diocesan Board of Education (DBE)

The DBE is the statutory body for Church Schools within the Diocese. [The DBE Measure 2021](#) provides the legal framework within which the DBE engages and works with Church Schools.

Overview

The DBE has developed this school organisation strategy 'Towards a Strong Multi Academy Trust Home for All Church Schools' reflecting on the current national educational landscape, including the [White Paper 'Opportunity for All'](#) (2022) . It takes into consideration the varied context of our schools. It has been written to provide schools with an understanding of how they can work together with Multi-Academy Trusts and their churches to sustain our unique family of church schools and ensure that they continue to strengthen for the benefit of the children and communities they serve. The aim of our work is always to ensure that children and adults in our church schools experience the opportunity to flourish and live 'life in all its fullness' (John 10:10) in line with the [Church of England's Vision for Education](#) and recently published '[Our hope for a flourishing schools System](#)'.

The DfE White Paper clearly sets out the aspiration for all schools to be a part of a strong Multi-Academy Trust by 2030. The Diocese of Worcester Board of Education takes seriously the responsibility to ensure that every school will have the opportunity and choice of joining a strong Trust within the identified time scale.

Context

The Diocese of Worcester family of schools spans two local authorities (The Metropolitan Borough of Dudley and Worcestershire), two archdeaconries and six deaneries. There are a wide variety of church schools across the diocese including small rural primaries with mixed age classes and large urban schools. The Diocese also covers areas that continue to have both the two tier and three tier arrangements for education. Therefore, the Diocese serves first and primary schools; some with maintained nursery provision, middle schools, high schools and secondary schools.

The Diocese has a mix of maintained local authority schools, stand-alone academies, and schools within Multi-Academy Trusts. A small number of maintained schools have also entered into a formal agreement as part of either Soft or Hard Federation.

Schools that are still maintained by the local authority are designated as either Voluntary Aided or Voluntary Controlled. Those schools that have converted to a Multi-Academy Trust continue to retain their governance structure and diocesan representation at both local and Trust Board level reflecting their previous designated character as either Voluntary Aided or Voluntary Controlled.

Just under half of the schools within the Diocese have now converted to become part of a Multi-Academy Trust. The Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) currently works with 14 Multi-Academy Trusts with varying numbers of church schools within them. The Diocese has set up two of its own Trusts – The Diocese of Worcester Multi-Academy Trust (DoWMAT) – to predominantly serve Worcestershire schools, and Elements Diocesan Learning Trust (EDLT) – to serve the schools within the Borough of Dudley that often have very different contexts to those situated in Worcestershire. However, it should be understood that both of these Trusts are independent of the Diocese and operate as Trusts in their own right.

This Strategy outlines all of the Multi-Academy Trusts currently operating in the Diocese of Worcester that have the appropriate Diocesan Articles of Association (available on request from the Diocesan Education Team) and are able to welcome further church schools.

The DBE values all of its schools equally for their individual and unique contribution to education across the Diocese, alongside schools that are not designated as Church of England. The DBE encourages schools across the Diocese to support one another regardless of their size, location or academisation status.

School Organisation and Academisation

The view of the DBE is that all Church of England Schools within the Diocese should be proactive in planning for their future. The role of the DBE and wider Education Team is to facilitate, advise and support the further development of strong, established Multi-Academy Trusts ([in-line with Trust Quality Descriptors](#)) across the Diocese.

By being part of a strong Multi-Academy Trust, our family of schools will be part of a strong education system, with MATS accountable for schools within their local Multi-Academy Trust community. The DBE understand and urge schools not to rush into a decision around academisation, but they should look proactively at the different options available to them, carefully considering the possible benefits to their individual and unique school.

All church schools are equally respected and served by the DBE whether academy, VC or VA. All schools that are not already in a Multi-Academy Trust are encouraged to explore their current long-term solutions that respect their theologically-rooted vision and values, unique context, geography and existing links.

When identifying an appropriate MAT home, there is no requirement for church schools to be in the majority, and/or the percentage of church school pupils to be in a majority in a MAT. The DBE strategy supports having a number of church schools in each strong MAT to strengthen each of the schools' individual vision and Christian distinctiveness. However, the principles of the [National Memorandum of Understanding](#) must be upheld, supporting strong governance that upholds the recognised proportions of diocesan representation whilst encouraging church and non-church schools to work productively together. The MAT vision, structures, commitment to training and CPD must support the unique nature of the church schools

within their MAT.

To support this, the DBE will expect every Multi-Academy Trust to agree to and uphold our Members' Agreement (Appendix I within The Diocese of Worcester 'Academisation Policy'). The DBE's Academisation Policy can be found [here](#).

The DBE is concerned regarding the current level of school funding and as a result subsequent impending deficit positions for a number of schools, particularly but not exclusively, pertaining to rural and small schools. However, the DBE recognises and greatly values the role of small schools in providing community cohesion and living out the Church of England Vision for Education. Understandably, schools with deficit budgets or fragile financial positions may feel that they have limited appeal to a MAT as it is the responsibility of the MAT to take on any deficit at point of conversion. As a maintained school, the DBE encourages leaders to work in partnership with the local authority and The Diocesan Education Team to ensure they have produced a clear deficit recovery plan and should share this information as part of the process of due diligence and conditional consent. Many Multi-Academy Trusts will use such documentation to offer advice and support on how to achieve a more balanced position and will suggest how being part of a strong MAT can facilitate cost saving through such means as shared procurement and centralising resources.

Converting to Academy Status

In the Diocese of Worcester, a separate company, the Worcester Diocese Academy Trust (WDAT) fulfils the role of corporate membership of all Multi Academy Trusts that contain church schools from within the Diocese of Worcester.

[The Memorandum of Understanding](#) (MoU) between the National Society (NS), (the company name of the Church of England Education Office, (CEEEO)) and the Department for Education (DfE), September 2023 sets out the working principles for the Diocesan Boards of Education (DBE) and schools considering academisation. The DfE clarify that *'any judgements as to the religious character of Church Schools and the sufficiency of any protection of that character are solely for the DBE as the religious authority and may be informed by SIAMS inspection'*.

The expectation is that the model documentation for academisation (Articles of Association, The Church Supplemental Agreement and the special clauses for the funding agreement and supplemental funding agreement) agreed between the National Society and the Department for Education will be used for all Church of England schools when they join a Multi-Academy Trust.

Within the model documentation, The DfE clarifies that it *'respects the statutory right and requirement for the consent of various diocesan bodies to allow a local authority maintained Church of England school to become a academy or a*

Church of England college to become a 16-19 academy’.

The DBE recognises the geographical and contextual diversity of church schools within the Diocese of Worcester. This has been the primary reason for the formation of two Diocesan Multi-Academy Trusts . The Diocese of Worcester Multi-Academy Trust (DoWMAT) will continue to provide a Trust home for schools within Worcestershire and Elements Diocesan Learning Trust (EDLT) will continue to provide a Trust home for **all** Church schools situated in the Metropolitan Borough of Dudley.

The DBE understands that some Worcestershire schools, due to their context and location, may seek conditional consent to join another existing Multi-Academy Trust with the appropriate church school articles located within the Diocese. Church schools considering academisation must contact the Diocesan Education Team early in their considerations, when having initial discussions as a governing board. The Diocesan Director of Education must attend a Full Governing Board meeting to share the Diocesan Academisation Strategy and associated Policy. Procedures for applying for consent can be found in The Academisation Policy appendices.

Current MAT Options for Church of England Schools in the Diocese of Worcester

For Church of England Schools in the Diocese of Worcester the following options are currently available to our schools who are either maintained local authority schools or standalone academies.

The DBE requires any Multi-Academy Trust to have adopted the most up to date Model Articles of Association and have signed the mandatory Members’ Agreement. Therefore, the list of options below does not include all Multi-Academy Trusts that currently contain Church schools in the Diocese of Worcester. It is no longer an option for maintained schools to become a Stand-Alone Trust (SAT). Existing SATs should also consider, in formal discussion with the DBE and other partners, their future sustainability and how they could enhance the provision of an existing MAT.

Before considering MAT options and to arrange the required formal meeting, please contact Tim Reid – Diocesan Director of Education (treid@cofe-worcester.org.uk).

The Diocesan Strategy has approved the following Trusts. Where schools have more than one option from within the strategy, it is the expectation that the Diocesan Trusts (DoWMAT, EDLT) have been adequately considered prior to looking at wider options.

Current School or Academy Status	Current Options
Metropolitan Dudley Borough of Dudley Maintained Voluntary Aided (VA) schools	1. Elements Diocesan Learning Trust (EDLT)
Metropolitan Dudley Borough of Dudley Maintained Voluntary Controlled (VC)	1. Elements Diocesan Learning Trust (EDLT)

schools	
Worcestershire Maintained Voluntary Aided (VA) schools	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Diocese of Worcester Multi-Academy Trust (DoWMAT) 2. The Spires CofE Learning Trust
Worcestershire Standalone Academy Formerly Voluntary Aided (VA) schools	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Diocese of Worcester Multi-Academy Trust (DoWMAT) 2. The Spires CofE Learning Trust
Worcestershire Maintained Voluntary Controlled (VC) schools And Worcestershire Standalone Academy Formerly Voluntary Controlled (VC) schools	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Diocese of Worcester Multi Academy Trust (DoWMAT) 2. The Spires CofE Learning Trust 3. Alvechurch CofE Middle School (Empty MAT) 4. Avonreach Academy Trust 5. Bengeworth Multi-Academy Trust 6. Black Pear Trust 7. Central Regions Schools Trust 8. Endeavour Schools Trust 9. Mercian Education Trust (MET) 10. Severn Academies Education Trust (SAET) 11. Shires Multi Academy Trust

Trust Partnership with the DBE and The Diocesan Education Team

As part of the process to become an academy/join a Trust, all schools must seek conditional consent from the Board of Education before a recommendation is made to the Regional Director.

The process for conditional consent supports both the Church school and the Multi-Academy Trust to help ensure that due diligence and consultation has been completed and that all parties are confident that they understand the implications of becoming an academy and joining their MAT of choice.

It is essential that a school identifies what they have to offer a Multi-Academy Trust as well as recognising how they are going to benefit from being part of that MAT. Governors, including Foundation Governors must be involved at all stages of the process, ensuring that the school's theologically-rooted Christian vision, values and ethos is driving the decisions of the school and are confident that the school's Christian vision and the MAT's vision are complementary and supportive.

When a Church school joins a MAT, it does not leave the Diocesan family of schools: the DBE and The Diocesan Education Team are still an active and engaged partner providing the same level of support, advice and expertise for the school. As part of the application process, that must be signed by each Multi-Academy Trust containing a church school, there is an expectation that the church school still engage through The Diocesan 'Training and Support Service Level Agreement'. This supports the assurance that the church schools are still engaged, up-to-date and relevant in the current effective practice of enhancing their Christian vision, values and ethos as well as providing pupils with high quality worship, Religious Education, Spirituality and other aspects of Church school life.

Where there is a need for a new Church of England academy the Regional Director will work with the

DBE to establish if, in accordance with the Diocesan strategy alongside wider strategic plans, it will be possible to establish a Church of England Free School.

Towards a Strong Multi Academy Trust Home for All Church Schools

The DBE and Education Team are committed to working with all existing MATs to continue to develop our strategic collaboration for MAT growth. Through the Diocesan Corporate Member and Diocesan Trustees, continued strong collaboration will ensure the DBE, alongside MAT partners, can further establish an effective offer for church schools within the diocese. MAT growth needs to be carefully considered and measured with ongoing steady growth. The DBE is also committed to being proactive in supporting models of organisation and leadership that ensure the best outcomes for all by working with all stakeholders including the two local authorities and Regional Director's office.

All MATs will be expected to fully commit to school improvement and academy sponsors must be ready and prepared to consider admitting vulnerable schools to the MAT where and when the DBE make a formal approach. It is essential that they are secure homes that will support rapid improvement whilst ensuring that the school's Christian vision is central to their work and approach. The growth of Multi-Academy Trusts is carefully planned to ensure that there is capacity within the MAT, their central team and schools to provide the necessary support – living out the Christian value of service to others. At different times, some schools will have greater capacity to offer support while others may need of greater support themselves. The DBE will encourage all MATs to offer support beyond their family of schools and both DoWMAT and EDLT as diocesan Trusts will lead in offering a home for schools who find themselves with the greatest need.

If a Church of England academy, as part of a MAT is in danger of not maintaining its religious character then the DBE will consult with the MoU and Members' agreement to seek the best course of action.

The DBE recognises that the picture of leadership and school structures across the diocese will continue to change and evolve over the coming years. We are fully engaged with this process – to support, challenge, advise and guide our family of schools into the next stage of their development to ensure that church school education supports the flourishing of all pupils and adults in all of our schools and wider church communities across the Diocese of Worcester.

