



Diocesan Vision for Education

Academy Strategy Paper

Foreword:

In 2016 the Education and Adoption act provided the legal framework for the structural transformation of the school system.

The Secretary of State recognises the responsibility of DBEs to all the Church of England schools within their diocese and the children in those schools whether these are maintained schools or academies. The Secretary of State also acknowledges and accepts that it is for DBEs to plan strategically for the exercise of this responsibility, including in relation to school improvement and to work closely with the Regional Schools Commissioners (RSCs) in doing so.

The statutory responsibilities of the Durham Diocesan Board of Education (DDBE) and the Newcastle Diocesan Education Board (NDEB) are described in the 2021 Diocesan Board of Education Measure. In regards to the academy programme, the Memorandum of Understanding between DfE and the Church of England recognises policy and practice and supports the role of DBEs to determine the future for their schools. Church of England schools converting into Church of England MATs legally safeguards our schools in regards to land and buildings and secures the on-going Christian vision and ethos of the school through majority governance and the relationship with the DBE.

We know that government expects schools to convert and join Trusts to ensure, in their view, the highest quality of education. We heard from government ministers earlier in 2021 that

“... the golden thread running through academisation is that we must constantly advance education, improving outcomes for children and levelling up communities. ... multi academy trusts are the best structure for improvement, and we want a system that’s the best at getting better.”

It is also the case that on the 15th July the DfE published their DfE Outcome Delivery Plan: 2021 to 2022 which made it clear at Priority 2.4 that their aim is to raise school standards right across the country and support every school to join a strong family of schools, especially in areas where standards are weakest.

The NDEB and DDBE are both being told by DfE and the Church of England Education Office that the government position is not simply about supporting the academy system but asserting that we need to move away from the current ‘mixed economy’ structure and towards a single model. The clear position from DfE is that standalone academy trusts are no longer preferable and that new, small scale local MATS will not be approved if they comprise of small numbers of schools. It is clear that the emphasis for the future is on the growth and development of our existing academy trusts through conversion of schools.

In the North East of England, we recognise some of the challenges that relate to our rural context and stress the importance of working as a family of schools to support each other across Diocesan and ‘Trust’ borders.

This policy has been the work of two working parties, one from each Diocese and the Joint Education Team that are employed by both Dioceses to oversee and manage Church of England Education. It is hoped that the document clearly sets out the current position of our Schools and Trusts and makes clear the opportunities that are available for all schools within each Diocese.

Canon Paul Rickeard DDE

Current Position

Each Diocese already has a number of academies. Some academies are part of Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) with more than one academy in them and some are 'empty MATs' with only the original converting school which are yet to grow. There are also Single Academy Trusts (SATs) who are companies in their own right created historically which sit outside of a larger MAT.

In the Newcastle Diocese there are 4 'Mixed MATs' with an overarching governance structure that is designed to protect both the ethos of the Church Schools and non-Church schools within the Trust. In these mixed MATs three out of the five members are Church appointments (one in consultation with the Trust). Overtime the Diocese has developed a strong and trusted relationship with the Mixed MATs and as such continues to support their growth with Church of England Schools where they are the best solution for those schools. Northumberland Church of England Academy Trust is a Church of England Academy Trust within the Diocese which comprises 7 Church of England Schools and a Special School.

The two Dioceses operate a Diocesan MAT, the Durham and Newcastle Diocesan Learning Trust, which contains 9 Church of England Primary Schools (all currently within the Durham Diocesan area) with an application in progress for two more Church of England Primary academies to join the Trust.

In the Durham Diocese there is a mix of 10 Multi-Academy Trusts and Single Academy Trusts (in addition to the Diocesan Trust) of which several comprise only one or two schools.

All of our Trusts actively welcome non-Church of England Schools; One Excellence and Northern Lights both have non-Church Schools that have joined them where children flourish and grow. Excellence is a mixed MAT with one non-church Member. However, the governance of the remainder of these Trusts at Member Level is that all members (apart from the Chair) are nominated by the Church of England in some form.

The tables overleaf lists the current Trusts **across both Dioceses**.

TRUST NAME	MAT/SAT	Number of Schools	Diocesan area currently covered	Phase covered currently - but note could be open to cross phase ie Primary /Secondary/etc
NCEAT (Northumberland Church of England Academy Trust)	MAT	8 (Two in discussion)	Newcastle	Secondary, Primary and Special
3 Rivers Learning Trust	Mixed MAT	9	Newcastle	First, Middle and High
Tyne Community Learning Trust	Mixed MAT	9	Newcastle	First, Middle and High
Pele Trust	Mixed MAT	6	Newcastle	Secondary and Primary
NEAT Academy Trust	Mixed MAT	6 (Two in discussion)	Newcastle and Durham	Secondary and Primary

TRUST NAME	MAT/SAT	Number of Schools	Diocesan area currently covered	Phase covered currently - but note could be open to cross phase ie Primary /Secondary/etc
Durham and Newcastle Diocesan Learning Trust	MAT	13	Newcastle and Durham	Primary
Northern Lights	MAT	7	Durham	Primary
1Excellence	Mixed MAT	4	Durham	Primary
Melrose	MAT	5 + Free School)	Durham	Primary including a Free school
Holy Trinity CofE Academy	MAT	1	Durham	Primary
Whitburn CofE Academy	SAT	1	Durham	Secondary
St Aidan's CofE Academy	SAT	1	Durham	Secondary

Between each Diocese the Church of England educates approximately 25,000 children; 43 out of 107 schools are currently academies (40%). In order for a Trust to access Capital Funding the Trust needs to have in excess of 3000 children in mainstream education or slightly less if designated SEND Provision is part of the Trust. Similarly, in order to have the capacity to deliver effective school improvement a Trust needs a number of successful schools with effective leadership structures that have the capacity to support others. For these reasons, both Dioceses have recognized the value in reducing the number of MATS and SATS to ensure sustainable growth for existing Trusts and facilitate longer term viability within a school system that has capacity to support school improvement across our many schools. The consultation on funding for Local Authorities has now concluded and will lead to a 50% cut in local authority grants for school improvement support.

In the Newcastle Diocese **all existing Trusts** already comprise a number of schools and **will be** supported to grow. When considering which Trusts should be identified as being likely to grow in the Durham Diocese the working parties and Joint Education Team have taken into consideration the current growth of the Trusts to date and the collective performance of the schools in those Trusts. This does **not** mean that Trusts that have not been identified to grow do not have committed and capable boards of Trustees or dedicated and experienced leaders and staff. However unfortunately in some instances, despite the very best efforts of our smaller Trusts to grow and develop formal partnerships, this has simply not happened and, in those cases, there does not appear to be a serious likelihood of this happening in any significant way.

In light of this in the Durham Diocese it is envisaged that Five Trusts will be in a position to be actively supported to grow:

- Durham and Newcastle Diocesan Learning Trust
- Northern Lights Learning Trust
- Melrose Learning Trust
- 1 Excellence Multi-Academy Trust
- Dayspring Trust

Whilst the Diocese does not have the power to force the merger of any Trusts it will seek to actively encourage SATS, those remaining small MATS and empty MATS to consider a suitable Trust to join. It is not envisaged by either Diocese or the Regional Schools Commissioner that any further new Trusts will be approved unless there are significant extenuating circumstances that are agreed by both parties.

Joining a Trust

Any Church of England school seeking to join a Trust must have the written consent of the Diocese and can only join a Trust that is currently based in the Diocesan areas of Durham or Newcastle. Every Diocesan School has a link officer and they should be your first point of contact. All of our Trusts have accessible websites that provide key information on becoming an Academy and what the 'offer' is to schools who wish to join. When comparing Trusts, it is important, if possible, to consider all of the options to ensure you find the agreed best fit for your school.

Supporting Vulnerable Schools

The government have made clear that they consider 'Strong Trusts' as being best placed to manage school improvement. There is a current consultation regarding the grant that is paid to support vulnerable schools directly from the government, this suggests this is likely to end which will leave a number of schools potentially without support. As a Diocese we have some capacity to support vulnerable schools but moving forward we will need Strong Trusts to work with us to deliver this support utilising any grants available from the Department for Education.

The NDEB and the DDBE recognise that the Education and Adoptions Act 2016, Section 7, places a duty on the Secretary of State to issue an Academy Order when a school is eligible for intervention due to an Ofsted 'inadequate' judgement. The DBE expects that schools subject to such intervention will be placed in secure Church of England (or mixed MAT) Trust homes and the Diocese will seek to influence existing Trusts to invite such schools to join them; there will be no 'lost sheep'.

Supporting Small and Rural Schools

The Church of England has a number of small and rural schools; indeed, a number of these schools are less than 100 children. Across the Dioceses of Newcastle and Durham there are 25 schools that fall within this group. Trusts that commit to long term growth will also be asked to commit to ensuring they support a number of these schools (7 of which are already academies). The challenges associated with small and rural schools are well known, however both Diocesan Boards of Education have committed to the wider obligations involved in educating children in rural areas so this must remain a priority as Trusts are enabled to grow.

Conclusion

The DDBE and the NDEB are committed to supporting schools to join strong growing Trusts. However, we acknowledge that neither Diocesan Board of Education has the power to force a conversion unless a school is given a Direct Academy Order (DAO). That said as the number of academies increases and the support offered by Local Authorities is diminished we believe that Trust accountability for communities of schools is shaping a strong school-led education system that will protect and preserve the long-term sustainable future of Church of England schools within which our children flourish and lives are transformed. Both Diocesan Boards of Education share the view that without belonging within an established and effective Trust, any Church School's long term future is, sadly, potentially at risk.

The decision to convert to become an academy is one of the most significant decisions a Governing Body will ever make. It is vital that any engagement with a Trust takes place with the support and facilitation of the Diocesan education team at an early stage. Consent for academy conversions is only granted by the Regional Schools Commissioner when they have confirmation of Diocesan conditional consent. A letter of conditional consent will be issued only following satisfactory completion of a Diocesan application form and a meeting to go through this with a working group from the relevant Diocesan Education Board. The RSC require a copy of this letter before any academy order is issued and any conditions within the letter must be fully met by the joining schools and the multi-academy trust before conversion can take place.

Our message has to be clear: review your current position as a maintained school, SAT or Small MAT; discuss the possible options available to you with a member of the Joint Education Team and start to consider, with your governors or Trust board, the next chapter of your schools' journey. Following the launch of this paper there will be briefings for Head teachers and Chairs of Governors to support you all going forwards.



Rev Dr Gill Alexander
Chair of the Newcastle NDEB



Nigel Wyrley-Birch
Chair of the Durham DDBE



Canon Paul Rickeard
Diocesan Director of Education