

Memorandum of Understanding

The Guildford Diocesan Board of Education

and

Church Multi-Academy Trusts in the Diocese of Guildford

16th February 2024



"Together, we will enhance the quality of education and develop the Christian character of our Church schools and academies, nurturing all those involved in education in our diocese so that all children and young people can flourish"

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU)

Introduction

The Diocesan Board of Education is committed to supporting the growth and development of all Church Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) within the Diocese of Guildford.

We believe that Church MATs are civic organisations which build community cohesion and act as 'anchoring institutions' (Leora Cruddas, 2023) which promote and protect public values for the benefit of the common good.

Working in partnership with our Church MATs our ambition is to ensure that every Church of England school is able to become an academy and join a Church MAT which will protect, maintain and develop its Christian character.

The DBE and Church MATs are committed to maintaining a cohesive Diocesan family of schools and working in partnership with stakeholders to promote distinctive and inclusive high-quality education to transform the lives of all children and young people who attend our Diocesan Church schools.

This Memorandum of Understanding sets out how we intend to work together, the key principles on which our decisions are made and the criteria that we will use to ensure that Church schools can become academies and that Church MATs can reach a scale which is sustainable in the longer term.

Our Key Principles

- We will always make our decisions with the best interests of children at heart
- We will work together, listening to and consulting with all parties before taking decisions
- We are committed to seeing every Church MAT in the diocese grow and develop
- We are prepared to take difficult decisions and model courageous leadership in the sector
- We will work together to seek an equitable distribution of Church schools across our Church MATs and promote system resilience
- We are committed to open and transparent communication with our family of Church schools and each other
- We will support school leaders and governors to make good strategic decisions which is in the best interest of their school and their pupils and not deliberately to the detriment of other local schools
- We recognise the uniqueness and value of small and rural schools; their contribution to the wider family of diocesan schools and their compassionate hospitality, often delivering a valuable social function and service within a specific locality

- We understand that the decision for a Church school to become an academy is the responsibility of the governing body of the school unless the school is instructed to become an academy by the Regional Director (DFE)
- We will promote the Church of England vision for education and the Diocesan academy strategy

Protocols

- The Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) is the statutory body and religious authority for all Church schools in the Diocese; its consent is required for a Church school to become an academy
- The Regional Director (RD) is required to consult with the DBE on seeking to find a Church MAT which is suitable for a Church school seeking to become an academy or directed to become an academy
- The DBE will engage with all Church MATs to determine the best outcome for a Church school and will use the academy criteria published in the Diocesan academy strategy before giving its conditional consent
- Church MATs will work in partnership with the DBE in the spirit of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to agree a suitable future for a Church school, demonstrating a meaningful commitment to preserving and promoting the Christian character and ethos of Church schools within the Anglican tradition. This should include a commitment to academic excellence, inclusivity, community well-being and working collaboratively with other local schools including community schools
- The DDE and Church MAT CEOs will meet together to discuss the difficult cases seeking to identify a Church MAT for a Church school in line with the key principles in the MOU
- Governing Bodies of Local Authority maintained Church schools are the legally responsible body for their schools; the DBE does not have power to direct schools to become academies but will use its influence to shape the direction in line with the Diocesan academy strategy
- In the event that a Church school is considered vulnerable to closure, the DBE will work with the Local Authority to seek a solution for the school and will not expect a Church MAT to take a Church school which is not financially viable in the long term

Criteria to be used by the DBE to guide decision making

The following criteria have been agreed by the DBE and the Church MATs in the Diocesan Strategic Partnership as the framework for how Church schools seeking to become academies will be encouraged and directed to Church MATs in the future:

1.	Commitment to the Christian character of the Church school & the legal protections
	<p>The Christian character of our Church schools and the religious denomination status is sacrosanct.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>The DBE requires all MATs who wish to take Church of England schools to adopt the Church of England Articles of Association which legally protect the Christian character and religious denomination of Church schools.</p>

	<p>The DBE will not give its consent to a Church of England school joining a MAT that does not operate under the Church of England Articles of Association.</p> <p>The DBE expects all MATs with Church schools to have a clear plan which demonstrates how the MAT will support their Church schools with meeting the requirements of the SIAMS inspection.</p>
2.	Geography and travel required between schools (including existing federations and partnerships)
	<p>The Diocese of Guildford covers parts of the geographical areas of three local authorities; Surrey, Hampshire and Kingston-upon-Thames.</p> <p>The DBE will consider the location of a Church school seeking to join a MAT operating across a wider geographical area in order that a meaningful collaboration amongst other schools in the MAT is possible.</p> <p>The DBE will also give consideration to the journey time between schools already in a MAT in order that travel time for school staff between schools in the MAT is realistic and possible.</p> <p>The DBE will consider the relationship between Church and Community schools which are close to the Church school seeking to become an academy so that the future of these schools can also be taken into account as part of any decision.</p>
3.	The pupil journey and transition between infant, junior, primary and secondary schools, sixth form
	<p>The DBE recognises the effective transition of pupils between schools is an important factor in supporting community cohesion and achieving good educational outcomes.</p> <p>Wherever possible, the DBE will expect an infant and junior school operating closely together to join the same MAT and for groups of primary schools that feed into a secondary school to also join the same MAT.</p> <p>There are only three Church of England Secondary schools in the Diocese of Guildford so the DBE recognises that not all Church primary schools feed into a Church secondary school. However, where this is possible, the DBE would expect these schools to be joining the same MAT.</p>
4.	School improvement capability and expertise
	<p>One of the best indicators of school improvement capability is the track record of an organisation in improving schools and the outcomes for pupils for which it is accountable.</p> <p>The DBE will consider carefully the school improvement capacity of the Church MATs to take Church schools and will consult with the CEOs and Chairs of each MAT to ensure that the MAT is able to provide accurate information to the DBE.</p> <p>In addition, the DBE will also liaise closely with the Regional Director's office (DFE) to ascertain the view of the Regional Director before making a final decision.</p> <p>The DDE will ensure that any information provided by the Regional Director is shared with the CEOs and Chairs of the MATs so they are aware of the views of the Regional Director.</p>
5.	Trust capacity and existing academy conversions already underway
	<p>The DBE will liaise with the CEOs of each of the MATs to seek their views on the capacity of their MATs to take further Church schools, in addition to schools that are already in the pipeline to join the MAT.</p> <p>The DBE will also liaise with the Regional Director and the Local Authority to seek their views in order that it can form an accurate, evidence based view on the capacity of each MAT to take more schools.</p>

	<p>In the event that more than one MAT wishes to take the same school, the DDE will convene a meeting of the CEOs of the MATs concerned so that the future of the school can be discussed and a decision made in line with the key principles and protocols set out in this MOU.</p>
6.	Distribution and type of schools already in the MAT
	<p>The DBE and Church MATs seek to ensure that every Church MAT can grow to a sustainable scale.</p> <p>To that end, the DBE will consider the distribution of Church schools across the different MATs and the different types of schools already in the MATs. This will include the distribution of very small schools which may need to be considered as part of a wider group or cluster and very large schools which will add capacity to the MAT.</p> <p>The DDE will engage the CEOs of the MATs at an early stage, before the DBE considers granting conditional consent in order that wherever possible, a common understanding and agreement can be reached between all the parties regarding the future direction of the school.</p> <p>In turn, the CEOs of the MATs will ensure that the DDE is aware of any conversations that are underway with a Church school which is considering becoming an academy so that the future of the Church school can be considered as part of the bigger picture.</p> <p>The DBE recognises that MATs will need to conduct their own due diligence on Church schools that are considering joining a MAT and this should not start until the DBE and the MATs have agreed the future direction for the Church school.</p> <p>The Regional Director will also have a view about the distribution of schools across a diocese and the DBE will liaise with the Regional Director to seek its views before making a decision.</p>
7.	Trust Specialisms
	<p>It is right and proper that every MAT is able to develop a unique offer based on its own strategic vision and values and Church schools seeking to join a MAT will be interested in how a MAT articulates this.</p> <p>In addition, there may be specialisms which a MAT may be able to provide to a Church school which meets the specific needs of that Church school and would be beneficial to both the Church school and the MAT.</p> <p>Examples might include early years provision, curriculum design, the school improvement model, professional development, disadvantaged pupils and other specialisms.</p> <p>The DBE will consider the specialisms of the MAT and the needs of a Church school as part of its wider decision about the future of the school and will seek to ensure that this taken into account.</p>
8.	Other factors which are bespoke/specific to the school's context
	<p>Having considered the other criteria set out above, the DBE will also consider other factors before giving its conditional consent for the school to become an academy with a specific MAT.</p> <p>Other factors may include the cultural fit of the school with the MAT, any existing relationships which the school already has with other schools and MATs and any other factors raised by the school or the MAT.</p>