



DIOCESAN ACADEMY STRATEGY

‘All schools are to be in a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) or academy ready by 2021 with academy ready meaning the point at which schools have completed sufficient preparation* to enable/facilitate commitment to the academy process when appropriate’

*informal due diligence

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Some governors and headteachers have requested access to these questions and answers in order to help them improve their knowledge and understanding of academies, MAT’s and the conversion process, as well as gaining more information about the Diocesan Academy Strategy.

This is by no means an exhaustive list and it will be under constant review with amendments taking place as and when required following further meetings scheduled across the diocese.

We hope that you will find it helpful.



What is an Academy?

Academies are publicly-schools which operate outside of Local Authority control. They receive their funding from central Government, through the Education Skills & Funding Agency (ESFA) rather than through a Local Authority. The Government describes them as independent state-funded schools. Academies have more freedom than other state schools over their finances, the curriculum, length of terms and school days and teachers' pay and conditions.

What is an Academy Trust?

An Academy Trust is a charitable company limited by guarantee and is responsible for running the Academy

An Academy Trust company has two layers of governance: members, who are best viewed as guardians of the constitution; and Governors who are responsible for the business of running the school. The Members of any MAT in Clifton Diocese will always be the Diocesan Bishop, The Chief Operating Officer of the Diocese, the Director of Schools and Colleges, and an Educational Trustee.

How do schools benefit from becoming an Academies?

Greater control over the curriculum allows flexibility in terms of balance and mix of subjects. A curriculum tailored to the needs of a Catholic school could be more fully developed. Stronger collaboration between schools in MATs is seen as a benefit; schools can more readily appoint new staff to work across the schools in the MAT. Once operating as a MAT, the school receives the same per pupil funding as other state schools. However, it gains control of a portion, on some cases more than 10% of its budget, which would previously been held back by the Local Authority. Catholic schools would not have to pay the 10% currently required towards the cost of capital works. The Department for Education pays £25000 towards conversion costs.

Why should Catholic schools consider converting to academy status?

The Secretary of State's repeated statements about 'target' or underperforming schools is an indication that some of our schools will be put under pressure to convert to academy status. Pursuing the MAT strategy in our partnerships allows us to develop support system for our schools. As there are already major changes within Local Authorities as to how they deliver services or even if they will continue to deliver services. Our schools that may be vulnerable to 'forced' conversion as sponsored academies need the support of the Partnership MAT and Diocese in order to protect their identity and governance arrangements as a Catholic school.

Taking the next steps:

The following guidance papers have been published to help support Governors and Senior Leaders understand the process. The papers give a summary of the main issues which need to be discussed.

The Papers are published by the National Governors Association (NGA); Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) and Browne Jacobson Solicitors.

Considering forming or joining a group of schools

https://www.ascl.org.uk/ASCL/media/ASCL/guidance_paper_taking_the_next_step_considering_forming_or_joining_a_group_of_schools_may_2019_72071.pdf

Forming a multi academy trust

https://www.ascl.org.uk/ASCL/media/ASCL/guidance_paper_taking_the_next_step_forming_a_multi_academy_trust_12603.pdf

Joining a multi academy trust

https://www.ascl.org.uk/ASCL/media/ASCL/guidance_paper_taking_the_next_step_joining_a_multi_academy_trust_35346.pdf

Becoming Academy Ready

1) What does the term 'Academy Ready' mean?

Academy Ready means that a school is ready to form or join a MAT when it deems it necessary or as required by an academy order. It is about all governors being fully aware of what being a part of a MAT means and making an informed decision based on concrete evidence that they are able to remain as a single entity for at least three years. It is the expectation of the Bishop and Trustees that all Catholic schools under the trust deed, will By September 2021 be in a position to form or join a MAT having completed due diligence which involves analysis of pupil outcomes, finances, now and for the next three years, pupil forecasts, position of governance and security of leadership.

The due diligence document can be found on the diocesan schools website.

<https://schools.cliftondiocese.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/academy-Documentation-1.Zip>

2) What support is available to help discussions with our Governing Body?

The Schools and Colleges Department can arrange bespoke meetings with governing bodies or academy information evenings. We would recommend that the chair contact the diocese in the first instance to arrange any bespoke support that is necessary. It is also possible to arrange a meeting with the Regional Schools Officer to clarify the process.

3) How long have we got to become Academy Ready?

All schools are required to complete their due diligence by September 2021.

4) How long does it usually take for a School to convert to Academy status?

Normally conversion would take between 4 and 12 months depending on the circumstances of the school however, pre-arrangements between schools can be made and are beneficial.

5) What is the best way to start our journey of becoming 'Academy Ready'?

We recommend that individual schools start by having discussions between the head and governors in order to establish a working party typically involving the headteacher, chair and another foundation governor to act on behalf of the governing body. This might then be followed up by a meeting between the headteachers and chairs from across the partnership of schools and include the Diocesan Partnership Officer.

6) How will becoming an academy affect our existing Governing Body?

A new Trust Board of Directors, overseeing the Multi-Academy Trust will be established and the diocese will have oversight of the appointed foundation governors. However, existing governors may apply to become a Director of the board or choose to apply to remain as governors on the new local governing body for the academy, if they wish to. This may result in very little change to the membership of the existing local governing body but their role within the MAT will change. Please refer to the scheme of delegation.

7) Who is responsible for undertaking the 'Due Diligence' work?

The governors of the school seeking to convert or remain as a single school have responsibility for undertaking due diligence.

8) What is the rationale behind the partnership?

Several factors were originally considered when developing the initial suggested partnerships including; locality, secondary with primary feeders, preventing any isolation, economies of scale for finance and governance purposes.

9) Do schools have to become part of a designated partnerships MAT?

Currently Yes. It has already been decided that each partnership in the Diocese will form the basis of each MAT. Governors cannot select their own MATs.

10) What happens if some schools in a partnership are not ready to convert?

Schools in a partnership do not have to convert all together. They can convert at a time best suited to their needs. This phased approach to conversion can help to keep the process manageable and allows schools to convert at the best time for them – whether it is sooner or later.

11) What will happen if our Governing Body is unable to proceed to become Academy Ready?

There may be very specific reasons preventing a school from being able to meet the date of September 2021 however, the Diocesan Academy Board on behalf of the Trustees will expect an explanation from the governors of the school outlining why they are unable to implement the wishes of the Bishop in terms of the academy strategy at this time, and how they plan to overcome any such obstacles in order to become 'academy ready'.

12) Can we talk to groups of schools who are already in a MAT to learn from their experience?

We encourage all schools to meet with Trusts to learn from their experiences and use it to inform the best way forward to being academy ready or establishing a MAT. The Diocese and Regional Schools Commissioners Office can broker such meetings.

13) Is the Diocesan Academy Strategy a distraction from our school and pupils?

No. The Trustees consider it an essential strategic step for all schools to take to secure the continued long-term provision of the best Catholic education to both current pupils and future generations of pupils and should be part of a governing bodies strategic planning process

14) What is expected by September 2021?

The Diocesan Academy Board will expect that the chair of governors on behalf of the school will submit a completed due diligence form outlining the progress made by the school to date and a proposed action plan outlining how the school will move towards being academy ready. It is also envisaged that some MATs may have been formed.

The Conversion Stage

1) How is the conversion process funded?

The process is funded by an academy conversion grant currently £25,000 per school. The academies are then funded as individual schools directly from the ESFA (Education and Skills Funding Agency). Funding is allocated directly to the academy. Revenue funding guidance is available on the DFE website. Please refer to the website for further detailed guidance.

2) What would the Diocese predict is the cost of conversion for a MAT?

The costs of conversion depend on the size and circumstances of the proposed MAT. The significant costs incurred in conversion are legal costs and these would largely depend on the legal provider being used chosen from the designated Diocesan legal providers.

3) How much capital funding goes to academies?

All schools are entitled to DFC – currently paid at a lump sum of £4,320 per school, plus £12.15/primary aged pupil; £18.23/secondary age pupil. For a typical 1 FE primary this equates to just over £7,000/year. The rates for Academies are the same at present.

However, for MATs with more than 3000 pupils, the MAT would currently receive £115 per pupil automatically on an annual basis. In cases where there are less than 3000 pupil's capital funding would be accessed through an annual bidding process.

4) What financial incentives are there to convert?

There are no financial incentives currently on offer apart from the standard conversion grant of £25000 available to all schools which covers all costs associated with the conversion process and funding for schools taking vulnerable schools i.e inadequate schools into their MAT to support school improvement to move to a good judgement on reinspection.

5) Who is responsible for staff contracts?

The MAT board of directors is the new employer and takes responsibility for contracts. However, those currently employed are subject to TUPE and will move across to the MAT. All services carry on.

6) Who is responsible for staff pensions?

Teachers' pensions remain with the Teachers' Pension Scheme and pensions for non-teaching staff remain with the Local Government Pension Scheme.

7) Is the pay of employees affected by conversion?

No. On conversion schools undertake the TUPE process which ensures that pay and conditions remain the same on conversion.

8) What responsibilities does the MAT undertake on conversion?

All of the existing responsibilities of the governing body transfer to the board of the MAT on conversion including HR, health and safety, finance, premises, repairs, insurance, contracts etc.

The MAT may choose to continue to use existing external providers for these services or move to a new provider or employ a team within the MAT.

9) What is the timeline for converting to academy and for joining MATs?

This will be determined by the governors of individual schools depending on local circumstances.

10) Who is expected to do work before, during and after conversion to an academy?

The work is shared among the board, committees, local governing bodies and heads/principals by using the respective skills of individuals. It is good practice to appoint a member of staff to act as the coordinator for the process in order to oversee the work and make the process manageable for the heads/principals.

11) What does the LA take responsibility for when in a MAT?

The LA remains responsible for a limited number of statutory functions including: SEND, co-ordinating admissions and providing sufficient school places as well as safeguarding (including attendance).

12) What local parish involvement can there be in a MAT?

The involvement of the Parish and parish priest with an academy would remain as it is with existing VA schools. As is the current practice, parish priests can be appointed by the diocese to the local governing body or to the board.

13) Can a school be an academy on its own outside of the MAT structure?

Not for newly converting schools as single academies are no longer accepted by the government, however, an existing single academy would remain so until it enters a MAT.

14) Is it too soon for new MATs to expand as they may need to embed?

The time frame for the merger of MATs is determined by the respective MAT board. Planning and preparation can still be ongoing even if the time frame may be longer for certain MATs.

15) How do schools find time to do this?

By appointing a coordinator to oversee the business of conversion and delegating tasks to members of the 'shadow board'. It is important that schools allow themselves enough time for the conversion process to keep it manageable for all those involved.

16) How much help is available?

The Diocese employs a partnership officer Paul Kehoe to assist schools through the conversion process and to share best practice in terms of establishing the MAT, the structures and the processes. As well as colleagues from the Regional Schools Commissioner's Office.

The Operational Stage

1) How would schools joining a MAT be represented on the board of directors?

The board of foundation directors are appointed by the Bishop and in line with its articles. It may not be possible for each school to be represented at the board level as it is based on skills and not allegiance to any one school.

2) In terms of Governance what are the accountability structures in a MAT?

These are explained in the scheme of delegation available on the Schools and Colleges website.

3) How does academisation affect representation of different stake holders?

All existing stakeholders are still represented within the new MAT at local governing body level.

4) How is the appointment of individual school leadership undertaken?

This is the responsibility of the directors of the Trust with the assistance of the local governing body and is explained in the scheme of delegation.

5) Appointment of Chief Executive Officer and Senior Trust Roles?

This has to be undertaken by the Trust board and has to be open and transparent process in terms of recruitment to ensure the people appointed have the appropriate skills. It cannot be assumed that a current head or other senior member automatically acquires this position

6) What are the costs of running a MAT?

The actual costs will depend on the schools and how the MAT operates. Normally the collective costs of the schools within a MAT are reduced when the MAT takes advantage of the freedoms and the efficiencies that MATs have, by establishing central services and functions for all the schools.

7) Who is paid and who is voluntary?

All local governors and directors on the board are voluntary with the exception of members of staff employed by the schools or staff employed by the MAT.

8) How much do academies contribute to fund central services within the MAT?

This depends on the way the MAT operates, its size and the level of centralised services provided by the MAT to the schools. It is determined by the board of directors.

9) Who owns the school buildings and the school land?

Typically, the diocese owns the school buildings and often the LA owns the playing fields. This depends on the specific school. These are transferred to the Trust on conversion on a lease basis.

10) Who recruits/interviews/appoints new staff?

Teachers and support staff can be recruited by the local governing body. Senior Leadership positions are appointed by the directors of the Trust.

11) Are individual schools OFSTED rated?

Each individual academy within the MAT receives its own Section 48 and Ofsted Inspection.

12) How will MATs lead, support, monitor and evaluate schools?

It will be for MATs to decide what the local support model should be, based on best practice. It is likely that the MAT will employ an external school improvement partner and a consultant for headteacher performance management to secure continued school improvement.

13) How do you envisage leaders working across this number of schools?

This will be for the MAT board to determine the best mode of operation which would be based on existing good practice and what works best under the local circumstances. Becoming an academy enables greater freedoms in the ways schools work together and how they develop their school structures collectively.

14) How can we be assured that senior leaders are not taken away from their prime responsibility – namely the education of the pupils?

MATs that are operating successfully at present are providing centralised support services that enable headteachers to concentrate on their prime responsibility of education - the teaching and learning of pupils. Support services such as HR, finance, buildings and premises can be dealt with by a central team with the necessary expertise and skills enabling greater efficiency in terms of time and finance across the MAT.

15) How will unpaid Directors with varying degrees of expertise lead, monitor and support so many schools?

This will be achieved through effective use of local governing bodies in a similar way that governors oversee standards in their schools at present. Clearly, there will be a need for directors to be offered further training and guidance as the models of MAT structures develop. We share best practice across our diocesan area through partnership meetings.

16) If you are on the board should you/will you be able to be a member of an academy committee?

There will be directors who are also on the local governing body of schools within the MAT.

17) How will the MAT ensure that schools not represented directly on the board feel involved?

Communication will be the key. Some MATs have a link director for each academy committee or establish sub committees with responsibility for different aspects of the MAT. In these ways individual academies are made to feel involved and represented.

18) How will you recruit more representatives and board members with appropriate skills and sufficient time to be effective in their role?

In the same way as we currently do for foundation governors of VA schools or single academies. This is one of the challenges the Diocese currently faces; the recruitment of suitably skilled directors. We use our extensive contact of networks to identify suitable directors, along with advertising locally in parish bulletins etc. in addition to using recommendations made by existing directors and governors.

19) How will the MAT ensure there isn't overlap between the board and committees?

This will be achieved through the use of the Scheme of Delegation.

20) How will the MAT ensure the uniqueness of every school and encourage consistency across a wide range of schools?

It would be expected to have consistency across schools in terms of policies and procedures used by schools across the MAT. This standardised documentation brings efficiencies. However, the uniqueness of schools is defined by their mission, uniform, buildings etc. which remains in place as it is determined by the local school.

21) How do we avoid too much work and too many meetings for certain individuals?

This can be achieved through careful planning of board, committee and local governing body meetings. Delegating responsibility and accountability to individual committees and avoiding the same people on a number of different committees. Effective use of the scheme of delegation will ensure best use of the local governing body too. Combining these actions should effectively spread the workload and make it manageable – just as it is done with the governing bodies at present.

22) Does the Diocese have a preference for centralised or decentralised models of organisation?

It is not for the Diocese to direct how a MAT works operationally, a one size fits all solution clearly would not suit all MAT's, therefore a local solution needs to be developed to meet local need. However, for the MAT to be successful and benefit from its new freedoms there would need to be a different way of working by the schools collectively. For the financial efficiencies to be realised there would need to be centralised functions either provided in house or via collective procurement.

23) How do we go about the consultation with staff and parents and when does that take place and how do we allay any fears?

Full open, honest and transparent communication is key to building trust and overcoming any worries and fears. Meetings with staff and parents help to deal with the typical misconceptions some people have about academies.

24) What services will the Diocese provide to MATs in the future when they are up and running?

The Diocese will maintain its current services and work with MATs as they are established to seek other ways to support.

Other questions

1) Why are the Diocese pursuing an academy strategy if the Government have changed their position on forcing all schools to become academies?

The diocesan academy strategy was developed and implemented by the Trustees to secure, protect and improve Catholic education regardless of any government's political position. Evidence across the diocese shows a significant number of schools will not be sustainable unless they work in formal partnership with others. It is still the intention of the current government that all schools become academies even though they are not forcing the issue.

2) What is the view of the DFE on the Diocesan Academy Strategy?

The Regional Schools Commissioners, on behalf of the DFE, are very supportive of the academy strategy and the approach adopted by the Diocese. They have attended academy information meetings and offered guidance and support to schools where necessary.

3) What evidence is there that academies in MAT's perform better than VA or single academies Schools?

Performance of MATs depends on the same factors that influence performance in all schools. However, we know that the MAT structure builds in collaborative working and collective accountability which has seen several of the vulnerable and isolated schools saved by being part of a MAT. MATs have a successful track record for improving schools. More specifically in key areas such as leadership, self-sustaining school improvement, transition key stage 2 – 3 and financial and business efficiencies. It also supports staff development and retention of staff in Catholic Education.

4) What are the benefits to the children?

Many MATs will have achieved many different benefits for their children depending on circumstances of local schools. The diocese is seeking to secure, protect and improve Catholic Education not just for current pupils but for generations of children to come.

5) What is the 10-year vision for the Academy plan from Diocese?

Securing the continued provision of Catholic education for the long term, protecting and developing the school buildings and estate, improving the quality of Catholic Education across all schools so that it is consistently good or better.

6) Is there a risk of a MAT being too big?

If the process of expansion is managed and planned for carefully any risk will be minimal. There is a greater risk to a MAT that is too small which restricts future capacity and limits financial viability.

7) How far can individual schools retain their distinctiveness within a larger organisation?

All schools retain the distinctive identity on conversion.

8) Can a conversion take place if the school is in debt?

The final decision rests with the RSC and headteacher board. Typically, a modest deficit is allowable provided there is a repayment plan in place, but the level of debt is unlikely to be more than 3% of budget. As good practice we expect all diocesan schools to be debt free or working towards this goal, regardless of whether it is a VA school or an academy. If a school is issued with an academy order because it is in special measures category, the debt remains with the LA on conversion if a VA school. For a single academy talks with the EFSA need to be held.

9) What level of decision-making can be made at school?

The details are in the scheme of delegation is on the Schools and Colleges website under Diocesan Academy Strategy

<https://schools.cliftondiocese.com/partnerships>

10) Can our schools continue to use the services provided by our LA if we join a MAT?

The best providers that offer the best service at the best price will be used by the MAT and this is the expectation of all schools and academies.

11) What would be the diocesan stance on other forms of alliance rather than joining an existing MAT?

The Trustees have stated that the expectation is that all schools are moving to form or join a MAT as part of the academy strategy for the Diocese.

12) Are the Diocese forcing all Schools to become academies?

No. but the Bishop and the Trustees expect all schools to prepare to become an academy but the timing of any conversion is open to discussion with the Diocese.

FURTHER WEBSITE AND INFORMATION

<https://schools.cliftondiocese.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/11.6.19-Letter-from-the-Bishop.pdf>

<https://schools.cliftondiocese.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Strategy-Launch-12-June-2019.pdf>

<https://schools.cliftondiocese.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/academy-Documentation-1.Zip>

https://schools.cliftondiocese.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Guidance-Paper_Taking-the-next-step-joining-a-multi-academy-trust-Copy-Copy.Zip

<https://schools.cliftondiocese.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/a-Clifton-Diocese-Scheme -of-Delegation.docx>

<https://schools.cliftondiocese.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/b-Table-of-delegation-Clifton-Diocese.docx>

https://schools.cliftondiocese.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/c-Members-Agreement_Clifton-Diocese.docx

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/academies-financial-handbook/academies-financial-handbook-2020-to-print>