



Academy Strategy and Policy

Diocese of Leeds Board of Education September 2024

“If we walk in the light, as [God] is in the light, we have fellowship with one another...” 1 John 1:7

Foreword

Dear Colleagues,

“If we walk in the light, as [God] is in the light, we have fellowship with one another...”

We hope that you find this updated strategy useful. It reflects the current national educational landscape and takes into account the diverse contexts of our schools. Its purpose is to set out the position of the Leeds Diocesan Board of Education (LDBE) regarding academies. It also seeks to guide schools on how they can explore and collaborate with Multi Academy Trusts to sustain our unique family of church schools. As such, we ensure continued improvement for the benefit of our pupils, staff, governors and the communities they serve. Our ultimate goal is to ensure that everyone within our church schools has the opportunity to flourish and experience ‘life in all its fullness’ (John 10:10), as outlined in the Church of England's Vision for Education and the principles within 'Our hope for a flourishing schools system'.

The Diocese has a statutory responsibility to set a strategy and make decisions that are in the long-term interests of our church school family. Schools face great challenges at this time. Primary pupil numbers are falling, as are school budgets. Strong leadership is increasingly difficult to find. This is especially the case for specialist SENDCo positions, at a time when numbers of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities are on the rise but the external support mechanisms are disappearing. The MAT system does not possess the magic money tree or a magic wand as a solution to all of this. However, faced with challenging circumstances, many schools have found that formal collaborations are an effective, proactive choice for removing isolation, sustaining and developing excellent practice and providing positive outcomes for all.

In all we do we are motivated by a spirit of service and collegiality. We talk about our ‘church school family’ to describe the relationships between our church schools, MATs and the Diocese. This is especially important when there are inherent complexities and tensions within the educational landscape in which we find ourselves. Experience has taught us that we serve best when we work relationally with openness and transparency. We hope that this strategy models and contributes to this commitment and approach.

We encourage all our schools and MAT partners to work in ‘fellowship’, as we continue to navigate our futures together.

With every blessing



Simone Bennett Director of Education



LDBE Academy Strategy Summary

1. Governing Boards of maintained Church of England schools should give due consideration to becoming an academy
2. Church of England schools can only join one of our partner Church of England MATs (as listed in Appendix 1)
3. Our partner MATs are open to all schools
4. Our partner MATs are committed to supporting vulnerable schools
5. The Diocese is committed to the growth of our partner MATS
6. The Diocese is committed, where possible, to offer a choice of MAT home to our Church of England Schools
7. The approval process should always begin with the Diocese
8. All of our MATs commit to the Diocesan MAT Partnership Agreement

Academy Strategy

1. Governing Boards of maintained Church of England schools should give due consideration to becoming an academy

The Diocese* holds a neutral position in relation to whether schools operate within the maintained sector or convert to academy status. We respect the right of governing boards of maintained schools to make their own decision about the future of their schools on behalf of their pupils and communities. However, such decisions must be well-informed and based on up-to-date, accurate, well-researched factual information. Governing boards should be making decisions based on what, in the long run, will provide the best education and outcomes for their pupils. Even in situations where a maintained school is receiving quality support from their local authority, in their local context, it may also be true that even better support could be provided by a multi-academy trust.

In giving due consideration, we expect our Church schools in the first instance to contact their named adviser. The Diocese offers regular introductory briefings on academisation. Governing boards should contact all of the partner MATs that operate, or are willing to operate, in their locality. This exploration should include discussions with the CEO and could include speaking to governors and staff from, or visiting, schools that are in the MAT(s). The Diocese provides a guidance document to support the board in this process, which we expect to take place regularly (approximately every 3-4 years).

2. Church of England schools can only join one of our partner MATs (Appendix 1)

All of our partner Church of England MATs in the Diocese of Leeds are 'church majority MATs'. This majority model in essence replicates the voluntary aided model of school governance, where the majority of Members (the top tier of governance) derive from the Church.

The Diocese holds this position because it is the largest diocesan provider of Church of England schools by pupil number nationally and a considerable number of our Church of England schools are Voluntary Aided (VA) schools. It is the role of the Members to hold the Trust Board to account for the effective running of the MAT. This strategy safeguards the Church of England foundation of our schools.

3. Our partner MATs are open to all schools

The Diocese maintains its commitment that Church of England MATs should be open to all schools



that decide to join them, subject to due diligence by both parties.

Community schools can also join our partner MATs. Their status and ethos are also protected and it is expected that such schools will play a full and strategic role in the development of the MAT. Those MATs wishing to admit non-Church schools must include the Diocese in such decisions. This is because any changes affect all of the schools within the MAT.

Welcoming community schools into a MAT is not a reason Trust Boards should use to weaken the way they message their Christian foundation and vision. The Diocese expects MATs to welcome all and be unapologetic in expressing their Christian foundation.

4. Our partner MATs are committed to supporting vulnerable schools

Our partner MATs will play a full and committed role in system-led school improvement. The Diocese expects all its partner MATs to be ready and prepared to admit vulnerable Church of England schools whenever possible.

If a school receives an 'inadequate' or second 'requires improvement' Ofsted judgement, the decision to join a MAT is made by the Regional Director. In this situation, the Diocese will work closely with the Regional Director to identify a suitable home in one of our partner MATs. Any school subject to a Directive Academy Order (DAO) or re-brokering will convert as if they had previously been a VA school, irrespective of their previous designation.

5. The Diocese is committed to the growth of our partner MATS

Our partner MATs in the Diocese of Leeds are listed in Appendix 1. Conversion into other MATs is not possible for our church schools. The Diocese is committed to supporting all to grow and anticipates that the majority of Church of England schools will be in a MAT that operates within their locality.

The Diocese knows that the future of the academy programme is going to be reliant on sustainable MATs with the capacity to provide high-quality support. MATs with a small number of pupils will not be viable in the longer term. They will be unable to deliver on all the expectations for an academy-led system, including the central functions of a MAT such as high-quality school improvement, CPD, finance, HR, compliance and governance. To support the increased viability of its MATs, the DfE and Diocese will not be approving the development of any more Church of England MATs into our current Diocesan system. Also, no other existing MATs will be added to our partner MAT list. All standalone academy trusts will be actively encouraged to join a partner MAT.

6. The Diocese is committed, where possible, to offer a choice of MAT home to our Church of England Schools

The Diocese believes that there is no 'one size fits all' solution for academisation and each case needs to be considered on its circumstances and context. Our partner MATs are all different but equal.

Through strategic conversations with our partner MATs and the DfE, the Diocese will ensure, where possible, that schools have a choice of MAT home. This will be subject to the constraints of geography and the due diligence process.

To this end, the Diocese will support schools to have meaningful conversations with all partner MATs that are willing to operate within their locality. We recognise that school governors need to be reassured that the approach of the MAT is going to align with their vision and values and that the educational needs of their communities will be best met in a MAT. The Diocesan MAT Partnership Agreement, laid out in this strategy, will provide reassurance to school governors and



their communities.

The DfE has published Trust Quality descriptors based on five 'pillars':

1. High-quality and inclusive leadership
2. School improvement
3. Workforce
4. Finance
5. Operations; governance and leadership.

These will be used largely by the Regional Directors in assessing a MAT's 'potential for growth'. However, these pillars will also underpin discussions within the Diocese when assessing requests from schools to join a particular MAT.

7. The approval process should always begin with the Diocese

From early consideration through to conversion, the named Diocesan adviser for the school should be kept informed and up to date by schools at all times.

The Diocese is aware that the decision made about converting to academy status is among the most significant a governing board will ever make. The engagement of the Diocese in that decision process is essential and non-negotiable. Our process for joining a MAT is set out in our academy conversion documentation.

Written consent from the Diocese is required in law for a school to convert to become an academy. The Diocese will only consider such requests following a resolution of the full governing board and, where appropriate, the consent to apply from any other foundations/trustees involved in the school. Approval will only be given in circumstances where schools have made contact with all local partner MAT options in the early exploration phase.

8. All of our MATs will commit to the Diocesan MAT Partnership Agreement (outlined below)



Diocesan MAT Partnership Agreement

Each partner MAT commits to work to the partnership arrangements outlined below. This agreement will be equally applicable to any proposed amalgamations or future mergers involving MATs.

8.1 Vision and values

- a) The MAT will have a vision that promotes and protects education that is consistent with the faith and practices of the Church of England. This vision will have a positive impact on the distinctiveness of the MAT and each Church school within it. The vision will be reviewed regularly through the MAT's monitoring and evaluation systems and processes.
- b) Every Church school will be able to adopt its own distinctive and theologically rooted Christian vision, specific to its context. The MAT vision will dovetail appropriately with the vision of the Church (and non-Church) schools in the MAT.
- c) The MAT will demonstrate commitment to being inclusive and serving the disadvantaged.
- d) The MAT will ensure the creation of a MAT-wide culture of support, involving care for the wellbeing of the whole school community.

8.2 Partnership

- a) The MAT will work with the Diocese transparently and openly and also with other partner MATs and schools, working collaboratively as part of the Diocese's family of schools.
- b) The MAT will have due regard to Diocesan advice and guidance about matters affecting Church schools. This includes admissions, signing each of its Church schools up for the Diocese's service level agreement (the 'Enhanced Service Plan' or 'ESP') and ensuring that full use is made of ESP support to help each school preserve and develop its Christian foundation. Associate ESP membership for any non-Church schools will be available if requested.
- c) Appropriate professional development will be accessed to ensure that leaders at all levels have a clear and up-to-date understanding of how to support the Christian foundation of their Church schools. This includes MAT leaders, Church school leaders, governance professionals, Members, Directors, and governors at a local level.

8.3 Governance

8.3.1 Articles of Association

- a) The MAT will adopt the most up-to-date Academy Articles of Association for use by multi-academy trusts with Church of England schools.
- b) No alteration or addition shall be made to that documentation without the consent of the Diocese.

8.3.2 Governance oversight

- a) The MAT will have regard to the Diocesan Academy Strategy and our advice and guidance in establishing/reviewing Schemes of Delegation.
- b) Effective oversight structures and reporting mechanisms will be in place across all



levels of the MAT's governance to ensure the distinctive foundation of Church schools is preserved and developed. This includes a written report to Members at least annually providing oversight of the effectiveness of church schools within the MAT and how the work of the MAT has impacted this. This will be made available to the Diocese upon request.**

- c) Those involved in governance at all levels, including governance professionals, will be appropriately briefed and trained about Church school-specific governance to provide effective oversight.

8.3.3 Members and Directors

- a) Where requested, the MAT will work with the Diocese to identify appropriate individuals to take on Foundation Member and Director roles.
- b) Foundation Member and Director appointments will be made in accordance with the Articles. Diocesan appointment/approval processes and procedures will be followed.
- c) All Members and Directors, however appointed, will sign a written undertaking to the Diocese (Appendix B) before taking on the role. A copy of which will be provided to the Diocese.**

8.3.4 Local governor level (LGL)

- a) The MAT will agree on LGL compositions of church schools with the Diocese, sharing any proposals for amendment with us before approval.
- b) Foundation local governor appointments to church schools will be made in accordance with the Articles. Diocesan appointment/approval processes and procedures will be followed.
- c) All local governors of church schools, however appointed, will sign a written undertaking to the Diocese (Appendix B) before taking on the role. A copy of which will be provided to the Diocese upon request.**

8.4 Leadership – Appointment of Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

- a) The MAT will ensure Diocesan involvement in the recruitment process for the appointment of the CEO. This includes proposals concerning interim arrangements. To this end, the Chair of the Trust Board will promptly inform the Diocesan Director of Education (DDE) when a vacancy becomes available.
- b) The DDE, or their representative, will be invited to see the recruitment process through from start to finish.
- c) Recruitment processes will robustly ensure that recommended candidates are fit and able to preserve and develop the religious character of the Church school(s).
- d) The MAT trust board must gain the consent of the Diocese before any such appointment is made. This will be through the verbal approval of the DDE, or their representative, at the end of the process.

8.5 Leadership – Appointment of Executive Principals, Principals or Headteachers

- a) The MAT will ensure Diocesan involvement in the recruitment process for the appointment of any Executive Principal (or similar) responsible for overseeing a Church school and any Headteacher/Principal of a Church school. This includes proposals



concerning interim arrangements. To this end, the MAT will promptly inform the named adviser to the school from the Diocesan Education Team when a vacancy becomes available.

- b) The named adviser will be invited to see the recruitment process through from start to finish.
- c) Recruitment processes will robustly ensure that recommended candidates are fit and able to preserve and develop the religious character of the Church school(s).
- d) The MAT trust board must gain the consent of the Diocese before any such appointment is made. This will be through the verbal approval of the named adviser at the end of the process.

8.6 MAT Quality, strength and growth

- a) The MAT will ensure that it is strong and sustainable, to provide capacity for the long term.
- b) The MAT will be ready and prepared to admit vulnerable church schools to the MAT where possible. For this reason, MATs will inform the Diocese when school improvement capacity is temporarily limited. Where appropriate, MATs should also demonstrate a commitment to supporting small and rural schools.
- c) The Diocese will be updated termly on the MAT growth plans and strategy. This will include Church and non-Church schools as our Academy Strategy states that our partner MATs wishing to admit non-Church academies, must include informing the Diocese in such decisions.
- d) Consent will be obtained from the Diocese and any Site Trustees prior to any Church school conversion or transfer of a Church school from the MAT.
- e) The Diocese will be informed by the MAT from the outset regarding any plans to establish a Church of England free school. The Diocese will also be informed of any plans for non-Church free schools.

8.7 The Inspection Process

- a) In partnership with the Diocesan Education Team, the MAT will ensure that it prepares all Church schools well for the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) inspection process across the MAT.
- b) The MAT will inform the named adviser for the school immediately upon becoming aware of an Ofsted inspection and/or a SIAMS inspection of a Church school. The named adviser from the Diocese will be invited to hold a conversation with the inspector as part of any such process within a Church school and be invited to hear the inspector's feedback.

8.8 Significant changes or events

- a) The MAT will consult the Diocese on any proposed significant changes to a Church school and ensure any required diocesan consent is obtained in writing before any changes take place. These include:
 - i. Change of age range
 - ii. Change of name
 - iii. PAN adjustments



- iv. Collaborations or shared leadership arrangements
 - v. The proposed closure or temporary suspension of a Church school
 - vi. The transfer of a Church school to another MAT
- b) MATs will promptly inform and consult with the DDE regarding discussions of MAT mergers, amalgamations or formal partnerships with other MATs.
 - c) If the MAT receives a request for a review, warning notice or any other indication that an intervention may take place either concerning the MAT generally or a Church school specifically, the DDE will be informed immediately. The DDE or their representative will be invited to strategic review meetings with the DfE.
 - d) The MAT will comply with any recommendations made by the Diocese expeditiously if there are concerns that the MAT is failing to ensure that a Church school is being conducted in accordance with the principles, practices and tenets of the Church of England.

*Reference throughout this document to 'The Diocese' refers to Leeds Diocesan Board of Education.

** The Diocese of York has set reporting systems and formats for tiers of governance and written undertakings are in the form of the Church School Oversight Agreement. In our partner MATs which are shared with the Diocese of York, Diocese of Leeds schools should adhere to these processes to align themselves with other church schools in the MAT.



Collaboration and Partnership

The Director of Education, Deputy Director of Education and/or their representative(s), on behalf of LDBE, attend termly meetings with Regional Directors, Ofsted, the SIAMS Central Team, Local Authorities, MAT CEOs and officials from the DfE. This places the Diocese at the heart of strategic decision-making both statutorily and relationally.

Meetings will include discussion about the delivery of this strategy alongside the sharing of data, information, opportunities and concerns. They will ensure a single point of contact between the Diocese and central decision-makers, and they will provide an opportunity to triage issues that arise from time to time.

Church schools and MATs should not hesitate to raise questions and issues with the Diocesan Director of Education if they wish for the Diocese to advocate for their school or MAT in these forums.



Background information and definitions

This strategy and policy of the Leeds Diocesan Board of Education (LDBE) operates within the parameters set out in the following documents:

- [2023 Memorandum of Understanding](#) (“the MOU”) between DfE and National Society
- [2021 Diocesan Boards of Education Measure](#) (“the Measure”)
- [2023 Church Academy Articles of Association](#) (“the Articles”)

The MOU explains the status and purpose of this strategy:

(2) The Secretary of State remains committed to securing the religious character of every Church School and to preserving diocesan families of schools. The Secretary of State recognises the responsibility of DBEs to all the Church Schools within their diocese and the children in those schools whether these are local-authority maintained schools or academies... ..it is for DBEs to plan strategically for the exercise of this responsibility, adhering to the Diocesan Strategy of the diocese and working closely with the Regional Director including in relation to school improvement.

The Measure sets out the aim of the Diocesan Board of Education, to:

- a) promote or assist in the promotion of education in the diocese that is consistent with the faith and practice of the Church of England;
- b) promote or assist in the promotion of religious education and religious worship in schools in the diocese;
- c) promote or assist in the promotion of church schools in the diocese;
- d) promote co-operation between itself and other persons concerned with education in the diocese.

The Articles make clear the role that this strategy plays in setting the work of MATs and church academies:

(4A – and footnote 8) A Company (the MAT) and a Church Academy must be conducted in accordance with the published Diocesan Strategy for the Appropriate Diocesan Authority (the Diocese of Leeds).



Appendix 1: Our Partner Church of England Multi Academy Trusts

	<p>Abbey Multi Academy Trust Co CEOs: Helen Pratten helen.pratten@abbeytrust.org Catherine Garrett catherine.garrett@abbeytrust.org</p>	<p>Abbey Grange Church of England Academy Butcher Hill Leeds LS16 5EA Telephone: 0113 275 7877</p>
	<p>Bradford Diocesan Academies Trust CEO: Carol Dewhurst OBE carol.dewhurst@bdac-academies.org</p>	<p>2nd Floor, Jade Building Albion Mills, Albion Road Bradford BD10 9TQ Telephone: 01274 909120</p>
	<p>Collaborative Learning Trust CEO: Janet Sheriff janet.sherriff@collaborativelearningtrust.co.uk</p>	<p>94-96 Pegholme Wharfebank Mills Ilkley LS21 3JP Telephone: 01904 262203</p>
	<p>Dales Academies Trust CEO: Damian Chubb damian.chubb@dalesmat.org</p>	<p>c/o Oakbridge CE Primary School Alvertune Road Northallerton DL6 2GD Telephone: 03301 242618</p>
	<p>Elevate Multi Academy Trust CEO: Nigel Ashley n.ashley@elevatemat.org</p>	<p>Keeble Gateway Academy Inspiration Way Topcliffe Road Thirsk, YO7 1TS Telephone: 01423 541996</p>
	<p>Enhance Academy Trust CEO: Mark Randall Mark.Randall@enhanceacad.org.uk</p>	<p>Unit 7 The Office Campus, Paragon Business Park Red Hall Court Wakefield WF1 2UY Telephone: 01924 971721</p>
	<p>Learning Accord Multi Academy Trust CEO: Elaine Watson ceo@learningaccord.org</p>	<p>Skelmanthorpe Academy Nursery Building Elm Street HD8 9DZ Telephone: 01484 863306</p>
	<p>Leeds Diocesan Learning Trust CEO: Richard Noake richard.noake@ldlt.co.uk</p>	<p>Parkhill Business Centre Walton Road, Wetherby LS22 5DZ Telephone: 07587725995</p>
	<p>Trinity Multi Academy Trust CEO: Michael Gosling ceo@trinitymat.org</p>	<p>Maltings Road Halifax HX2 0TJ Telephone: 01422 300024</p>
	<p>Yorkshire Causeway Schools Trust CEO: Jane Goodwin j.goodwin@ycst.co.uk</p>	<p>St Aidan's CE High School Oatlands Drive, Harrogate HG2 8JR Telephone: 01423 885814</p>

Appendix 2

Written undertaking to Leeds Diocesan Board of Education to uphold the Objects of the Company

Multi Academy Trust name

Role within the company: Member / Director / Local Governor*

I,

(name) (address)

undertake to carry out my role in such a way as is conducive to upholding the Objects of the Company insofar as they relate to any Church of England academy within the Company from time to time, and in particular with the intention of:

- Recognising and supporting the ethos, and protecting and promoting the Church of England designation of Church of England academies;
- Ensuring that those academies are conducted in accordance with the principles, practices and tenets of the Church of England generally; and
- Ensuring that those academies are conducted in accordance with the principles, practices and tenets of the Church of England in particular in relation to arranging for religious education and daily acts of worship.

I also undertake to ensure that the Company is conducted in accordance with the published Diocesan Academy Strategy and Policy, always having due regard to the advice and guidance of and, as appropriate, following any directions given by, Leeds Diocesan Board of Education.

Signed Date

Witness (name)

Witness (address)

Signed

Date

*Delete as appropriate

Additional Information:

[Church of England Vision for Education: Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good \(2016\) Our Hope for a Flourishing Schools System](#)
[Church academies: model documents](#)

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