



Guide for governing boards when considering academy status

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. Such consideration should be given regularly, schools deciding not to become an academy should review should revisit the process every 3- 4 years. Please note that this is the decision of the board and not of the headteacher. The headteacher should have a say as a member of the board but their position should not give undue weight to what is a board decision.

In giving due consideration, we expect our Church schools in the first instance to contact their named adviser. Church schools can only join the partner MATs specified in the Diocesan academy strategy. 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 could include speaking to governors and staff from, or visiting, schools that are in the MAT(s). The Diocese provides guidance and questions to support the board in this process. Some boards find it helpful to set up a small working party to support with workload. You may also wish to go through this process as a group with your local partnership of schools.

What constitutes 'due consideration'?

- Governors have attended an academy briefing led by the diocese or received a presentation by the named adviser
- Initial contact has been made with all partner MATs (outlined in our strategy) willing to operate in the school's locality
- Further investigation has taken place with the selected partner MAT(s). This has included inviting the CEO, or their representative, to meet with governors and possibly visiting schools already in the chosen partner MAT(s)
- Governors have recorded the pros and cons of joining a MAT, ensuring that this discussion has been evidence-based
- Governors have voted on and minuted their decision (the decision does not have to be unanimous)

There are a range of sources of evidence available to boards in investigating academisation.

- MAT personnel
- Diocesan Adviser
- MAT and individual academy websites
- Articles of Association/ Schemes of Delegation
- Annual accounts
- Inspection reports
- References/Input from the academies

Through this process boards should seek to be able to answer the following overarching question:

Would becoming an academy, and joining this MAT, improve the quality of provision and educational outcomes for our pupils and preserve and enhance the Christian distinctiveness of our school?

Boards may want to consider using some of the following questions when giving due consideration to becoming an academy. These questions may also prove useful for schools in the position of comparing MAT options. We advise boards to meet in advance of the meeting to agree on the questions they wish to ask the CEO. It would be helpful for transparency to send the chosen questions to the CEO in advance of the meeting.

A. Local partner MAT options, their visions, values and direction

1. What are our partner MAT options as defined by the Diocese?
2. Do the MAT's vision and values align with the school's?
3. What is the vision for the future of the MAT and does it align with our vision for the school?
4. What is the growth strategy of the MAT and how will this affect the academies within it?
5. Does the MAT clearly express that it is a Church of England MAT?

B. Educational outcomes and school improvement offer

1. What does the MAT offer in terms of school improvement?
2. How does the MAT support the preservation and development of church school distinctiveness?
3. What evidence can the MAT show of raising performance in the academies of the MAT?
4. Have any academies in the MAT moved Ofsted grades in the past five years?
5. Do SIAMS inspections of any of your academies give any indication of the impact of the Trust?
6. To what extent does the MAT support a holistic view of education? How has the MAT supported a broad and balanced approach
7. What is the MAT's record in supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils in its academies?
8. What are the accountability structures in the MAT and how are local governors involved?

C. Financial implications

1. How does funding work in the MAT?
2. What financial efficiencies have schools achieved by being part of the MAT?
3. What percentage of our annual budget will be taken (or 'top sliced') by the MAT? Who decides this figure? Will it be the same every year? How is it used and who determines this?
4. Who will determine our internal budget and how it is distributed?
5. What is the budgetary position of academies in the MAT (in general terms), are any at financial risk and how does this affect other academies in the Trust?
6. Consider specific questions which might relate to your school position, for example:
What's the MAT's policy on the financial reserves held by a joining school? Will our school be able to retain its reserves? or Our school is part of a private finance initiative (PFI) agreement on the buildings/assets, how will this affect conversion?

D. Centralisation and services

1. What central services does the MAT offer? E.g. Will our school have centralised HR systems, IT support, catering suppliers etc?
2. How does this work in practice? In what time frame would our school be expected to centralise?
3. What aspect is the trust considering/moving to become more centralised in the future? How will the MAT consult the LGBs?
4. In what ways does the MAT centralise the curriculum offer? How are school leaders involved in these decisions?

E. Collaboration, shared practice and CPD opportunities

1. How does the MAT ensure that collaboration results in the schools being stronger than if separate?
2. Does the MAT encourage the sharing of staff or good practice across the MAT? What impact has this had?
3. Does the MAT have trust-wide CPD? Can you evidence the impact of this on the quality of provision and educational outcomes?
4. How does the MAT facilitate trust-wide collaboration for local governors?

F. Governance, structures and school identity

1. Which aspects of our school's identity will change and which will stay the same if we join the MAT?
2. How will joining the MAT preserve and enhance the distinctive Christian ethos of our school?
3. Will our current partnerships (local schools, LA, Diocese) change or be maintained?
4. What is the MAT's governance structure?
5. Will our school maintain a local governing board (LGB) and how will our roles and responsibilities change on becoming an LGB?
6. What are the envisaged powers of our own governing body in relation to:
 - a. Safeguarding
 - b. Staff appraisal and appointments, including the headteacher
 - c. Financial decision-making
 - d. Establishment of service-level agreements
 - e. Buildings and Site Issues
 - f. Admissions
7. Can academies in the MAT show evidence of strong or developing governance through the challenge and support of the MAT?

Summary overview of the conversion process

As a general guide, we suggest a time scale of one year from the board's decision to conversion as an academy. However, there can be many barriers and obstacles, sometimes unseen from the outset, that can hold up this legal process. For example, complexities with building-related matters.

Conversion does not take place at the point the board makes the decision or even when the application to the Diocese or DfE is submitted. Conversion will only take place once the final agreement is signed. Trusts and schools are able to change their minds up until that point.

