



# Academy Strategy and Policy

Diocese of Leeds Board of Education  
September 2021



# A Diocesan Vision for Education

## Securing Transformational Outcomes for all Children and Young People

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### Foreword

#### **Review of the Academy Policy for Leeds Diocesan Board of Education (LDBE)**

The Education and Adoption Act 2016 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 Leeds Diocesan Board of Education (LDBE) 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.

This policy has been reviewed to reflect government expectations that all schools should ideally be on a journey towards conversion and joining a Multi-Academy Trust.

For Church of England Schools in the Diocese of Leeds yet to convert, this will mean joining one of its existing Church of England MATS. If there is not a suitable local Church of England MAT then the DBE will work with schools to find an appropriate solution, which might include joining the Diocesan MAT.

### Policy Summary

- Church of England schools can only join Church of England MATs
- Our Church of England MATs are open to all schools
- Our Church of England MATs are committed to supporting vulnerable schools
- The LDBE is committed to the growth of our Church of England MATS.
- The LDBE will continue to support options for our Church of England Schools
- The approval process should always begin with the Diocese



## The LDBE Policy

### 1. Church of England schools can only join Church of England MATs

The Diocese of Leeds is the largest diocesan provider of Church of England schools by pupil number nationally. A considerable number of our Church of England schools are Voluntary Aided (VA) schools. For this reason the DBE has declared that, Church of England schools, on conversion, need to be in MATs where the company that establishes the MAT has a majority of Members derived from the Church. This will either be as corporate bodies (e.g. the Board of Education) or as a corporation sole (e.g. the Bishop).

The Members appoint the majority of the Board of Trustees (also known as Directors under company law). The Board of Trustees run the company. Trustees are appointed on the basis of skills, of being able to hold the CEO to account and to represent the interests of the Members as dictated and directed by the Objects of the company.

The company must be established using Articles of Association that have been approved by the Church of England with the DfE. This safeguards the scheme that has established the Church of England school at its start: The Trust Deed.

### 2. Our Church of England MATs are open to all schools

LDBE maintains its commitment that Church of England MATs will not be exclusive MATs for Church of England schools or exclusive MATs for outstanding and good schools. They should be open to any and all schools that decide to join them (subject to due diligence by both parties and a full business plan).

Non-Church community schools can join a Church of England MAT. Their status and ethos is protected in such a MAT and it will be expected that such schools will play a full and strategic role in the development of the MAT. Church of England MATs wishing to admit non-Church academies must include the DBE in such decisions.

### 3. Our Church of England MATs are committed to supporting vulnerable schools

Church of England MATs will play a full and committed role in school improvement and LDBE expects all MATs to be ready and prepared to admit vulnerable schools to the MAT where and when the DBE makes such a request.

The DBE recognises 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 MAT homes and the Diocese will seek to influence existing Church MATs to invite such schools to join them; there will be no 'lost sheep'.



The DBE expects that a school subject to a Directive Academy Order (sponsored) or re-brokering will convert as if they had previously been a VA school, irrespective of their previous designation.

### 4. The LDBE are committed to the growth of our Church of England MATS

LDBE is committed to supporting all Church of England MATs to grow and anticipates the majority of Church of England Schools will where possible, be in a MAT local to them or operating in their region.

It is important and an expectation of the LDBE that schools will carry out thorough due diligence of their MAT options, which must include a face to face meeting between head teacher, chair of governors and MAT representatives and a full reporting back to governors. Acknowledging that the system is constantly evolving and changing – including our Church of England MATs, LDBE expects schools to revisit MATs that they may have had conversations with in the past.

To this end, LDBE will support schools to have meaningful conversations with their local provider(s) as part of this due diligence process. LDBE recognises that school governors need to be reassured that their priorities are going to be met in a MAT, including safeguarding the unique identity of any school as that is a distinctive feature that enhances the holistic nature of church school education and learning.

LDBE knows that the future of the academy programme is going to be reliant on sustainable MATs with capacity to provide high quality support. MATs with a small number of schools/pupils will not in the longer term, be able 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. With this as a given and to support the increased viability of its ten MATs the LDBE will not be supporting the development of many more Church of England MATs into the system.

## **5. Supporting options for our Church of England Schools**

Where a school finds that either, there is no local Church of England MAT option or that following extensive due diligence their options are limited, the LDBE will work with the school to identify alternative solutions across the Church of England MATs in the Diocese.

Following a process of review the LDBE has decided to establish an eleventh Church of England MAT as a Diocesan MAT with capacity to operate clusters of schools across a number of locations in the Diocese. This may provide options for some schools and should ensure increased capacity to meet the needs for more schools to convert.

## **6. Approval process should always begin with the Diocese**

No school should embark on consideration of becoming an academy without having read the DBE supplementary documentation (see additional information below) and having had a conversation with their named Diocesan Education Team Adviser. The officers of the DBE are fully conversant with the academy programme and know what options might look like for our Church of England Schools.

Written consent from the DBE is required for a school to convert to become an academy. The Diocese of Leeds will hear requests from schools, under the Academies Act 2010 Section 3 iv for consent to apply for an Academy Order. The Diocese will only hear such a request following a resolution of the governing body and the consent to apply from any other foundations / trustees (i.e. usually the Parochial Church Council or Vicar and Church Wardens as site trustees).

There will be specific dates in the year when the DBE will meet to consider applications from schools to become an academy. These dates will be set in advance of the start of the academic year. The approval process will always involve the head and chair (other key personnel are permitted to attend the meeting) and representatives from the MAT.

## Conclusion

### The Leeds DBE commitment to securing viable futures for our Church of England schools

The LDBE is committed to encouraging all schools to belong within a multi academy trust, sharing the school's strengths and experience and leading the on-going formation of education culture in our diocese. Our commitment is rooted in the belief that MAT accountability for local 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 where children flourish and lives are transformed. Church of England school leaders have much to offer to this process of transformation. The LDBE is concerned that without belonging within an established and effective MAT, any church school's long-term future is potentially at risk.

The LDBE is aware that the decision made about academy status is among the most significant a governing body will ever make; the LDBE engagement in that decision process is essential and non-negotiable. The LDBE process for joining a MAT, which all schools and Trusts will be expected to follow, is set out in our academy conversion documentation.

Consent for academy conversion is only confirmed by the LDBE with the Regional Schools Commissioner when the consent requirements are fully met by the joining school/s and the multi academy trust, as set out in our Conditional Consent letter, which will be received as part of the conversion process. This brings with it the expectation that Church of England schools in Church of England MATs will maintain their strong commitment to the LDBE through the annual subscription to the Enhanced Service Plan.



Additional Information:

[Guide for governing boards on considering academy status](#)

[FAQs: Converting to academy status](#)

[Convert to an academy: guide for schools \(Department for Education website\)](#)

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