

September 2021

Dear Headteacher and Chair of Governors

A refreshed strategy

We take this opportunity to commend to you our 2021 academy strategy. It outlines the position the Leeds Diocesan Board of Education (LDBE) will take on policy and practice regarding the government's academy programme. We last reviewed our position in 2018, but in the light of recent communications about the programme, which we do not believe will change as a result of a change of Secretary of State, it is appropriate to refresh our documentation.

Some may be surprised that the government would push the academy programme at the same time as we are emerging from a global pandemic. What we know from national conversations with government is that this has been on the cards for a while and that the pandemic has held up the department's push towards full academisation.

We want to ensure that our Diocese of Leeds Church of England schools understand the possibilities and opportunities and that you are supported to make decisions that are right for your community. The LDBE will work with you, through the DDE and his team, to review your options and to identify possible timescales for conversion.

We have consistently maintained a neutral position on conversion. However, we now expect schools to, meaningfully review their position on academy conversion during 2021/22 and to understand what joining a Multi-Academy Trust will mean for them and which of the Church Trusts in the diocese will provide them with a secure home. This strategy document will help schools to understand what their options are now and what they need to do next.

Current Context

We know that government expects schools to convert and join Trusts to ensure, in their view, the highest quality of education. We heard from government ministers earlier in 2021 that

"... the golden thread running through academisation is that we must constantly advance education, improving outcomes for children and levelling up communities. ... multi academy trusts are the best structure for improvement, and we want a system that's the best at getting better."

It is also the case that on the 15th July the DfE published their [DfE Outcome Delivery Plan: 2021 to 2022](#) which made it clear at Priority 2.4 that their aim is to raise school standards right across the country and support every school to join a strong family of schools, especially in areas where standards are weakest.

The Leeds DBE are being told by DfE and the Church of England Education Office that the government position is not simply about supporting the academy system but asserting that we need to move away from the current pick-and-mix structure and towards a single model. We understand from DfE that standalone academy trusts are no longer preferable and that new, small scale local MATS will not be approved. Standalone academy trusts or groups of maintained schools looking to create new MATs therefore need to be clear that the emphasis for the future is on the growth of our existing academy trusts through conversion of schools.

Unique protection for Church Schools

You will be reassured to know that our Church schools are protected by the requirement to join a Church of England Trust. This is further safeguarded by the DfE, the new DBE Measure 2021 (that has recently received Royal Assent) and the 2016 memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Church of England and the DfE.

Since 2014, the LDBE has worked to create a coherent academy strategy with its Academy Trust partners. Our existing Trusts are a key part of our strategy moving forward. In the diocese all our providers of secondary education have converted, as have over 25% of our primary provision. Therefore Church Schools in Church Trusts continues to be a central message to safeguard both the distinctive vision and ethos of the school as a Church School and the legal arrangements for schools around buildings and land.

In May 2021 the government announced a DfE pilot, working with Anglican and Catholic dioceses to support new diocesan led trusts to encourage more schools to convert. The LDBE is one of those dioceses and will therefore be creating an eleventh Trust for schools that do not have an obvious Church MAT solution.

Our message then is clear: review your position, discuss your options with your diocesan adviser, work proactively with your local Church MAT if you have one and if you need other options then we can discuss those with you. To support you in your exploration, in 2021/22 we will be offering a number of information sessions on the process of academisation, along with resources to support governors and leaders in their discussions. You can enrol onto our [academy programme briefings](#) through ESP Online.

We look forward to working with you over the next period of time, to support you in finding the right solution for your children and young people.



The Rt. Revd Dr Helen-Ann Hartley
Bishop of Ripon, Chair of the DBE



Canon Richard Noake
Director of Education