

**MULTI ACADEMY TRUST CONSULTATION**  
**Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)**  
**November 2015**

**1. Why are you thinking of becoming an academy and forming a Multi-Academy Trust?**

Because the Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia has given a clear steer that it considers the future of Catholic education in this region is best secured by formalising and strengthening the already existing relationships between local Catholic schools by forming a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT). Schools in the MAT would be able to support each other to improve outcomes for pupils and help ensure that all the schools do well. The education landscape has changed significantly in recent years, so that the majority of high schools are now academies; many have grouped together to form large chains of academies, in Multi-Academy Trusts. There is a potential danger that if schools did not formalise relationships as a MAT then if one was deemed as failing by Ofsted it may be liable to intervention from the Department of Education who could replace the Governing Body with its own appointed groups which may not value Catholic education sufficiently.

**2. Will the Catholic ethos of the schools change on becoming an Academy?**

No. The schools will continue as Catholic schools as they always have done.

**3. Will the schools name change if we became an Academy?**

No. There will be no change to a school's name, and each will retain its own individual identity.

**4. Will the schools admissions criteria change?**

No. The schools will continue to follow the School Admissions Code as laid down by the Department for Education (DfE).

**5. Would admissions arrangements for Looked After Children (those in the care of the Local Authority) change if the school were to become an academy?**

No. Looked After Children would continue to be prioritised within the admission arrangements, as required by the School Admissions Code.

**6. Will the school's uniform change?**

No. Each school will retain its separate identity and there will be no uniform changes on becoming part of a Multi-Academy Trust.

**7. Will there be changes to the length of the school day?**

There are no plans to change the length of the school day. Voluntary Aided schools can change the school day anyway, regardless of Academy status. Changes could be made but these would only be done after full consultation with parents and staff and even then would only be made if it were in the best interests of the school and its pupils.

**8. Will there be changes to the term times?**

There is no intention to make any changes to the term times at present or for the foreseeable future as these would conflict with the opening times of other schools and cause difficulties for parents. No change will be made without fully consulting parents and only then if such change was deemed to be in the best interests of the school.

**9. Would the school rules change?**

No – there would be no change to school rules.

**10. My child has special educational needs. Will the change to academy status mean any changes for her?**

No. The local authority will continue to have overall responsibility for Special Educational Needs budgets. There will be no difference in the support given for individual pupils whether schools remain under Local Authority control or are part of a Multi Academy Trust.

**11. My son receives Music Tuition at school via the Norfolk Music Service. Would Academy status affect costs or change this in any way?**

No. The current Music Service costs and tuition would continue in exactly the same way if the schools were to become academies. Any changes that the Music Service decided to make to its provision or costs would affect Local Authority and Academy schools in exactly the same way.

**12. Will you be holding a vote among parents, staff or pupils?**

No – the process is one of consultation, so we do not see a vote as being of benefit.

**13. What about the Local Authority? Does it support this move?**

Each school currently works closely with the Local Authority, and will continue to work with the Local Authority even if it takes on Academy status. The Local Authority has adopted a neutral view on schools consulting or converting.

**14. Will the school's relationship with the Diocese be any different from what it is now?**

The existing links with the Diocese are likely to be strengthened as the MAT Board of Directors will be appointed by the Bishop, who would retain the authority to remove Directors in the unlikely event that this becomes necessary. The schools would convert to academies and would be outside Local Authority control, instead being answerable to the MAT Board of Directors.

**15. How will becoming an Academy affect the curriculum?**

There is no intention to make major changes to the current curriculum as it supports our pupils extremely well. Academies do have greater freedom over determining the curriculum but still need to have regard to any proposed changes by Government.

**16. What proportion of the curriculum will be devoted to religious education?**

Converting schools would still follow the National Curriculum. The current allocated time for RE will continue, which follows national guidelines. There is no intention for this to change.

**17. Will becoming an Academy mean more money for the school?**

Levels of funding would remain largely similar to that for Voluntary Aided schools at present. However academies have control over how that money is allocated and spent, and would be accountable to the MAT Board of Directors, rather than the Local Authority. The main reason for creating a MAT would be so that schools could support each other to deliver high quality Catholic education in this area.

**18. What happens if one school in the Multi-Academy Trust has a budget deficit?**

The Directors would require reassurance from prior due diligence investigations on schools proposing to join the MAT. It is likely that the Board of Directors would require strong evidence of a budget plan to eliminate the deficit before a school in such circumstances joined the MAT. Similarly such plans to eliminate the deficit would need to be in place for academies already in the MAT if such a position were forecast to arise.

**19. If the school becomes an Academy and part of a Multi-Academy Trust when is this likely to take place?**

Early in 2016 is most likely. It does not have to be at the beginning of an academic year.

**20. Are the Governors supportive of this consultation?**

Yes. The Governors of each school separately decided to proceed with this consultation.

**21. Will all school staff be guaranteed the same terms and conditions they have now?**

Yes. Although staff will be employed by the Multi-Academy Trust, a Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 [TUPE] process would be undertaken to ensure staff maintain their continuous service entitlement, and keep the same terms and conditions of employment.

**22. What is the exact length of TUPE protection for staff? What is the scope for “reorganising” staff anyway, in ways allowed by TUPE to change the workforce?**

Voluntary Aided schools currently have wide scope anyway to reorganise the workforce. It is not necessary to become an academy for this to be available. TUPE protection simply ensures that current working agreements, terms and conditions are transferred over exactly as now to a new employer.

**23. What are the protections if the staff were to be TUPE'd with regards to?**

Hours – exactly the same as now

Teaching & Learning Responsibility (TLR) points – exactly the same as now

Threshold - exactly the same as now

All constituents of current School Teacher Pay and Conditions Documentation would be retained with the same levels of protection. Indeed the school could undergo a TLR review or a review of hours now without becoming an Academy.

**24. I believe staff and parent governors are elected at present. By what means would new governors be added to the governing body in the case of academy status? For example, which of the governors, if any, would be elected, and how would non-elected governors come to be added?**

Non-elected Foundation Governors on the local Governing Body would be appointed by the Diocese as is currently the case. Staff and parent Governors would continue to be elected in exactly the same way as at present – i.e. from amongst the staff and parent/carer groups respectively.

**25. How will this affect the governing body structures?**

The Multi-Academy Trust Board of Directors is appointed by the Bishop. The MAT Board would have overall accountability for the operating of academies within the Trust, and would delegate much of the responsibility for running the schools down to local Governing Bodies (LGBs).

**26. Would an academy receive extra funding above that allocated to Local Authority (LA) schools?**

No. The funding allocation to both academies and schools would be the same, but academies receive this money directly. An academy may spend this money directly on services, rather than the Local Authority providing services at a cost determined by the Local Authority. The purchasing power of the MAT may however allow for economies of scale and therefore best value on purchases. In addition academies do not have to commit 10% to the cost of any capital build and are not liable to 20% VAT on capital equipment and IT purchases.

**27. What financial risks are associated with academy and Multi-Academy Trust status? Would the Department for Education (DfE) be more involved?**

Academies are subject to rigorous annual financial auditing which would minimise the risks of financial difficulties. Academies would need to carefully consider all the potential costs they would be liable for, particularly those currently covered by the Local Authority e.g. the cost of providing maternity and paternity cover, redundancy costs etc However financial accountability would be more stringent than at present in Voluntary-Aided schools. The DfE would only be involved if it considered that an academy was failing, but the whole idea of the MAT would be to support individual schools and avoid such difficulties arising.

**28. Would an academy require more financial expertise to cover the increased financial accountability?**

It is likely that the MAT would need extra support in the finance team, or the provision of external support, to cover the additional workload. There is a £25,000 grant available to each school to cover for the legal and other costs associated with academy conversion.

**29. Who is going to be on the Board of Directors? How can you be sure they will know how to run a Multi-Academy Trust?**

The Board of Directors will be appointed by the Bishop. The Bishop will be careful to appoint individuals who will best serve the interests of Catholic education, and will likely have a range of educational, financial, business and religious expertise necessary to run a MAT.

**30. Would the Directors be paid?**

No. The Directors will not be paid for fulfilling their roles as Company Directors and Charity Trustees.

**31. Will the Directors include representatives from some of the schools in the MAT?**

The Bishop has stated his wish that school representatives are on the Board of Directors (alongside other Directors), so this is very likely.

**32. What will the new local governing bodies look like?**

It is likely the Board of Directors will delegate authority and responsibility for running schools down to local Governing Bodies (LGBs). LGBs will consist of a majority of Foundation

Governors appointed by the Bishop, alongside an elected staff Governor, two elected parent Governors, the Headteacher and any other class of Governor the Directors agree may be appointed. Because the MAT has an additional layer of governance (the Board of Directors), it is likely that LGBs may be a little smaller than at present.

**33. What will be the role and responsibility of the local Governing Bodies?**

Local Governing Bodies will be responsible for overseeing the day-to-day running of each individual school, spending the funding allocated to it, the school's admissions, pastoral support and teaching and learning. The full scope of the LGBs authority will be documented in a Scheme of Delegation agreed by the Directors, but with input from Heads and LGBs.

**34. When Ofsted arrive, who will they want to meet with?**

Ofsted would inspect each school individually and would expect to meet with the school's Headteacher and its local Governing Body. In time there may be moves for Ofsted to inspect a whole MAT, when it would be expected that they would meet with the Board of Directors. As of now we are not aware of any such proposals.

**35. Will there be a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) in the structure, and what was the rationale for this decision?**

There is an expectation from the Department for Education that there will be a named CEO and Accounting Officer for the Trust. This role will be filled from the Board of Directors.

**36. Are you concerned that there is no guarantee that current funding arrangements (20% VAT) will continue in future?**

No. At present Voluntary Aided schools pay 20% VAT on capital equipment and IT - academies do not.

**37. Could the Multi-Academy Trust take over other schools?**

Yes, it would have the potential to take over other academies, but only with the consent of the Bishop. There is no intention in the immediate future to extend the MAT beyond the Catholic schools in Norfolk and north Suffolk.

**38. With the possibility of teachers working in other schools in the MAT, will the children have consistency in the classroom?**

It is hoped that if teaching staff were to work in other schools across the MAT then there may be increased consistency arising from shared practice.

**39. Will the MAT be a teacher training provider?**

Whether the MAT becomes a formal teacher training provider is separate to the question about whether schools become academies and join the MAT. It is likely that if the MAT (or an academy within it) were eligible to apply for teacher training status then this would be submitted. At present there are no plans for such formal accreditation, but circumstances may change in future.

**40. Are you satisfied that parents have been given enough time to fully engage in the process of consultation?**

Yes. The consultation involved dedicated parents meetings at three of the Catholic primary schools, school newsletters and a dedicated consultation email account, and generated a reasonable amount of parental interest across all schools. Parents were always able to put their views to Head teachers and Chair of Governors outside of the formal consultation period.

**41. What happens next?**

Following this period of consultation Governors of each school will be invited to make a formal decision regarding academy status and on joining any Multi-Academy Trust at a Governing Body meeting later in the term.