

Guide for Governing Boards when Considering Academy Conversion

A Useful Guide for Governing Boards

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This guide is from the Manchester Diocese Board of Education, September 2022.

In light of the intentions expressed within The White Paper 'Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child' (March 2022) Manchester Diocese Board of Education supports governing boards giving consideration to academisation.

Such consideration should include one or more of the following:

- Attendance at academisation briefings led by the diocese.
- Invite the diocesan adviser to present on academy options.
- Invite a representative from local MAT(s) to present and answer questions.
- Debate the pros and cons or complete a swot analysis on joining a MAT.
- Set up a working party to fully investigate the issue which is then reported to the FGB.

There are a range of sources of evidence available to boards when exploring academisation.

- MAT personnel
- Diocesan Director of Education
- MAT websites
- Articles of Association/ Schemes of Delegation
- Annual accounts
- Inspection reports
- References/Input from the academies

Boards may want to consider the following areas when giving consideration to becoming an academy:

- A. Local MAT options their visions, values, and direction
- B. Educational outcomes and school improvement offer.
- C. Financial implications
- D. Centralisation and services
- E. Collaboration, shared practice and CPD opportunities
- F. Governance, structures, and school identity

To support boards, we have framed some questions under the above headings, see below.

Boards may want to consider some/all the following questions when exploring becoming an academy. These questions may also prove useful for schools in the position of comparing MAT options.

Please note that these questions are designed for initial exploration purposes and are different to due diligence questions that might be asked after expressing an interest to convert.

A. Local MAT options their visions, values and direction

- What are our MAT options as defined by Manchester Diocese Board of Education?
- Do the MAT's vision and values align with the school's?
- What is the vision for the future of the MAT, and does it align with our vision for the school?
- What is the growth strategy of the MAT and how will this affect the academies within it?

B. Educational outcomes and school improvement offer.

- What is the MAT offer in terms of school improvement?
- How does the MAT support the preservation and development of church school distinctiveness?
- What evidence can the MAT show of raising performance in the academies of the MAT?
- Have any academies in the MAT moved Ofsted grades in the past five years?
- Have any academies in the MAT moved SIAMS grades in the past five years?
- What is the MAT's record in supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils in its academies?
- What are the accountability structures in the MAT and how are local governors involved?

C. Financial implications

- How does funding work in the MAT?
- What financial efficiencies have schools achieved by being part of the MAT?
- 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?
- Who will determine our internal budget and how it is distributed?
- 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?
- What's the MAT's policy on the financial reserves held by a joining school? Will our school be able to retain its reserves?

D. Centralisation and services

- What central services does the MAT offer? E.g., Will our school have centralised HR systems, IT support, catering suppliers etc.?
- How does this work in practice? In what time frame would our school be expected to centralise?
- What aspects is the trust considering/moving to become more centralised in the future? How will the MAT consult the LGBs?
- 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

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

F. Governance, structures, and school identity

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

Having reviewed the questions above, boards should be better placed to answer this overarching question:

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

Please be aware, this document has been created by Manchester Diocese Board of Education.

