

Salisbury Diocesan Board of Education Multi Academy Trust Policy

1. Introduction

Salisbury Diocesan Board of Education (SDBE) and school leaders aim to ensure that church schools are a vital and thriving part of the diocese and the country's education provision for the long term future – building on our 200 year heritage.

The SDBE encourages the leaders of every church school, VC and VA, rural, urban, market town, coastal, large or small, to reflect on how we might work together: school, parish and SDBE, so that we can ensure this aim is achieved.

2. This policy document sets out:

SDBE recommendation for church school leaders, including governors, to:

- engage with the SDBE in a risk and opportunities analysis to ensure that leadership decisions being made currently by the school governing body and the SDBE will protect and enable the school's long term future
- explore how belonging within a multi academy trust could contribute to protecting the school's future and enable its further flourishing
- establish a plan that will secure the school's long term future, whether or not this includes belonging within a MAT

SDBE principles which underpin our support for church schools becoming a part of a multi-academy trust

3. A risk and opportunities analysis aimed to secure long term sustainability

The SDBE mission is to 'lead the development of a body of confident, effective church schools and academies that are deeply Christian, belonging at the heart of the church and community, serving society's common good' (SDBE Strategic Plan 2018/23).

Church schools are at the heart of their communities and make a unique contribution to the life of that community. The SDBE is therefore committed to working closely with school and parish leaders to ensure they are fully supported to create a robust risk and opportunities analysis of their school's long term sustainability, taking account of local, regional and national opportunities and candidly considering the challenges. The SDBE recommendation is that each governing body has in place a plan which evidences how risks are to be mitigated and long term sustainability secured, including:

- the long term future of your school, preserving your unique Christian vision and rich educational heritage for generations of children to come
- a school that is flourishing within the local community and its parish, serving the unique needs of its children young people and locality
- excellent leadership, teaching and learning with strong educational outcomes, enabling life in all its fullness
- a stable 3 year financial forecast within a financial framework that evidences long term viability

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The SDBE therefore offers:

- an on-line risk and opportunities assessment tool for the governing body and headteacher, and for MAT leaders' use
- the opportunity for SDBE support through a risk and opportunities analysis assessment
- a discussion of outcomes and next steps with the SDBE

A wider national context

The Education and Adoption Act 2016 provided the legal framework for the structural transformation of the school system. Schools now work in the context of a significantly changed role for the LA with its focus on statutory duties: place planning; admissions; Alternative Provision; exclusions. This change has also had significant impact on the provision to schools of school improvement support.

The parallel national context of education funding and accountability (Ofsted) place high demands on all those who serve children and young people in schools.

The Secretary of State recognises the responsibility of DBEs to all the church schools within their diocese and the children in those schools whether these are maintained schools or academies (whether in Single Academy Trusts (SATs) or MATs). 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 SDBE believes it is important for all schools to maximize the opportunities offered by the structural changes across the educational landscape and culture. The SDBE believes the formal school collaboration offered by MATs is a key to mitigating risk and protecting and progressing church school education in the future. The SDBE considers a risk and opportunities analysis is needed by all schools to ensure that robust decisions are made now which will secure church school education for this generation and for many to come.

The SDBE's intention to work with both the LA maintained church school leaders and with MAT leaders, to secure long term sustainability plans, is part of the exercise of our responsibility to church schools across our diocese to protect and to preserve church school education provision for the next 100 years.

'MATs: A Home for All Church Schools'

The contribution of multi academy trusts in this diocese

The SDBE has witnessed over the last three years, how belonging within a multi academy trust is enabling education provision to flourish. Flourishing is especially seen in: the progression of a school's unique character; the interdependence of MAT schools and their sense of belonging; the creativity that supports the professional development of staff; the quality and timeliness of school improvement support and of accountability processes; the quality of governance, including foundation governance at all MAT tiers; the quality of leadership, teaching and learning; the provision of core services such as finance and human resources which releases energy into school leadership; the improvement towards financial stability; the use of buildings; the way in which 'great' schools are further thriving, and crucially, in the way the Christian character of schools is being intentionally developed. These are hallmarks of multi academy trusts in our diocese.

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The SDBE believes that multi academy trusts play a significant role in enabling us to secure the flourishing of church schools. We believe MATs are creating a home which values the unique vision of each school and enables schools, as connected communities, to flourish within a strong, creative and accountable, educational structure. It is from the ***position of strength of MAT provision*** that the SDBE recommends for schools to become a vital part of a MAT.

An Immediate Risk for Schools Causing Concern

In our diocese, Local Authorities are experiencing an increase in the number of maintained schools and Single Academy Trusts judged by Ofsted to be inadequate and thus moved by the Regional Schools Commissioner into a

MAT through a Direct Academy Order, removing the capacity for choice and endangering the church school foundation. It is essential for governors to exercise their right to determine their school's future ahead of situations which take away this choice.

The SDBE's intention is to proactively support all schools causing concern:

- firstly through the SDBE schools causing concern strategy [SDBE Schools Causing Concern Strategy](#) which seeks to aid school improvement
- secondly through risk assessment to consider how belonging within a MAT might aid their improvement and their long term future

The development of the role of Multi Academy Trusts across our own diocese is providing system leadership to enable school improvement provision. The SDBE is privileged to partner MATs in this work.

SDBE Multi Academy Trust Policy statement

Our vision is to facilitate the further development of multi academy trusts across the diocese that stand the test of time: preserving, protecting and enhancing the distinctive church school deeply Christian vision, enabling children and adults to flourish.

Our diocese dates back to AD 705; the SDBE was formed in 1830 and is nationally one of the oldest formal diocesan bodies. Many of the church schools were founded before that date, and the Board, or Council as it was called then, was formed to support their work and to promote new schools. The Salisbury Diocesan Board of Education (SDBE) now serves 194 schools and over 43,000 children; it is our responsibility, working with church school leaders, to cherish, protect and progress church schools – each a Christian presence at the heart of their community. The SDBE believes that Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) with Church Articles have an enormous role to play in enabling the flourishing of church schools for the future.

The SDBE 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 schools where children flourish and lives are transformed. Church school leaders have much to offer to this process of transformation. The SDBE is concerned that without belonging within an established and effective MAT, any church school's long term future is potentially at risk.

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The Education Department of the Church of England has worked with the government to ensure key principles and a legal framework for the conversion of church schools to academy status. This legal framework is proving to be highly effective in protecting the Anglican foundation and the day by day flourishing of church schools in this diocese.

SDBE Principles and Expectations

1. The SDBE expect all maintained VA and VC schools to undertake a formal risk and opportunities analysis, evidencing the opportunities and challenges in respect of the school's long-term sustainability (link to the tool).
2. all church schools are invited to engage proactively in the exploration of the need for new partnerships and structural change, in order to positively shape long term educational provision and ensure a continued and strong church school presence for current pupils and for pupils of the future
3. In taking account of the political and educational landscape, the SDBE will not compromise church school status; the SDBE is committed to the protection in the present and for the long-term future, of the trust deed and therefore church school designation of every church school.
4. The SDBE believes, but will not insist, that all schools and standalone academies should plan to become a full part of a multi academy trust. Where church schools do not choose to become a part of a MAT, the SDBE expects governors to hold full accountability for the school's long-term future.
5. The SDBE considers that as a part of their MAT investigations schools should consider the Diocese of Salisbury Academy Trust (DSAT), particularly local schools joining as a group as a group to form a local hub. The SDBE will support the application to the DSAT Trust Board wherever due diligence shows this is in the best interests of the school.
6. The SDBE supports the development of MATs within the diocese which may include schools from a range of predecessor designations: Voluntary Aided, Voluntary Controlled, standalone academies, and community schools.
7. Every MAT will have appropriate Foundation representation within each tier of governance which will be expressed in a memorandum of understanding and in the legally binding Articles.
8. At Member and Trust Board the SDBE expectation is 50% Foundation representation
9. At local level the Foundation representation will replicate that of the predecessor school: Voluntary Aided majority foundation representation or Voluntary Controlled minority representation
10. The SDBE supports the merger of MATs to create stronger system leadership and the development of MATs across diocesan boundaries, supported by shared diocesan memoranda of understanding.
11. The SDBE will not support a school wishing to establish a standalone academy trust, umbrella trust or federation.
12. When there is a senior leadership vacancy, the SDBE will expect all schools as a matter of course and whatever their size, to give careful consideration to how structural change maximizes the opportunity for long term sustainability. The governing body should not assume that an appointment within the same structure will be supported by the Board of Education.
13. The SDBE is aware that the decision made about academy status is among the most significant a governing body will ever make; the SDBE engagement in that decision process is essential and non-negotiable. The SDBE process for joining a MAT, which all schools and Trusts will be expected to follow, is set out in [Doc 1 Process for considering conversion and next steps](#)

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14. Consent for academy conversion is only confirmed by the SDBE 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 Academy trusts

Support for Risk Analysis and for Academy Conversion

The SDBE has dedicated staff, including those with financial, education and multi academy trust experience to support schools to fully explore issues and opportunities relating to sustainable futures, including multi academy trust options.

The SDBE is committed to providing regular opportunities for schools to access current information relating to risk analysis and to multi academy trust status and these are advertised through the SDBE website and include training opportunities and conferences.

Links to documents to support the SDBE Multi Academy Trust

[Salisbury Diocesan Board of Education Academy Trusts](#)

SDBE Contact and support

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