

Mater Christi Multi Academy Trust
Consultation
Frequently Asked Questions
12th February 2021



1. What is an Academy?

Academies are publicly-funded schools which operate outside of local authority control. They receive their funding directly from the government through the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) rather than through a local authority.

2. What is the difference between an academy and a free school?

A Voluntary-Aided school, such as SJCHS, can convert from being a Local Authority Maintained School to an academy, whereas Free Schools are entirely new state schools.

3. What are the main differences between academies and maintained schools?

- 3.1. The religious nature of the school remains the same but the governance model of the school changes.
- 3.2. A Catholic Multi Academy Trust is a group of Catholic Schools coming together to form a Multi Academy Trust (MAT). Only Catholic schools will be members of the Mater Christi MAT.
- 3.3. Academies have a funding agreement with the Education Funding Agency (ESFA) and receive funding directly from them. Maintained schools receive money from the Local Authority.
- 3.4. School Standards are monitored by the Local Authority (LA) currently. The LA has very little authority in academies. Standards are monitored by and reported to the Regional Schools' Commissioner on behalf of the Department for Education.
- 3.5. Currently, LA schools must follow the national curriculum; academies do not have to teach this but may follow it in full or in part.
- 3.6. Academies have to participate in national curriculum assessments (also known as SATs).

4. What is a Multi Academy Trust?

A Multi Academy Trust is a charitable company and is responsible for running the schools (academies) within the Trust. It has three layers of governance: 1. The Bishop of Lancaster and the Diocesan Trustees. 2. The Directors and 3. The Local Governing Bodies and Headteachers.

5. Who monitors what in Academies?

The Education and Skills Agencies (ESFA) monitors the finance management of the MAT and the Regional School Commissioners, who work for the Department for Education, and OFSTED oversee school standards.

6. What are the advantages?

- 6.1. This will further strengthen the Catholic family. We will be one large family.
- 6.2. The Trust will group our schools together, protect them and help them develop by working together.

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- 6.3. As a Trust we will be able to support our Headteachers with their long-term goals.
- 6.4. Improvements to all of our schools can be made when we work together.
- 6.5. We will be able to support and use our strengths to collaborate. More creative opportunities will be made available for sharing practice.

7. We are a good school and already work well with everyone. Why shouldn't we stay where we are?

- 7.1. Partnership working is strong in our Diocese but not every school collaborates with the other Catholic Schools.
- 7.2. Being in one Trust will create new possibilities for sharing good practice. Each school will have its strengths which will be shared across the schools.
- 7.3. We will create improvement projects and develop new ways of working.
- 7.4. This further strengthens the Catholic family.

8. My school receives good support from the local authority so why should my school need to join a Trust?

Working relationships between schools and Local Authorities have changed and will continue to change, as funding levels have reduced, leading to variations in the level of support and in the way in which they are able to provide support to schools.

9. Will being an Academy provide a safeguard for the Catholic Identity of our schools?

- 9.1. Joining together in one Trust will mean that the Catholic identity of the schools in the Trust will be better safeguarded. Together we will be a stronger entity - this is seen as one of the main advantages.
- 9.2. All the documentation is written to safeguard our Catholic schools.

10. What will be the specific advantages of the Mater Christi Multi Academy Trust?

- 10.1. The schools in the Trust will be part of one large family of schools.
- 10.2. The schools in the Trust will be working together to focus even more closely on providing a first-class all-round Catholic education for all our children and young people.
- 10.3. There are advantages in terms of the ability to employ future specialist staff to work across all our schools, and agreeing a common shared ethos, policies, practice and economies of scale in terms of brokering services.
- 10.4. The Trust will also provide greater opportunities for staff recruitment and retention, succession planning and opportunities for coaching, mentoring and continued professional development.

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11. Will schools lose their identity?

- 11.1. No. Each school will become an academy in its own right and will be part of the Trust.
- 11.2. The Scheme of Delegation protects the uniqueness of each school.
- 11.3. The Local Governing Body is tasked with ensuring that the Catholic ethos is strong and the unique identity of the school is maintained.

12. What is the approach of other Dioceses to the establishment of Trusts?

Many other Dioceses are developing structures to further preserve, protect and develop Catholic education. Examples are Newcastle, Leeds and Nottingham Diocese where all Catholic schools are within a number of Trusts.

13. What will the direct impact be on families if our school joins a Trust?

- 13.1. The move will not have a negative impact on families.
- 13.2. Each school will still be led and managed by the Headteacher and a local governing body.

14. What are the legal responsibilities towards children with special educational needs and disabilities?

- 14.1. Pope Benedict reminds us, "Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary."
- 14.2. In a Catholic school, our responsibilities to all children extend beyond curriculum standards so that all children are flourishing.
- 14.3. Academies must follow the SEN Code of Practice, just like other schools.

15. Becoming an Academy

- 15.1. All the schools will be equal in the Trust.
- 15.2. The cost of conversion is met via a grant of £25,000 per school.
- 15.3. Subject to Governor approval, the timeline to convert is June 2021.
- 15.4. The current governing body will become the Local Governing Body under the Directors of the Trust.

16. Buildings

- 16.1. If there are emergency building issues, contingency payments can be paid by the ESFA.
- 16.2. Academies can apply for grants for building projects that are currently not available to Local Authority schools.

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17. The role of parents

- 17.1. All schools that convert to academies must ensure that parents are consulted as part of the process. Parents are a key component of the work of a Catholic school and schools looking to become part of the Trust must seek to work in partnership with the families who entrust children to their care.
- 17.2. Admissions are still administered by the Local Authority. Each school has an Admissions Policy which it will follow.
- 17.3. The MAT board is responsible for arranging for an admissions appeal if there are families who want to appeal for a place.

18. Curriculum

Academies must ensure they offer a broad and balanced curriculum although they are not required to follow the National Curriculum. In practice, many do. Academies are required, however, to participate in the national curriculum assessments (SATs).

19. What is the role of OFSTED?

All academy schools will have separate OFSTED inspections but OFSTED may inspect all the schools in the same 'window'.

20. Who monitors the MAT board?

- 20.1. The MAT is a charitable company and has to make an annual report to the members through an AGM. In the Diocese of Lancaster, the members are the Bishop of Lancaster, the Trustees of the Diocese of Lancaster and the Episcopal Vicar for Education and Formation.
- 20.2. If the members feel that the MAT is not performing across a number of its schools they would ask the MAT Board what actions it was going to take. The Diocesan Education Service would retain its active role supporting schools to promote excellence in Catholic education.

21. What is the Leadership structure in the Trust?

- 21.1. There will be a Chief Executive Officer and a Chief Financial Officer.
- 21.2. Each school will have its Headteacher or an Executive Head as it does now. These roles will not be diminished.
- 21.3. The Trust and the Local Governing Body will be involved in the appointment of Headteachers when vacancies arise.
- 21.4. Each school is an equal partner in the Trust so that there is no school more important than another.
- 21.5. Each school will retain its own budget and will pool finances for key roles and projects in the Trust.

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22. What is the proposed governance structure?

- 22.1. The Trustees will be the Bishop of Lancaster, the Diocesan Trustees and the Episcopal Vicar for Education and Formation.
- 22.2. Then there is a Trust Board made up of a minimum of five directors, who are not paid.
- 22.3. The Chief Executive Officer will report to the Trust Board.
- 22.4. Each school will have its own Local Governing Body and Headteacher or Executive Head.
- 22.5. The powers of each of these will be decided in a Scheme of Delegation.
- 22.6. The Local Governing Body will carry out many of the functions they presently do. For instance, the Local Governing Body will ensure that standards in the school and pupil attainment are as good as they can be and that the school is delivering the improvements that are needed.

23. Teaching and learning and curriculum.

- 23.1. Academies are all still subject to OFSTED inspections and their results are published by the Department for Education. Additionally, all schools remain subject to the Diocesan Inspections carried out on behalf of the Bishop of Lancaster.
- 23.2. The Trusts will have the responsibility to ensure that standards in each academy are monitored and evaluated effectively through the local governors. Where a problem is identified or reported to them, they will be required to ensure that appropriate support has been obtained.
- 23.3. Every academy in the Trust will be expected to play a full part in supporting the improvement of standards across all academies in the Trust. The Education Service will continue to monitor standards in schools and will hold the Trust to account.
- 23.4. All schools are unique and serve a local community so schools will have a voice in determining their broad and balanced curriculum. The content of RE and the choice of schemes remain under the Bishop of Lancaster's jurisdiction.
- 23.5. It is likely that the Trust will develop data tracking systems across the schools so that performance data can be compared.

24. Safeguarding

The same expectations for schools around safeguarding would be in place in the new Trust.

25. Services across the Trust

- 25.1. The Trust will establish a core central team. The core team will offer support for schools around finance, standards, school improvement and operational running of schools. They will continue to work with the Lancaster Catholic Education Service to offer strong support in developing each school's Catholic life.
- 25.2. The Trust will be required to purchase services that are of the best value and best quality.
- 25.3. Some Multi Academy Trusts currently purchase services from Local Authorities, this will be something considered should there be a need.
- 25.4. Local Authorities still retain their statutory responsibilities for areas such as Safeguarding and SEN.
- 25.5. The Trust can make savings by economies of scale. This money can then be used for the education of the children. Buying separately would limit this ability.

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25.6. The Trust will establish working practices that do not rely on schools being geographically close. This will be a challenge, but we have proved recently that there are ways to work virtually.

26. Finances and resources

- 26.1. The Trust Board will be responsible for presenting the consolidated accounts for the Trust as a whole.
- 26.2. The Trust will provide opportunities for centralising contracts and service delivery that we hope will yield considerable savings on school budgets.
- 26.3. The Local Governing Body will be responsible for managing the delegated school budget. The Trust is responsible for the central service fund and for strategic planning across the whole Trust.
- 26.4. The Local Governing Body is responsible for staffing structures. As now, they will need to ensure that the structure is sustainable within the delegated budget.

27. Employment

- 27.1. Teachers will transfer to the MAT and be employed on the Standard Teachers Pay and Conditions (STPCD).
- 27.2. Support staff will transfer to the MAT on their existing conditions.
- 27.3. There is no expectation that staff would work in different schools. However, future posts might be designed to do so.
- 27.4. The aim of the Trust policy will be to develop Catholic education. The Diocesan Academy Policy aims to ensure that schools are supported by the Trust and savings through economies of scale can help smaller schools.

Additional Questions received during the Consultation

- 1. Would the Trust (when it is formed) consider the relationship between the Local Governing Bodies and the Directors to ensure that there is a close working relationships between LGB Chairs, Vice Chairs and the Trust Directors. Will you also ensure that parents have a relationship across the group?

Yes – this will be considered. We have not yet determined the exact responsibilities across the Directors and LGB except to ensure that LGB have the powers to lead their school in their communities. We will look at the ways that the Directors and LGB communicate so that all leaders are informed to do their role in the best way.

2. Why now?

Because the Bishop has asked us to convert. Either schools join later once the Trust is established or schools are founding members. All Catholic schools across Lancaster and Cumbria have been asked to convert. We appreciate that this time is a difficult period for all schools, but the DFE have not paused their expectation that the Diocese considers academisation. Some schools have been discussing conversion for a number of years, other schools have not, so some are more ready than others. The Bishop asked all Catholic schools to be academy ready some time ago.

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3. Can we vote?

The Bishop has already taken the decision for us to convert. If we have a vote, we would be going against the Bishop.

4. Will being a part of a MAT increase the chance of redundancies?

The pressure to balance the books exists in every type of school. Remaining as a LA school or being an academy does not take away the need for schools to manage their budgets well. However, as a group of schools we hope to find efficiencies in our buying power for services such as HR or legal services and others which may assist us in saving money.

5. What about national pay scales?

The MAT will honour national pay scales.

6. Why our schools and not others?

Because schools have to be in a certain position to convert.

Our schools have been discussing academisation for a long time. They have also been working on their 'academy ready' status for over a year, in readiness for the Bishop's decision. Not every Governing Body is in a position to take an 'in principle' vote and not every school will be ready for the DFE to closely scrutinise their financial systems, processes and position. The DFE scrutiny in the run up to conversion is tough. It is not a given that schools can convert when they want to.

7. Is converting going to break up the current ethos of each school?

The school will still be led by the Headteachers and Governors who have established and continue to establish the Catholic Ethos of the schools.

8. What would be the impact of falling numbers on a school in a MAT?

All schools have to balance their books and fewer students does mean less money. This is the case with LA schools.

9. Scrutiny of Finances

We acknowledge that some MATS have not been well run financially and the scrutiny that should have existed was absent. It is our intention to have in place the very best financial management and scrutiny so that our students have their money spent on their education.

10. What experience does the Diocese of Lancaster have in running MATs.

To date there has only been one group of academies in Blackpool. In five years' time, there will be more.

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11. Is a new build likely for any of the schools?

Academies can apply for capitation grants. It is unlikely that a totally new build will happen.

12. We are already a Catholic Family of schools.

We are. But in a MAT we would be one family and be able to work more closely together.

13. Can we see the Governance Structure, budgets etc.?

We have agreed to have regular meetings in the future so as these structures are formed and information on budgets is available, they can be shared.

14. What can't the school with the Academy Order join the Academy in Blackpool?

Because that academy is not a sponsor academy.

15. Have leaders and staff been given opportunities to discuss the proposals with other academies?

Staff are free to have those discussions. The Diocese has held a number of events where experiences outside of Lancaster have been shared. Two large events took place in the academic year 19-20 pre Lockdown 1.

16. Why is the Headteacher Board considering the schools before the consultation ends.

The Consultation ends on February 12th and the board meet in March. Governors will make their decision after the consultation.

We are committed to continue to answer questions, even though this consultation ends on the 12th February. The email address academy.materchristi@gmail.com remains open.