

# Carlisle Diocesan Board of Education

## Academisation Strategy: April 2024

### Introduction

The Carlisle Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) has developed an inspiring vision for church schools in this diocese that reflects the [Church of England's Vision for Education](#), being deeply Christian and serving the common good.

Our vision has at its heart human flourishing for all members of our school communities, children and adults. The DBE remains committed to supporting our cohesive family of church schools, striving to achieve the best possible educational outcomes and transform the lives of young people.

The DBE acknowledges the Department for Education's (DfE) ambition for every school to be part of a family of schools in successful multi academy trusts (MATs). In light of this, the DBE has reviewed and reflected on its position in relation to academy conversion.

The DBE believes that flourishing is best achieved when schools work collaboratively, in partnership with one another, providing mutual support and challenge. We are committed to supporting our schools in developing long-term sustainable educational structures. Whilst the DBE is supportive of a range of other highly successful formal and informal collaborations which exist in our diocese, it commends the MAT model as the most successful form of collaboration for our schools.

However, for schools in Carlisle Diocese, whether or not to join a MAT remains for individual schools to decide, with the long-term best interests of the school and its pupils at heart.

### Current Position

In 2014, during the early stages of academisation, the diocese set up its own MAT, the Good Shepherd Trust (GST). At that time, schools were encouraged to consider joining GST as one of a number of options available (including converting to academy status as a single academy trust).

Since then, GST has grown to become a strong MAT containing 12 academies, across and beyond the diocese. Community, voluntary controlled and voluntary aided schools are all represented in the GST family. The GST also supports other maintained schools and academies across the diocese via its school improvement services. The DBE has supported this development and growth, working closely with GST's officers and directors to realise its vision of *life in all its fullness* for GST schools.

A majority of directors and members of GST are foundation (diocesan) appointments.

At the moment GST is the only MAT option for church schools.

Acknowledging:

- the DfE's vision that, ultimately, all schools will join a MAT; and
- church school leaders' understandable desire for choice,

in April 2022, the Bishops Council (standing committee of Diocesan Synod) approved the DBE's recommendation to establish a second diocesan MAT (the 'second MAT') to sit alongside GST.

### **National Expectations for Church Schools wishing to join a MAT**

The national expectation for any church school joining a MAT, as set out in the [Memorandum of Understanding](#) between the National Society and the DfE, is that the school's governance structures will be reflected at director and member level in that MAT.

Therefore, any MAT a **voluntary controlled** school wishes to join must have at least a **minority** of foundation-appointed directors and members. In turn, any MAT a **voluntary aided** school wishes to join must have a **majority** of foundation-appointed directors and members.

Given:

- the DBE's commitment to safeguarding the distinctiveness of its church schools;
- Carlisle Diocese's commitment to offering supportive and effective MAT governance;
- the successful track record of GST in supporting voluntary aided, voluntary controlled and community schools; and
- the large number of voluntary aided schools in this diocese,

the second MAT will have a majority of foundation appointed directors and members.

### **The Strategy**

Following extensive consultation with schools across the diocese, the DBE has agreed the following academisation strategy:

1. All church schools are strongly encouraged to plan for their long-term sustainability and flourishing. Schools should consider how formal or informal collaboration may support this.
2. Whilst the decision about whether and how best to collaborate remains with individual schools, the DBE commends, to all our schools, joining a MAT.
3. Following the DfE's announcement on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2024, that *'From 1 September 2024, the £25k converter grant will be paid only to schools approved to join a trust as part of a group of three or more schools'* the DBE will usually only approve voluntary conversions to academy status where a school is looking to join a MAT in the same tranche<sup>1</sup> as two or more other schools. Schools considering joining a MAT are therefore strongly encouraged to work closely with local schools to explore joining a MAT together. Schools should contact the Director of Education for advice and support.
4. Any church school seeking formal mutually supportive collaboration with opportunities for efficiency, career development and progression should consider which of the two diocesan MATs is the 'best fit' for them<sup>2</sup>. The Director of Education will support any school in making this determination.
5. Schools wishing to join a MAT will be free to join whichever of the two MATs they choose, if it is (in the opinion of the DBE) in the best long-term interests of their school and is approved by the Regional Director.
6. Both MATs will have the full support and endorsement of the DBE.
7. Both MATs will be encouraged to work collaboratively with each other as part of our diocesan family of schools.

<sup>1</sup> Schools do not have to convert or join a MAT at the same time to be part of the same Tranche but their application to join a MAT must be approved by the Regional Director at the same time and the timeline for them joining as part of one phase must be established.

<sup>2</sup>School leaders wishing to know more about joining GST should arrange a confidential, commitment free meeting with either the Diocesan Director of Education or the Chief Executive Officer of GST to find out more.

### Appendix: Church school Academies in Carlisle Diocese

	Primary schools	Secondary schools
Multi-Academy Trusts	9	0
Single Academy Trusts	4	2
Empty MATs (only 1 school in the Trust)	0	0
Local Authority maintained schools	89	0
Total number of schools	102	2

Adopted: Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> May 2024