

DIOCESAN STRATEGY FOR THE CHURCH SCHOOL SYSTEM

This document constitutes the published ‘Diocesan Strategy’ for the Diocese of Canterbury, approved by the Canterbury Diocesan Board of Education, as referenced in:

- *The Department for Education (DfE) Academy Articles of Association, for use by multi-academy trusts with Church of England schools (September 2023)*
- *The Memorandum of Understanding between the National Society and DfE (September 2023)*
- *Commissioning High-Quality Trusts (Department for Education, July 2023)*

1. VISION

The Canterbury Diocesan Board of Education (‘CDBE’, ‘the Board’) maintains a bold commitment to education which is rooted in a Christian vision and context, supporting Church of England (CE) schools which are authentically Christian, generous and enriching; which nurture a culture of deep reflection and compassion for God’s world, encourage spiritual development and provide a rich experience and appreciation of the Christian faith, enabling all children and adults to live an abundant life.

2. CONTEXT

Canterbury Diocese is the oldest diocese in England, stretching from Maidstone to Thanet and the Isle of Sheppey to the Romney Marsh. The diocese has 350 miles of coastline with historic ports and seaside resorts, alongside rural communities, market towns and commuter-belt urban developments. Affluent areas often sit alongside pockets of major deprivation, offering an exciting and challenging mission context.

At the heart of all we do is a vision of transformation for ourselves and our communities: no one can encounter God and remain unchanged. In the Diocese of Canterbury, we want to increasingly become a Christian community transformed through encounter with Christ, growing and overflowing to transform and bless the families, homes, schools and communities we serve: Changed Lives, Changing Lives.

Canterbury Diocese comprises 204 parishes organised in 101 legal benefices, with over 26,000 children and young people educated in 105 Church of England schools.

3. AMBITION FOR THE CHURCH SCHOOL SYSTEM

3.1 The CDBE’s ambition is to maintain a cohesive, interdependent family of diocesan church schools, dedicated to transforming the lives of children and young people, within which schools and academies will instinctively seek advice and support from the diocesan Children, Young People and Education (CYPE) team. The Board seeks to be responsive to local contexts and attentive to the political landscape for education, both regionally and nationally, whilst holding an impartial position in relation to whether schools operate within the maintained sector or convert to academy status.

- 3.2 Most importantly, the CDBE is focusing its narrative and attention on the current, systemic pressures being felt by schools in terms of finance, budgeting and sustainability. The Board recognises the impact of general UK economic uncertainty, noting in particular current inflationary pressures, rising fuel and staffing costs for schools and systematic cuts to public services which have affected the level of state funding for education.
- 3.3 Thus, this Strategy describes structures, policy positions and expectations intended to promote system resilience; that have a clearly identifiable theological underpinning and help schools to express their own theologically-rooted Christian vision. It explains the strategic principles which inform the CDBE's planning, intentionally emphasising moral purpose, mutuality, courageous advocacy and choice.

4. THEOLOGICAL UNDERPINNING

'How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!'
(Psalm 133:1)

4.1 Mutuality, not competition: 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

Church schools, regardless of status, size or location, share a common identity and purpose: distinctively Christian communities of learning in which children will encounter a real experience of God's love for all humanity and receive affirmation that they are a beloved child of God. CE schools should be communities of nurture, where learning is lifelong, and children learn to be centred and held in the Christian tradition.

With vision and values rooted in the Gospel, CE schools recognise the intrinsic worth of each member of the community, aspiring for everyone to know they belong and are welcome - completely included, valued and celebrated. Thus, we value and honour the wide variety of gifts, capabilities and ways of serving characteristic of others and instinctively know the importance of each member of the body.

This is essential across the diocesan family of church schools too: an ambition and culture of interdependence, where we see the mutual strength of belonging together, each member of the community playing a unique part, vital to the health and transformation of all.

But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? (1 Corinthians 12:18-19)

4.2 Rootedness and extravagant sowing: Luke 8: 4-15

Drawing on the Parable of the Sower, we advocate that leaders in CE schools should be empowered by personal and theological rootedness which shapes their strategy, as well as nourished by established life-giving habits so that their personal vision and values are sustained through times of both challenge and celebration.

In addition, this parable demonstrates extravagance in sowing; an indication that Jesus' approach to mission is not about playing safe. His example gives us freedom to take risks for the sake of the gospel; to engage critically with the educational landscape, considering its appropriateness for our context and making brave decisions, and to explicitly fulfil our responsibility to prioritise the vulnerable and transform injustice.

Note that the word is sown with extravagant generosity, even in the most perilous places; but always with the confidence of Christ's promise of an abundant crop.

4.3 God chooses the small and seemingly insignificant: John 6:1-14

*'In the Bible, God consistently raises up the small and places the outsider in the centre of the narrative of salvation... It is not simply that the small and humble are given equal weight as the great and mighty. The message is far stronger, God chooses the small, the little, the despised and the humble and reveals them to be more significant than the things the world praises for being great and mighty.'*¹

We notice that it is the small boy with loaves and fishes whose generosity is turned by Jesus into a sign of the coming Kingdom.

Similarly, we recognise the uniqueness and value of small and rural schools; a sense of 'family' and compassionate hospitality, often delivering a valuable social function and service within a specific locality. They can share unique insights into excellent leadership, developing and teaching an imaginative, tailored curriculum which suits the local community - and are fully deserving of the support they require to continue to thrive into the future.

God's grace is such that each one of our schools, including (and perhaps especially) the small, the weak and the seemingly insignificant, will take their place as part of God's purposes and the missional fabric of the Diocese.

5. PRINCIPLES

Arising from this underpinning theology, the following principles guide and inform our strategy, planning and expectations:

5.1 Connectedness and wellness together

- Acting in relationship; sustaining a sense of mutuality amongst the individual, distinctive members that make up the body (1 Corinthians 12:12-31) of diocesan church schools, catalysing collective action to benefit the quality of education of children 'beyond our boundaries'
- Retaining a culture of collaboration, not competition; acting with compassionate hospitality to all within different expressions of community (parishes, deaneries, federations, local hubs and alliances, Academy Trusts)

¹ From Appendix 1, 'A theology of small' - Embracing Change: Rural and Small Schools (The Church of England Education Office, 2018)

5.2 Living out a specific responsibility to the vulnerable and marginalised

- Being courageous in speaking out and acting if organisations and/or policymakers propose or pursue unethical or inequitable practice, and addressing any failure to show care for people and communities
- Undertaking an ongoing analysis of schools' exposure to potential challenges in the emerging landscape, targeting wisely any funding and investment in time
- Making sure that specific policies are in place to secure the place and future of small, rural or isolated schools

5.3 Creating capacity and choice

- Developing a model and vision for the school system that works for schools in every context, sustaining choice as a principle for decisions on academy status or other partnerships
- Defining carefully the qualities expected from a 'strong, well-rooted' trust for church schools, particularly how its leadership, vision and operation reflect diocesan principles and bring richness, relationship and capacity to the system, rather than seeking benefit for itself

6. THE ROLE OF THE DIOCESAN BOARD OF EDUCATION IN STRATEGIC PLANNING

6.1 All Diocesan Boards of Education (DBEs) and Diocesan Directors of Education (DDEs) hold an important system leadership role. Using their detailed local knowledge, they develop and promote a clear, coherent strategy (with associated local delivery and policy) for all church schools within a diocese, co-ordinating this within regional diocesan groups which relate directly to DfE Regional Directors for strategic planning across an area.

6.2 This includes: input into the ongoing process of monitoring and supporting the evolution of a resilient system, in consultation with headteachers and executive leaders in Federations and Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs); engaging constructively with proposed developments and changes to regulatory frameworks; and sustaining a deep connection with diocesan church schools, promoting the value of the local for missional opportunities.

6.3 The DBE has a clear vision of promoting distinctively Christian communities of learning that seek to be underpinned by values sourced in the Gospel narrative. This is realised through sets of treasured relationships and a posture of compassionate service, underpinned by the Board's statutory responsibilities under the DBE Measure 2021 (see Section 6.4).

6.4 The CDBE is the religious authority for 105 CE schools, its jurisdiction (functions and responsibilities) explained within the DBE Measure 2021 ('the Measure'). Primarily the aims of the Board are to:

- Promote education within the Diocese of Canterbury, according to the faith and practice of the Church of England
- Promote religious education and religious worship in diocesan schools
- Watch over the interests of Church schools and secure the provision of new schools
- Give advice as to matters affecting Church schools and Church educational endowments within the Diocese

Under the Measure, the CDBE can also require the governing body or (in the case of an academy) the proprietor of a church school to provide information to undertake its statutory functions. The CDBE enjoys a strong partnership with Kent County Council in relation to oversight of school performance in maintained schools and has established a framework for engagement with Academy Trusts. The latter is designed for Trust leaders to explore and evaluate the effectiveness of CE schools within the Trust, in addition to the quality of their engagement with those schools and impact by the Trust Board and leadership team.

7. LISTENING AND DISCERNING TO INFORM STRATEGY

7.1 The CDBE seeks to maintain an up to date understanding of pressures on church schools through individual feedback from leaders, headteacher forums, a small and rural schools network, contact with governing bodies and meetings of its 'School System Enabling Group' (membership of which includes all CEOs in Church MATs plus secondary school headteachers).

7.2 Current, common themes arising include:

- How the educational experience of children and professional development of staff is enhanced by collaboration with geographically local schools - these are frequently referenced as a school's most valued partnership
- Anxieties of school leaders and governors relating to academisation including funding levels, potential loss of identity, risks to small and rural schools and the continuation of fruitful local partnerships
- In both maintained schools and academies: increasing costs and managing a projected in-year deficit; insufficient High Needs Funding and a county crisis in SEND support; the potential impact of a falling roll or pupil numbers consistently at $\leq 80\%$ of actual capacity; condition of school buildings
- The capacity of school leaders and governors to undertake long-term planning and research into formal arrangements such as MATs and Federations, structural options (and restrictions) applying to church schools and the range of questions to ask during the process of due diligence

8. PATHWAYS

The CDBE has resolved to outline clear Pathways for school leaders and governors to explore, supported by diocesan officers, as they review viable options and consider new or reinvigorated partnerships within their school's context.

Note that this list of Pathways is not composed as a menu; nor are the Pathways linked chronologically, or in any order of preference. The intention is to envisage how every church school within the diocese might be provided with a positive choice when making decisions about the status of their school, in the light of existing and/or potential, mutually dependent relationships.

The only exception is **Pathway A**, which is regarded as ‘**Base Camp**’ for **maintained schools** and **Single Academy Trusts**. This Pathway anticipates an **annual review** of long-term planning, the school’s status and partnerships. If this review process affirms that the school’s current position and context remain appropriate and sustainable, having reflected on Pathways B-E, the CDBE still expects a continuing attitude of mutuality and collaboration.

In arranging dialogue with schools about any of these Pathways, or following processes for decision-making, the Board will always prioritise support for those presenting as most vulnerable or at risk. Diocesan officers presently undertake an ongoing risk analysis; this is informed by school leaders’ narratives and self-review, available data and inspection or monitoring information, plus Local Authority and Academy Trust evaluations and reporting.

Pathway A Base Camp: Reflection, Review and Collaborate

Headteachers and Governing Bodies of all maintained schools and Single Academy Trusts must review their long-term plans annually, drawing on information including local population indicators, inspection outcomes and external reviews, performance data, school budget projections and the school’s asset management plan.

At ‘Base Camp’ the school continues with **outward-facing collaboration**. This is expected good practice but may also prove enlightening for any future first step to a more formal working relationship. It is essentially connecting with other schools on joint activities, such as subject leader networking or governor training, learning walks, peer assessment or moderation. For this Pathway, schools and academies are free to work with whoever they feel can best support the ongoing development of their individual community.

Pathway B Formal Collaboration

A **Formal Collaboration** is where schools retain their existing Governing Bodies but work more intentionally together under a Memorandum of Understanding, on which the CDBE and Local Authority will be signatories. It is likely that partners will agree shared and individual objectives stemming from this collaboration, such that the arrangement impacts positively on the efficiency and effectiveness of both schools with outcomes for pupils at the heart of improvements. These arrangements have no legal description, since nothing of legal consequence has changed.

Pathway C Federation

A **Federation** emerges usually where schools with evidence of successful formal collaboration move to a single Governing Body (and often one executive leader) responsible for their strategic operation. The CDBE has a Policy for Federations and all church schools involved **must** secure the Board’s approval in its role as religious/diocesan authority.

Pathway D Joining an existing Multi-Academy Trust

Church MATs currently operating in the Diocese of Canterbury are:

Aquila, The Diocese of Canterbury Academies Trust	[Church Majority Articles]
Deal Education Alliance for Learning Trust	[Church Majority Articles]
Our Community Multi-Academy Trust	[Church Majority Articles]
Tenterden Schools Trust	[Church Minority Articles]
The Stour Academy Trust	[Church Minority Articles]

Pathway E Establishing or joining a new Multi-Academy Trust

The CDBE is open to a slight increase (1-3) in the number of Church MATs approved and operating within the Diocese, reflecting the Board's attentiveness to resilience and financial sustainability within the church school system, as well as enabling groups of schools in geographical proximity to work together well, regardless of their designation as church or community schools. *Pathway E is subject to annual review.*

Proposals for a new MAT would need to demonstrate:

- dedication to securing the place and future of small, rural or isolated schools
- the ability to draw capacity from partner organisations and a motivation to create one or more geographical hubs serving specific local communities.
- capacity for sharing high-quality practice and leading staff/curriculum development
- an understanding of its potential growth and improvement

9. KEY POLICIES AND PROTOCOLS

9.1 Formal collaboration and Federation

[CDBE Policy for Church Schools considering Federation or Formal Collaboration](#)
March 2022

For school leaders and governors wishing to consider Federation or Formal Collaboration as one of the potential solutions for their school; includes policy principles established by the CDBE for process, governance arrangements and safeguarding the religious character of the schools.

9.2 [Rural and small schools statement](#), March 2022

A statement acknowledging the place and unique characteristics of small and rural schools, affirming the role of the CDBE in strategic planning and encouraging collaboration, in addition to offering self-review questions.

9.3 Academy Guidance, Appendix (a)

Essential information relating to: the statutory position of the CDBE; characteristics of MATs; parameters and expectations set by the CDBE for church schools converting to academy status; safeguarding a school's Christian character; commentary on MAT growth and cross-diocesan opportunities; establishing new church schools; intervention in underperforming schools.

9.4 Academy conversion - consent process, Appendix (b)

A summary of advice for school governing bodies. Converting to academy status constitutes a 'significant organisational change', which requires the consent of the CDBE as religious authority for church schools within the Diocese of Canterbury.

9.5 A 'strong, well-rooted' Church Trust, Appendix (c)

What makes a strong, well-rooted Church Trust? Viewing the character, purpose and activity of a Church MAT through the lens of commitment to education rooted in a Christian vision and context, outlining expectations within areas such as strategy, system leadership, equality and diversity, governance, wellbeing, curriculum and school improvement, finance and operations.

10. STATUTORY POSITION OF THE CDBE

- 10.1 The CDBE is the legally responsible organisation for CE schools within the Diocese of Canterbury as set out in the Diocesan Boards of Education Measure, 2021. Primarily the aims of the Board are to:
- Promote education within the Diocese of Canterbury, according to the faith and practice of the Church of England
 - Promote religious education and religious worship in schools in the Diocese
 - Watch over the interests of church schools and secure the provision of new schools
 - Give advice as to matters affecting church schools and Church educational endowments within the Diocese
- 10.2 By law, the CDBE acts as the Diocesan Authority for its church schools and as such, must be consulted in all school organisation matters. All CE schools require the consent of the CDBE to convert to academy status (see Appendix (b))

11. WHAT IS A MAT?

- 11.1 A MAT is where several schools join and form a single legal entity; each constituent school is referred to as an 'academy' and the decision-making body for the group (Trust) is the Board of Directors. MATs receive funding directly from the government; thus, academies are state funded but independent of Local Authority control.
- 11.2 There is one set of Articles of Association, which is the constitution governing all schools in the Trust. The MAT also has a single Master Funding Agreement (essentially a direct contract with the Secretary of State for Education) and each academy has a Supplemental Funding Agreement. When church schools join a MAT, a Church Supplemental Agreement is put in place (see Section 14), which is a licence for the Trust to occupy land owned by Site Trustees, historically conveyed for the purposes of running a school with a religious foundation.
- 11.3 In MATs, each academy has its own local governing body which deals with issues pertinent to that academy. Whilst legally this is formed as a Committee of the Trust Board, it has a set of responsibilities delegated to it by the Board. All delegated authority is defined within a Scheme of Delegation (see also 12.6 and 12.7 for CDBE expectations)
- 11.4 MATs may adopt very different approaches to strategy, governance and delegated authority, central services (including finance), school improvement support and staff development/terms and conditions. Where a school is considering joining a MAT, leaders must consider their reasons and expectations carefully and undertake robust due diligence.

12. CHURCH MATS AND CDBE EXPECTATIONS

Constitution

- 12.1 The CDBE is keen to ensure that constitutional arrangements are established on a ‘once for all’ basis, and has resolved that MATs must either commence on, or transition to, the latest nationally agreed Academy Articles of Association, for use by multi-academy trusts with Church of England schools (‘the CE Model Articles’).
- 12.2 MATs must adopt the CE Model Articles on a Church Majority basis (the majority of Members being appointed by virtue of their relationship with the Diocese of Canterbury) and without variation.
- 12.3 The sole exception within 12.2 is a variation permissible for Article 12 (Members). In considering consent to establish a new Church MAT, the CDBE may agree that Articles should be established equitably, where an opportunity arises to create a proposal in full partnership with another organisation, to model and/or develop a unique, pioneering educational offer for schools. In these cases, 50% of Members will be appointed by virtue of their relationship with the Diocese of Canterbury and 50% by the partner institution. The CDBE may also request that up to 25% of Directors are appointed by virtue of their relationship with the Diocese of Canterbury.
- 12.4 The CDBE believes that Church Majority MATs provide the most appropriate safeguard for the religious character of church schools (see Section 14) as well as facilitating the widest range of options for schools, irrespective of status. They are structured to protect every school’s character and integrity, thus can embrace Voluntary Aided, Voluntary Controlled, Foundation and Community schools. This is an especially effective way of enabling partnership and valuing existing collaborations, reflecting the Church of England’s ethos and its commitment to local communities.
- 12.5 Church of England schools will **not** be given consent to join a Church Minority MAT (in which a minority of Members are appointed by virtue of their relationship with the Diocese of Canterbury) or any MAT where there is no Church Corporate Body representation at Member level.

Governance

- 12.6 The CDBE advocates that each Church MAT Board should establish a designated committee that oversees church school matters, evaluating whether each school’s work is driven by a contextually-appropriate theologically rooted Christian vision reflecting its foundation as a Church school, is meeting the needs of the school community, and is enabling children and adults to flourish.
- 12.7 Reflecting the Anglican stress on the local, the CDBE requires Church MATs to provide for local governance of schools, such governance reflecting previous VC or VA status, and for maximum delegation of responsibilities and powers to be expressed within the Trust’s Scheme of Delegation (SoD).

- 12.8 Where a Trust's Scheme of Delegation is amended, this must be undertaken with regard to this Diocesan Strategy and with the involvement and consent of the Diocesan Corporate Member (DCM) (see Article 102, CE Model Articles).
- 12.9 Under powers delegated to it by the CDBE², The Diocese of Canterbury Academies Company Limited acts as DCM for each CE Academy Trust established in the Diocese of Canterbury.

Supporting geographical connections

- 12.10 The CDBE believes that MATs will have a greater impact on the quality of education 'beyond their boundaries' when geographical groups of schools are able to work together, thus welcomes the development of both geographical 'hubs' and other creative solutions to ensure the continuation of existing local relationships.

MAT growth and cross-diocesan opportunities

- 12.11 MAT growth plans prioritising a desired quantity of schools, or targets for financial income and assets, are not a solution to systemic pressures (see 3.2). Rather, the CDBE hopes that Church MATs will aspire to build purposeful collaboration, acting together across sectors and partners for the common good. Trusts must ask the question: How do our decisions enhance the quality of education for children and young people across the wider system, those we may never even see?
- 12.12 The CDBE anticipates that Church MATs will develop their operation in clear geographical areas, or seek to encompass new local clusters, where there is currently no MAT presence or limited choice - instinctively including community, voluntary controlled and voluntary aided schools.
- 12.13 The Board will also consider working proactively through regional diocesan networks to enable schools to access Church MATs across diocesan borders, where there is clear geographical proximity or a shared local community.

Establishing new church schools

- 12.14 Data from February 2020 indicate that presently, the percentage of school-age children and young people within the diocese attending CE schools stands at approximately 27% (primary) and 6% (secondary).
- 12.15 As part of its bold commitment to education, the CDBE is determined to promote more opportunities for children, young people and families across the diocese to access a CE education, thus increasing these figures.
- 12.16 Therefore the Board trusts that the establishment of new CE schools will be fully embraced within growth plans published by Church MATs. The CDBE commits to highlighting emerging opportunities from the Kent Commissioning Plan for Education Provision and supporting a Trust's free school application process.

² Note here that the CDBE is a committee of the Canterbury Diocesan Board of Finance (CDBF), established under s.3(7) of the Diocesan Boards of Education Measure 2021 ('the 2021 Measure') and exercising the powers and duties conferred on it by or pursuant to the 2021 Measure and which have been delegated to the CDBE by the CDBF.

- 12.17 Church MATs must comply with the requirement to obtain the CDBE's consent to establish a new school with a religious (CE) designation.

Sponsorship

- 12.18 Where the Department for Education (DfE) requires a school to be sponsored due to underperformance, the sponsorship arrangement will be brokered by the CDBE, working with the Local Authority and the Regional (DfE) Director for the South-East (RDSE) to determine the most appropriate solution and improvement package within a Church Majority MAT.

13. THE NATIONAL MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

- 13.1 A revised version of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the National Society and the DfE was published in September 2023. It is a framework that has been negotiated to guide and support Diocesan Boards of Education and DfE Regional Directors in their desire for consistency of expectations and shared understanding. The MoU covers areas including strategic planning, schools converting to academy status, the provision of new schools, the use of national model documentation and interventions in schools not making necessary improvements.
- 13.2 The CDBE commits to consistency and transparency in decision making and acting in accordance with the principles and protocols outlined in the MoU.

14. SAFEGUARDING RELIGIOUS CHARACTER (including church school sites)

Safeguards are rooted within the governing documents for CE Academy Trusts:

- 14.1 The **Articles of Association** (Articles) are the rules that govern the running of the company and set out its Objects, which affirm a commitment to ensuring that CE academies continue to be conducted in accordance with the principles, practices and tenets of the Church of England.
- 14.2 The Articles also define the **Members** of the Trust, who are the 'guardians' of governance, holding Directors to account for the effective governance of the Trust. Members, as guarantors of the company, have limited but important powers including the right to wind up the Academy Trust, amend the Articles, change the name of the company, appoint other Members and appoint and remove one or more Directors.
- 14.3 The responsibilities of a Member appointed by virtue of their relationship with the Diocese of Canterbury are to: ensure that the Trust is acting within its Objects; safeguard and promote the values of the Trust and its Christian ethos; support the Trust and be an advocate for it; carry out their business effectively, including induction of new Members and a commitment to the continued professional development of Members; appoint (and where necessary remove) Trust Directors.

- 14.4 The **Church Supplemental Agreement** (an agreement between the Academy Trust, the Secretary of State for Education and the Site Trustees/Diocese) sets out the respective rights and responsibilities of each party for oversight of the Academy Trust, in particular its duties to uphold the principles, practices and tenets of the Church of England, and the use of any church lands by the Academy Trust.
- 14.5 As a safeguard for the church foundation of a school, the CDBE requires that any outstanding statutory transfer relating to a school site is completed prior to the Board's final consent being issued for conversion to academy status.

15. DESCRIPTION OF PROCESS

- 15.1 It is for the Governing Body (GB) of the existing school (and it alone) to decide that it wants to explore the possibility of conversion into a MAT.
- 15.2 **Preliminaries:** The Headteacher and Chair of the GB undertake informal consultation with the Diocesan Director of Education before the main Governing Body meets.
- 15.3 **Working Group:** Governors should set up a Working Group to scope options and consider process and implications, as fact-finding and due diligence at an early stage is critical. Its brief should be firstly to map out and share with the wider GB the different possible models of organisational structure for the school - which are the most viable, sustainable options which prioritise local collaboration, mutual accountability and delivering school improvement?
- 15.3 **Research and Decision:** If the GB agrees to explore becoming an academy, the Group should then approach the CEOs of relevant Church MATs and undertake a comprehensive appraisal of each Trust's business planning, performance and operational set-up, noting benefits and any disadvantages. The CDBE will appoint an officer to advise and support throughout this process.

Any final decision by the GB to proceed with a MAT must be taken at a properly called meeting with this item explicitly on the agenda. If there is no resolution, governors should agree to review the position and decision at a subsequent meeting.

15.4 Applying for approval from the CDBE

- i. There is a standard application form to be submitted, which will be considered alongside the evidence secured through the due diligence process and from the school's consultations (if undertaken)
- ii. The Diocesan Director of Education and Chair of the CDBE may wish to meet school leaders and governors to discuss the application and enable clarification and questioning. They will then consult with MAT and Diocesan officers in relation to the evidence from the due diligence process and recommend a decision to the CDBE for ratification.
- iii. Once conditional consent is granted, the CDBE will write formally to the GB confirming its decision and any terms attached. CDBE officers will lead on land matters, including dialogue with Site Trustees to obtain their approval for the school to convert. When applying to the Regional Director for an Academy Order, the school must provide a copy of the DBE consent letter.

15.5 CDBE costs

In deciding to pursue conversion, the school is agreeing to meet all costs (legal and otherwise) relating to the conversion to an academy. Costs incurred by Land Trustees and the CDBE in supporting conversion will be re-claimed from the school, at a flat rate of £2,750.

16. INTRODUCTION

- 16.1 All Church MATs (whether existing or new) will be expected to demonstrate a commitment to the principles outlined in Section 5 (Connectedness and wellness together, Living out a specific responsibility to the vulnerable and marginalised, Creating capacity and choice), alongside evidence of how the Trust meets the expectations and definitions outlined in the table below.
- 16.2 The CDBE also commends ‘Our Hope for a Flourishing Schools System: Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good’ (Church of England Education Office, 2023) as both an encouragement and deeper reflection on what is meant by a flourishing schools system. The document outlines hope ‘for our flourishing together, marked out by wisdom, community and dignity’ (p.3).
- 16.3 In addition, the Department for Education (DfE) has published Trust Quality Descriptions (July 2023), outlining five pillars:
- High-Quality and Inclusive Education
 - School Improvement
 - Workforce
 - Finance and Operations
 - Governance and Leadership

The CDBE’s narrative of being a ‘Strong, Well-rooted Church Trust’ is intended to enrich this guidance, by viewing different themes through the lens of education which is rooted in a Christian vision and context.

CDBE EXPECTATIONS OF A ‘STRONG, WELL-ROOTED’ CHURCH TRUST

i. Education rooted in a Christian vision and context

All church schools can and must be places that embody compassionate hospitality, diversity, creativity and joy, in which children and young people know their ultimate worth and recognise this in others. At their heart, church schools illustrate love as a foundational idea in education. They recognise that to learn and understand, it is necessary to be aware of what is beyond ourselves; attending to, contemplating, investigating and holding respect for what is apprehended - and making space to allow the other in.

Likewise, we believe that church schools remain at the centre of the Church’s mission to the nation, the heart of local communities, for children of all faiths and none. Church schools promote and exemplify distinctively Christian communities of learning, underpinned by values sourced in the Gospel narrative, enriching the whole educational experience.

A strong, well-rooted Church Trust will embrace this vision and feel an unambiguous call to justice and righteousness, to honour those who are marginalised; devoted to transforming unjust structures of society and to restoring the equal dignity of each person as holding the image of God.

ii. Trust Vision

The Trust has developed and implemented a vision which resonates with its church schools in a way that enhances their work and Christian foundation. Leadership at all levels act with integrity and live out this vision, which is shared unapologetically, shapes policy and planning and underpins all partnerships and relationships.

The outworking of the vision also means:

- Academic excellence is central to the ambitions of a strong, well-rooted Trust; although not the full story, as the Trust communicates and offers a broader, more expansive vision of what education is for
- All school communities promote social and cultural development through the practice of forgiveness and reconciliation that encourages good mental health and living well together
- Prioritising the wellbeing of the school community, compelled by evidence that the physical and emotional health of children, young people and adults is critical to whether (and how) they flourish
- Each school's curriculum and extra-curricular opportunities meet the learning and spiritual needs of all learners
- Priority is given to high-quality Religious Education and to Collective Worship that is inclusive, invitational, and inspiring
- School communities have a strong focus on the character and moral development of all children and young people, giving them aspiration for themselves and hope for the communities of which they are a part. They are engaged in social action and encouraged to be courageous advocates for change in their local, national, and global communities, challenging injustice
- Championing equity and diversity: empowering and giving voice, standing up for the vulnerable and marginalised, and striving to be an organisation which acknowledges racism as pernicious and dehumanising and is committed to change
- Putting dignity at the heart of provision for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

iii) Flourishing church/school partnerships

A strong, well-rooted Church Trust will encourage a mutually beneficial relationship between churches and schools; a flourishing partnership based on safe, long-term, listening relationships that faithfully and lovingly serve all children, young people and families in the local community without agenda.

In practice, leaders from the Trust, schools and churches must be able to demonstrate how they:

- prioritise these partnerships strategically, creating a sense of mutuality and shared priorities for serving the community
- consider what a 'ministry of presence' looks like in each school, establishing an offer of spiritual and pastoral care. This may include models of chaplaincy, or how families might be supported in exploring faith in the home

iv) Governance and leadership

A commitment to collective responsibility and mutuality inspires ambition to build a connected school system, acting together across sectors and partners for the common good.

Trust leaders and governors are unswerving in their desire to help underperforming schools improve, making decisions to enhance the quality of education of children and young people outside of Trust boundaries and inquiring intentionally - how is the education system better with our Trust being part of it?

The Board in a strong, well-rooted Church Trust maintains an efficient governance structure but can also demonstrate clearly how it delivers on its responsibility to uphold its unique Company Object. Through a robust and continuous self-evaluation process that involves executive leaders, governors and schools, all Directors and Trust executives are comfortable and confident in articulating the purpose, conduct and effectiveness of church academies.

Curriculum

Emphasising love as a foundational idea in education means that strong, well-rooted Trusts deeply respect the individual natures of different subjects in their dignity and integrities, and the breadth of flourishing possible, in the service of a broad and balanced curriculum to aid meaning making that draws on all within creation.

In Genesis Chapter 2, Adam names the things of the world that God has made. Pupils in our schools, like Adam, should flourish fully, acquiring and fulfilling all these human capacities in subjects that aid in reaching beyond the darkness into the light.

Trust leaders will therefore work courageously in the best interests of children and young people, using theologically-rooted and ethical arguments to justify making bold, vision-driven curriculum decisions.

Leaders will also ensure that vulnerable pupils are a priority and that all pupils can access and experience an exciting and relevant curriculum that enables them to make at least expected progress in their learning.

School improvement model

A school improvement model in a strong, well-rooted Church Trust:

- Reflects the concept of 'Ubuntu' ('I am because we are'); its contribution to wider system improvement recognising the mutuality of local groups of schools in serving and transforming community
- Engages the DBE in dialogue about school improvement and the needs of church schools; drawing on potential support and acknowledging the value and importance of providing information to assist the Board in carrying out its functions under the DBE Measure 2021
- Can demonstrate how the Trust supports headteachers and executive leaders in establishing life-giving habits so that their personal vision and values are sustained through times of both challenge and celebration
- Facilitates (for CE schools) an understanding of the uniqueness of leading or working in a church school; looking to the DBE for access to (or partnership in) bespoke training and support for governors and staff, in addition to leadership development to encourage and prepare future church school leaders

Finance and operations

- A strong, well-rooted Church Trust will ensure that Trust financial decisions, ethical and charitable activities are deeply connected to its vision and associated values
- The Trust will be able to articulate a commitment to sustainability, and to treasure and safeguard the integrity of God's creation. The Board will seek to achieve a reduction in carbon emissions in schools and changes in attitudes: that all employees, governors and pupils will be ambassadors for addressing the climate crisis wherever they go
- Trust leaders and governors value the role of the CDBE, its strategic and political work for the wider benefit of CE schools and its professional advocacy, advice, resources and training - assured that the capacity of the diocesan team is there so that the whole diocesan family benefits from this provision as they need it. Consequently, the Trust ensures that all church schools pay their annual Core Service Contributions and supports schools where this may be financially challenging

APPROVED BY THE BOARD:

19th September 2023

REVIEW DATE:

September 2024