



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about academy conversions BICTON CE PRIMARY SCHOOL & NURSERY

The information in this fact sheet is intended to help answer some of the questions which may arise when schools are becoming an academy within a multi academy trust. It has been produced in conjunction with **Shropshire Church of England Academies Trust**.

What is an academy?

An academy is a school that is directly funded by central government and independent of direct control by the local authority. Academies are inspected by Ofsted under the same framework as maintained schools. Church Schools that are academies are also subject to Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools as they are currently.

What is a Multi-Academy Trust?

A multi-academy trust (MAT) is a charitable company limited by guarantee where all schools within the trust are governed by a single board of trustees (directors), and the entire trust is a single legal entity. The MAT is responsible for decisions relating to how each academy is run and is ultimately accountable for each of the schools. The MAT is the employer of staff and holds the land and buildings of each academy in trust.

Who are Shropshire Church of England Academies Trust?

Shropshire Church of England Academies Trust is being formed through a joint partnership between Hereford Diocese and Lichfield Diocese who are working with a group of likeminded schools who would like to come together to formalise a working relationship for the benefit their pupils, staff and their communities. The schools proposing to join the Trust initially are:

- Christ Church CE Primary School, Cressage
- Bicton CE Primary School, Shrewsbury
- Meole Brace CE Primary School, Shrewsbury
- Bomere Heath CE Primary School, Shrewsbury (Part of the Bomere and the XI Towns Federation)
- St. John the Baptist Primary School, Ruyton XI Towns, Shrewsbury (Part of the Bomere and the XI Towns Federation)
- Worfield Endowed CE Primary School, Bridgnorth (Part of The Trinity Federation)
- St. Mary's Bluecoat CE Primary School, Bridgnorth (Part of The Trinity Federation)
- Beckbury CE Primary School, Beckbury, Shifnal (Part of The Trinity Federation)

What are the main reasons schools convert to academy status and join a MAT?

- To remain in charge of their own destiny as the Church of England has a goal to encourage all schools to be part of a strong multi academy trust or working towards this
- The Local Authority (LA) capacity to support school improvement is reducing. Pooling the resources of a number of schools means a Trust can re-design and create some of the services once received from the LA
- To shape the provision to meet the future needs of children, families and communities based on a local and collaborative proposal of working together and building on existing good practice
- To develop the expertise of all staff to further improve effectiveness and outcomes for children
- To generate financial efficiencies to invest back into the classroom for the benefit of the children

How does governance work?

The governance proposals for the Trust will ensure that there is church majority governance across its Members' group and Directors (Trustees). There will be a Board of Trustees (Directors) who are ultimately responsible for the work of the Trust and the academies. However, they devolve much of the responsibility to the individual academies and their respective local governing bodies.

Each academy has its own local governing body who work with the academy Headteacher to check that the academy is making good progress and add additional challenge and scrutiny to the work of the school. Each governing body

has representation from the diocese, parent/carers and staff community. The academy Headteacher is always a governor for the time they are employed in that role. The local governing body will set the vision for the academy in line with the overall commitment and ethos of the multi academy trust. The governing body also draft the academy spending plan and improvement plan for approval by the Trust Board. The governing body has delegated powers from the Trust Board including the management of finance and property and the appointment of staff.

Does our school have to join a MAT?

If schools are judged by Ofsted to be 'good' or 'outstanding' they do not have to join a MAT if they don't want to. Some schools are choosing to join a MAT because of the benefits this brings, but good and outstanding schools all have different reasons for joining or not joining a MAT.

Schools which are judged to be 'Inadequate' by Ofsted will receive an academy order from the Department for Education (DfE) and will have to make arrangements to join a MAT as soon as they can. Schools who have received two or more consecutive ratings below 'Good' may also be converted into academies. For schools in this position, the Secretary of State for Education will send the school something called an 'academy order', which will start the process for the school to become a sponsored academy. Bicton CE Primary School is a sponsored academy.

How long does academy conversion take and how will the process affect the day-to-day running of the school?

This will usually take 4-6 months. The day to day running of our school will not be affected as planning and meetings to enable the conversion are led by the iCEO and representatives from both dioceses, with the support of legal advisors, and are planned around the headteacher's school day when necessary.

What is the role of the MAT Chief Executive Officer (CEO)?

The CEO is the Accounting Officer for the Trust and the strategic lead for the whole Trust. The CEO is the key contact for the Regional Director and the DfE and acts as their first point of contact to ensure schools are not distracted from their core purpose of teaching and learning.

The priority for our school is the education of pupils. How will you ensure that the academy formation does not distract us from this?

Part of the work of the school and the MAT, will be to carry out 'due diligence' exercises which will make clear what extra support may be needed for our school to convert. The Trust will work with us to ensure we can continue to focus on the teaching and learning and progress of children. It's important that all schools are open about the amount of support they might need to enter and go through the process.

What parents and carers need to know

- The school is not proposing to change its character and will continue to look, feel and be the same as it is now.
- The School Leadership Team will continue to run the school daily and the Local Governing Body, which will include parent representation, will oversee the work of the school with delegated responsibilities from the Trust directors.
- The name of the school will not change and the school will not change its admissions policy.
- Children with special needs will continue to receive additional support in the way they do now, with the Local Authority continuing to fulfill their statutory responsibilities for Shropshire's children.
- The multi-academy trust arrangements will share some central services across the schools which will help them be more efficient and make sure that funding is focused on teaching, learning and support for children.
- The multi-academy trust will work very closely and co-operatively with local partners, including other schools, community groups and organisations, Hereford Diocese and Lichfield Diocese, and the local authority.

Is an academy like a business?

No. A business makes profit for its shareholders. An academy is a charitable trust which cannot make profit. It does report annually into the public domain on financial and academic performance.

Who makes the decision to become an academy?

If a school is sponsored due to its Ofsted category, then the Department for Education propose a sponsor and the Trust Board agree to undertake due diligence and subsequently the school joins the Trust as a member academy.

Are academies bound by the same rules and regulations as other schools?

Academies are required to follow the law and guidance on admissions, special educational needs and exclusions.

Will the academy follow the National Curriculum?

Yes, but it would have more freedom to include different things in the curriculum and make sure that what is taught is relevant to our pupils and their specific needs. The curriculum must be broad and balanced.

Does becoming an academy change the relationship with local schools and the community?

No. Academy funding agreements state that an academy must ensure that it will be at the heart of its community, collaborating and sharing facilities and expertise with other local schools and the wider community.

As an academy, will it still work with the local authority (LA)?

Academies are independent of the local authority. However, we have a good relationship with our LA colleagues and service providers and as such we wish to continue working with the LA, other local schools and local partners, where it is appropriate to continue to do so.

What about funding?

The Department for Education via the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) meets the running costs for an academy. Academy funding is calculated on a like-for-like basis with local authority schools. Therefore, the academy will have a similar budget to that of its predecessor school. With greater freedom to procure services from other providers and to realise cost efficiencies across the network, the academy will be able to make more efficient use of resources to support school improvement. Like other schools, an academy cannot run at a loss or agree a deficit budget, i.e., it must break-even.

How will the school be accountable financially?

An academy is governed by the rules and regulations for charitable trusts and company law and as such we will be required to produce and file accounts. There will be robust systems with a financial audit conducted regularly by an external independent auditor.

What functions would remain the statutory responsibility of the LA?

- Home to school transport for eligible pupils (eligibility is as defined by the LA)
- SEND assessment processes - The Local Authority's SEN Team have responsibility for the statutory duties relating to the Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) process and the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) Annual Review process for children and young people aged 0 to 25
- Shropshire LA will remain responsible for making sure that parents fulfil their responsibilities with regards to a pupil's school attendance which includes prosecution of parents for a pupil's non-attendance

Who will be responsible, and pay for assessments of pupils/students with additional needs?

The LA retains the same statutory responsibility for students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in academies as they would for a maintained school. We would continue to work closely with the LA SEND Team to ensure that our pupils with additional needs are well provided for and to ensure that the LA meets their statutory commitments with regard to pupils.

Does it cost to become an academy?

Yes. There are legal, financial and project costs associated with becoming an academy. The government gives each converting academy £25,000 to contribute towards these costs. For sponsored academies they also receive a grant towards supporting school improvement.

Who will own the school building and land?

The Diocese and local authority (as appropriate in respect of current ownership) will be required to grant a 125-year peppercorn lease to the academy trust for buildings and land. Where the freehold is currently owned, the Freehold also transfers to the academy trust.

Will the staff stay the same?

When a school converts from a local authority maintained school to a new academy, all permanent staff are entitled to transfer to it under the same employment terms and conditions.

Will you gather the views of staff, community and parents?

Yes, we will gather the views of all key stakeholder groups during the transition phase. This will include the sharing of the academy trust's vision at a meeting and an opportunity to gather views and feedback, as well as addressing any questions or concerns.

Will the school remain non-selective?

Yes - academies are non-selective schools. Academies are required to follow the law and guidance on admissions, SEND and exclusions as if they were maintained schools. It is the aim of the Trust to ensure that our academies provide high quality, inclusive education for all local children.

Will the school need to change its name?

We will not change our name unless there is a compelling reason raised during consultation to do so. We do not anticipate this being the case.

Can the academy work with the local council and other schools?

Yes. Where possible and appropriate, the academy will buy back services from the local authority. The academy can work in partnership with any schools it wishes to if this makes a positive difference to the education of the children.

Will there be a new uniform?

No. Uniform will be the same as it is now unless there is a compelling reason during the consultation to do so.

What date would the Academy open?

The provisional date is for the school to open as an academy on the 1 October 2024.