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# Academies: FAQs

*April 2023*

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*Growing our "Family of Schools"  
Securing the very best Catholic education for our children  
and those of future generations as part of the mission of the Church.*



Diocese of Lancaster  
**Education Service**  
Euntes in mundum

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# Introduction



The aim of this document is to provide a response to some of the frequently asked questions that have been raised during conversion to an Academy Trust. The aim is to give some clarity to all school stakeholders prior to and during the application and conversion process. You are still more than welcome to contact us if you still feel you have any unanswered questions. This document hopes to provide answers to some of the questions that have been raised by the academy strategy by stakeholders. The information provided is generic to all schools in the Diocese rather than answers to questions that are specific to individual schools or Trusts. Please refer to the academy trust websites and FAQ sections, for more information specifically about each trust:

For more information can be found at

- <https://mater-christi.com/>
- <https://bebcmat.co.uk/>
- <https://mater-ecclesiae-trust.co.uk/>

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Diocese of Lancaster Education Service

Academies FAQ April 2023

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# Bishop Paul Swarbrick's Vision for Academisation



Rev Paul Swarbrick, Bishop of Lancaster

## Why am I asking schools to join multi-academy trusts?

Our Catholic schools have been the bedrock of our mission to make Jesus Christ known and loved in our communities for nearly two centuries. The past two years have highlighted how vital our schools are and how their work and witness reveal Jesus Christ's presence in their locality. Our schools are an integral and critical part of the Diocese of Lancaster's mission. In a Catholic school, every child is welcomed, valued, and respected, and the person and teachings of Jesus Christ form the foundation of the school's life and activity. My aim is that every child, whether Catholic or not, will be respected, affirmed, supported, and encouraged to reach their full potential. A Catholic school is not just a building; it is a community, and those who form this community and participate in it cultivate this place of human growth. I have to ensure that Catholic Education is maintained and enabled to grow and develop for future generations.

To this end, I invite our parishes and schools to build Catholic Multi-Academy Trusts across the Diocese. Through these local families of schools, I seek to protect, secure and develop the Church's mission in education. This critical step forward for Catholic education in our Diocese aims to ensure that every school sits within a collaborative network where each institution gives and receives support. The reality is that Catholic schools must work together, viewing other Catholic schools as equal partners. As Bishop, I am aware that we need to place secure structures around vulnerable schools to help them improve and flourish. If we do not act proactively, we become reactive to circumstances rather than guiding and controlling change. The move to establish a network of Multi-Academy Trusts in the Diocese seeks to ensure that Catholic schools work closely together to assist with school improvement, leadership recruitment, formation, governance, and cooperation to strengthen our Catholic mission. This development enables a new spirit of collaboration where the success of Catholic schools in our Diocese can remain productive and protected.

+Paul

Extract from the Bishop's Letter, 14th September 2020

# 1. Academies

## What is the Bishop's vision for academisation?

Following a consultation process, the document 'Implementing the Bishop of Lancaster's Vision for Academisation' was published in September 2021. Schools were invited to form Trusts "to protect, secure and develop the Church's mission in education in the Diocese." As a result, willing converter schools came together from across the diocese and founded, or further expanded, our three Catholic Multi-Academy Trusts. The next phase of the Academy Strategy will allow the trusts to further expand in geographic clusters and deliver the Bishop's vision of all his schools within their respective MAT families by the end of academic year 2025-2026.

## What is an Academy?

Academies are publicly funded schools which operate outside of local authority control. They receive their funding directly from central government through the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) rather than through a local authority. The government describes academies as independent, state-funded schools. In law, academies have more freedom than other state schools over their finances, admissions, the curriculum, length of terms and school days and teachers' pay and conditions. There are currently 28 Academy schools across the Diocese of Lancaster.

## What are the main differences between academies and maintained schools?

The religious nature of the school remains the same, but the model of governance and funding change. A Catholic MAT is a group of Catholic schools coming together as a Trust. Only Catholic schools will be members of the Catholic Multi Academy Trust. Academies have a funding agreement with the Education Funding Agency (ESFA) and receive funding directly from them instead of the Local Authority (LA). Educational standards are monitored by the governance and leadership of the Trust instead of the LA. Academies have more freedoms and do not have to follow the national curriculum, but they do have to take part in national assessments such as (SATs and GCSEs) and Ofsted will still monitor them.

## What is a Multi-Academy Trust?

A Multi-Academy Trust is a religious company limited by guarantee and is responsible for running the academy schools within its Trust. It has three layers of governance:

- Members - who are best viewed as guardians of the constitution;
- Directors - sometimes referred to as 'trustees' and who are legally responsible for the running of the Trust;
- Local Governing Boards - who are responsible for monitoring standards in the individual schools in the Trust.

## Who is the MAT accountable to?

There are various layers of accountability, both internal and external. Directors and Executive Leaders have responsibility for standards and practices within the MAT, however there are further layers of accountability to the ESFA, the Regional Director (RD), Ofsted, and the Diocese.

## What are the advantages to a school joining Catholic Multi-Academy Trusts?

There are many advantages of being part of a Trust, from working together to preserve and improve Catholic education in the area, to educational, financial and spiritual benefits. Essentially, a group of schools working together in a single body can do lots of things that are harder for stand-alone schools to do. Teachers work and learn together to improve the way they teach and schools can share practices that make a difference to the quality of teaching. Teachers and leaders can work together on the things that matter – like curriculum

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and assessment. In addition, schools can challenge and support each other to continually improve.

The Academy strategy allows us to preserve, protect and develop our schools. Our Trusts can better support the long-term goals of developing our future leaders of Catholic education in the Diocese. Improvements in school standards can be secured across the board by developing and resourcing a strategic vision for leadership development. Through pooling expertise and knowledge on standards, school improvement can be developed. Greater control over the curriculum allows flexibility in terms of the balance and mix of subjects. A curriculum tailored to the needs of a Catholic school could be more fully developed. Stronger collaboration between schools in Trusts is beneficial.

**We are a good school and work well in partnership already so why shouldn't we stay as we are?**

Partnership working is strong in our Diocese, and it is expected to continue. Working in a more formal relationship within a larger Trust will ensure that all schools are supported and are mutually dependent, particularly those schools where such partnership working is more difficult to achieve, or local support is less well developed. This further strengthens the Catholic family and sense of mission. This would help develop further relationships and network support, rather than detract from what is already present.

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

There are four Local Authority areas in the Diocese namely Lancashire, Blackpool, Westmorland and Furness and Cumberland, meaning there is diversity of service level across our schools as a whole. Working relationships between schools and Local Authorities have changed 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. It is believed that the MAT model can help provide a more consistent level of support and partnership working, enabling us to better safeguard the future of all our Catholic schools across the four local authority areas.

**Can a school choose not to convert?**

It is the settled will of the Bishop that all his schools should join their MAT families no later than academic year 2025/2026. It is anticipated that all schools and their governing bodies will align themselves with this strategy according to the strategic implementation plan outlined by the Diocesan Education Service.

**Will academy status provide a better protect the Catholic identity of our schools?**

By enabling closer working, peer-to-peer support, and consistency of policy and practice, we believe the MAT model will help strengthen and encourage the Catholic identity of our schools. We further believe that where a school enters difficulty, the Catholic leadership of that school is better safeguarded where that school is within a MAT family, rather than under local authority control.

**Will schools lose their identity?**

No. Each school will become an academy in its own right and will be part of their MAT family of schools. All schools are seen as equal partners within their MAT families. The Scheme of Delegation protects the uniqueness of each school and it is the continued responsibility of the Local Governing Body to ensure the Catholic ethos and identity of their is maintained.

**Will there be a loss of local autonomy?**

The principle of subsidiarity underpins our academisation plans and it is recognised amongst all our trusts that each schools has its own dignity and uniqueness which is a gift that it can bring into the MAT family. Therefore, a great many aspects of decision making and leadership remains at the level of Headteacher and Governing Body. However, there will be aspects of alignment which may mean change in the short-term, in much the same way as would be the case currently with Local Authority relationships – for example, if the LA decides to use a new financial reporting arrangements, or school improvement templates. This alignment would usually Diocese of Lancaster Education Service

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be on management items – MIS systems, financial reporting arrangements, development plan formats etc. – with school autonomy respected in terms of the day to day decision making within the school.

#### **What is the approach of other Dioceses to the establishment of Trusts?**

Many other Dioceses have already developed structures to further preserve, protect and develop Catholic education. In some Dioceses – such as Hexham and Newcastle, Hallam, and Westminster – almost all schools are academised within their MAT families. Other local Dioceses, such as Liverpool and Salford, have also recently released plans for academisation. Across the country, many Catholic schools are now in MATs. In the North East Dioceses (Hexham and Newcastle, Middlesbrough, Leeds, Hallam and Nottingham, over 90% of Catholic schools have academized and entered into MATs, or 387 schools in total. The MAT strategy continues to be developed across all Dioceses in order to better safeguard and protect their future within the educational landscape.

#### **What will the direct impact be on families and wider community of a VA school converting to academy status and joining a Trust?**

The move into a MAT will not have a negative impact on families. Each school will still be led and managed by the Headteacher and governors. Indeed, it is believed that entering into a MAT will increase standards across schools, which will be to the ultimate benefit of all those we serve.

#### **Do academies still have to look after children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)?**

Yes, academy Trusts are subject to most of the same statutory duties as maintained schools when it comes to children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), including following the SEND Code of Practice. It is believed that coming together as a MAT family might help schools support their SEND pupils more effectively, through MAT-wide provision and support, as well as give MATs the freedom and capacity to explore develop its own bespoke, specialist support arrangement.

## **2. Becoming an academy**

#### **Does the order of joining the Trust determine the influence that schools have on the Trust?**

All academies are equal partners in the Trust and no one school is more important than any other.

#### **What does it cost the school to convert to academy status? Is money ring fenced for the school or pooled? What happens to money that is left over?**

The Department for Education pays £25,000 towards conversion costs for a school to convert into an academy. In most cases, this covers the cost of conversion. Where costs exceed this funding, the Trust will cover the shortfall.

#### **What is the timeline for conversion?**

The timeline for conversion is plan for managed, sustainable conversion into the MAT families. This has been recently updated, based on a readiness matrix developed by the Diocese. This has taken into consideration various contextual factors, such as preference expressed by the school governance, land and building matters, number on roll, financial health, inspection windows, any current difficulties being experienced in the schools, particular gifts and strengths the school might be able to offer to the MAT, and any other contextual information which may influence school readiness. This matrix facilitates discussion at the DfE regional meetings.

#### **Why have we not got the date we initially indicated?**

Whilst we recognise school preference as an important factor in developing a conversion timetable, Diocese of Lancaster Education Service

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nonetheless other influencing factors are also considered. For example, if too many schools chose the same conversion window there may not be the capacity amongst stakeholders – Diocese, Local Authority, MAT – to process such a large number of schools at the same time, and so a more manageable programme needs to be developed. This, in addition to the readiness matrix mentioned above, may mean that the suggested window for conversion differs slightly from the initial preferences given by schools.

#### **When will the conversion process start?**

Groups of schools have already converted in Wave 1 and we now have our three MAT families in place. A further cluster of schools are currently moving forward to convert during the academic year 2023-24 in Wave 2. This will be followed by Wave 3 (academic year 2024-25) and Wave 4 (academic year 2025-26) and all schools have been assigned to a particular. Further details on this can be found in the Academisation strategy document.

#### **Governors do not know what life is like within a MAT and what the conversion process is like - how will this be addressed?**

The Education Service will work with the governing bodies on the conversion process from start to finish. We hope to help to answer questions regarding academisation throughout the process, through documents such as this FAQ, as well as ongoing information given out through clerks' briefings and school bulletins. We will also be working with our MATs to meet local clusters of governing bodies, during which further information can be shared and questions addressed as they arise.

#### **Are Local Authorities aware of the plans?**

The Diocese and the LA meet frequently to discuss academy plans. The Academy strategy has been shared with all the Local Authorities and regular meetings are ongoing with the Regional Director's office.

#### **What happens to governing bodies?**

Governing bodies remain important under the academy structure, however their responsibilities change a little, as per the scheme of delegation. As the MAT board becomes the employer, academy schools will have a Local Governing Body (LGB) which offers a local level of governance to the school. Powers are delegated to this local group through a scheme of delegation by the MAT board. This scheme can be found as an appendix to the academisation strategy.

#### **What is a directive Academy order?**

On some occasions, schools maintained by the Local Authority (LA) can be issued with a Directive Academy Order (DAO) by the Regional Director (RD) if they are judged to be inadequate. The DAO requires the school to close and to re-open as a sponsored academy, usually within a Multi-Academy Trust.

#### **Will the uniform at the school change?**

It is not a formal policy to change school uniforms upon academisation. Any changes would be the responsibility of the Governors and the Headteacher, in dialogue with the Trust and school parents.

#### **Will the school day or holiday dates change?**

Academies have the power to set their own term dates. Currently, these are decided by the individual governing body of each school and are often in line with the Local Authority holidays. MATs may choose to have shared calendars across their schools, for example to facilitate MAT-wide training days or governance days. These kind of decisions will be made in dialogue with schools and governing bodies.

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### **Will the name of the school change?**

It is not a formal policy to change school names upon academisation. If there are any proposals to change a school name, necessary approval from the Diocese must be obtained and any proposed new school name must be consistent with legal requirements. Some schools may choose to include 'Academy' in their name, and some may not – this is a local decision.

### **Will staff change or have to move to other schools?**

Employees terms and conditions are protected by law and the TUPE process will ensure these are protected upon conversion. Nobody will be told to move to another school against their will. Occasionally, there may be job opportunities in other schools, or cross-school opportunities, but these would be advertised and staff could apply, as they could if they were not in a Trust.

## **3. Land and Buildings**

### **Does ownership of the buildings change?**

All land and building remain the property of the Trustees of the Diocese of Lancaster. The Diocese of Lancaster have issued the 'Diocesan Estates and Management Policy and Occupancy Protocols' which sets out what should, and what need not, be subject to Diocesan Trustee approval.

### **What happens in the case of a capital emergency?**

In the case of a capital emergency need at an Academy, they are eligible to seek an earmarked annual grant from the ESFA for emergencies, in the same way the LA can pay a maintained school a contingency payment. Academies are required to take out insurance, approved by the Diocesan Trustees, to protect against potential capital emergencies.

### **What about capital funding?**

When a MAT has over 3000 learners, it receives a capital grant for building works directly. However, MATs have to bid for Capital Improvement Funding devolved by the DfE for school buildings if there are under 3000 learners.

## **4. The role of parents**

### **Who is the first educator?**

The Church recognises parents are the first educators of their child. 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 a MAT must seek to work in partnership with the families who entrust children to their care.

### **How do Admissions change?**

Catholic MATs can set their own admissions policies, but they still have to meet the strict rules in the Government's School Admissions Code. The MATs usually work together with other local schools and local authorities to coordinate admissions and ensure equity and diversity in place planning. At present admissions are still managed by the local authority.

### **Who is responsible for appeals?**

The MAT board is responsible for arranging an admissions appeal. Details of how to appeal, and any associated time limits, should be provided with the original decision notice sent to the parent or carer by the MAT board.

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As with a Governing Body in a maintained school, a Trust should have a subcommittee to address any appeals. A parent may be able to make a further appeal to the Secretary of State about the way the original appeal was carried out.

#### **What will the curriculum be like?**

Academies will offer a broad and balanced curriculum largely based around the National Curriculum. Whilst MATs have the freedom to create their own curriculum, they nonetheless have to be able to demonstrate that their curriculum is at least as ambitious, and contains as much depth and variety, as the National Curriculum, as well as making sure pupils are prepared for future assessments. In reality then, the curriculum will be broadly aligned with national frameworks as set out in the National Curriculum.

MATs are also obliged to follow the guidelines of the Diocese of Lancaster in the teaching and learning of curriculum RE. This means the RED directory must be followed in the teaching of RE, that there is a daily prayer and liturgy according to the norms and requirements of the Catholic Church, and that at least 10% of curriculum time is devoted to Religious Education (at Key Stages 1 – 4). Diocesan policies on HRSE Relationships and Sex Education will also still apply to all schools within the MAT.

#### **What is the role of Ofsted?**

All academies will continue to be inspected by Ofsted under the Education Inspection Framework (EIF). However, the cycle may change as a result of conversion and there can often be an extended period to allow schools to become established within their MAT family before inspection.

#### **How does the Diocese monitor the MAT?**

Trusts are highly accountable to external agencies including the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), Ofsted and the Regional Director (RD). In addition to this, the MAT remains accountable to the Diocese, through the Section 48 inspection framework, through an annual AGM with the Members of the Trust, through ongoing work with the Education Service, and finally through an ongoing monitoring matrix which is used to assess the health and performance of the MAT.

## **5. Leadership in the Catholic Multi-Academy Trusts**

#### **Will the role of the Headteacher change?**

Headteachers continue to be the principal professional lead with the same level of responsibility and accountability.

#### **Will there be a Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher in each school?**

There is an expectation that all schools will have a Headteacher. However in some cases, as currently, where recruitment is difficult there may be created an executive role, where the Headteacher leads more than one school and each school under their leadership has a Head of School to support the Executive Headteacher. According to the expectation of Bishops' Conference, these are reserved posts for practising Catholics and the Diocese will remain involved in all appointments to reserved posts.

#### **Why is the term CEO used?**

This is what is now universally accepted as the terminology that is understood within the leadership structure of Multi Academy Trusts. The DfE expects there to be a single professional lead in each Multi Academy Trust and this is the CEO.

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### **What is the leadership structure in the new trusts?**

In the first instance, there will be a CEO and a senior finance officer (CFO). The CEO is responsible for education and the CFO is responsible for finances. Each Trust will develop their leadership structure according to need and in response to growth.

### **Will the Local Governing Body have a role in the appointment of Headteachers and senior roles within the academy?**

The appointment of a Headteacher, or any reserved post, is delegated to the MAT with representation from the Local Governing Body. The Diocesan Education Service is also represented by a Diocesan recruitment officer at each process.

### **Will the secondary agenda dominate?**

All schools are equal within the academy family. There is no single academy that is more important than another. There may be differing capacity and different gifts to offer, but all are valued equally within their MAT family. MATs work hard to ensure appropriate forums are built for feedback and shared leadership, to ensure all perspectives are heard and are given weight in the direction and practices of the MAT. Every school within a MAT should feel supported and empowered by being part of a wider Catholic community of schools.

## **6. Governance**

### **What about governance, does that change?**

Each school will have local governors (Local Governing Body) who will be responsible for Catholic Life, standards, holding the leadership team to account and being at the heart of the relationship between the school and its local parish community. A single Trust Board of Directors will set the strategy for the Trust and oversee the performance and standards in all the academies within the Trust. Supporting them will be the Executive Team of the Trust led by the CEO.

### **What powers will the Local Governing Body (LGB) have?**

The local governors will have their responsibilities set out in a Scheme of Delegation, but their prime responsibilities will be to monitor standards and pupil attainment, hold the leadership team to account, ensure staffing aligns with budgetary constraints, be involved in appointments and staff development, and to ensure that the Catholic Life of the school is maintained and developed. These are major responsibilities. Central MAT support will enable governors to devote themselves entirely to their monitoring role at local school level rather than having to be concerned with compliance to a number of statutory requirements.

### **Will there be one common Scheme of Delegation or can there be local variances?**

There is one common Scheme of Delegation that all our MATs are expected to adopt. This can be reviewed annually and any proposed changes will have to be approved by the Education Service.

### **Communication with parents from our schools is very good. Will that continue and will the role of parent governors remain the same?**

Yes, good relationships with parents are of paramount importance and there will be a role for parent governor/s on the Local Governing Body.

### **Why are foundation governors important?**

The foundation governors are the guardians and promoters of their schools' distinctive Catholic ethos. They are upholders of the vision and are appointed by the Bishop. They are his representatives to ensure the school remains a recognizably Catholic school, that it offers an excellent education, and that the Bishop's policies and

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directives are implemented in his schools.

**What is the make up of a Local Governing Body? (See Scheme of Delegation)**

The standard constitution of a governing body within the MAT will be:

- Foundation governors in the majority of 2
- Headteacher
- Staff governor
- Up to two parent governors
- up to 1 Additional (or Non-Foundation) Governor appointed by the Local governing body with the approval of the Trust Board.

Some MAT may choose to have governing bodies of 8, some may choose to maintain 12, but the core principles of foundation governor majority, staff and Headteacher membership, and parental membership will be maintained at all times.

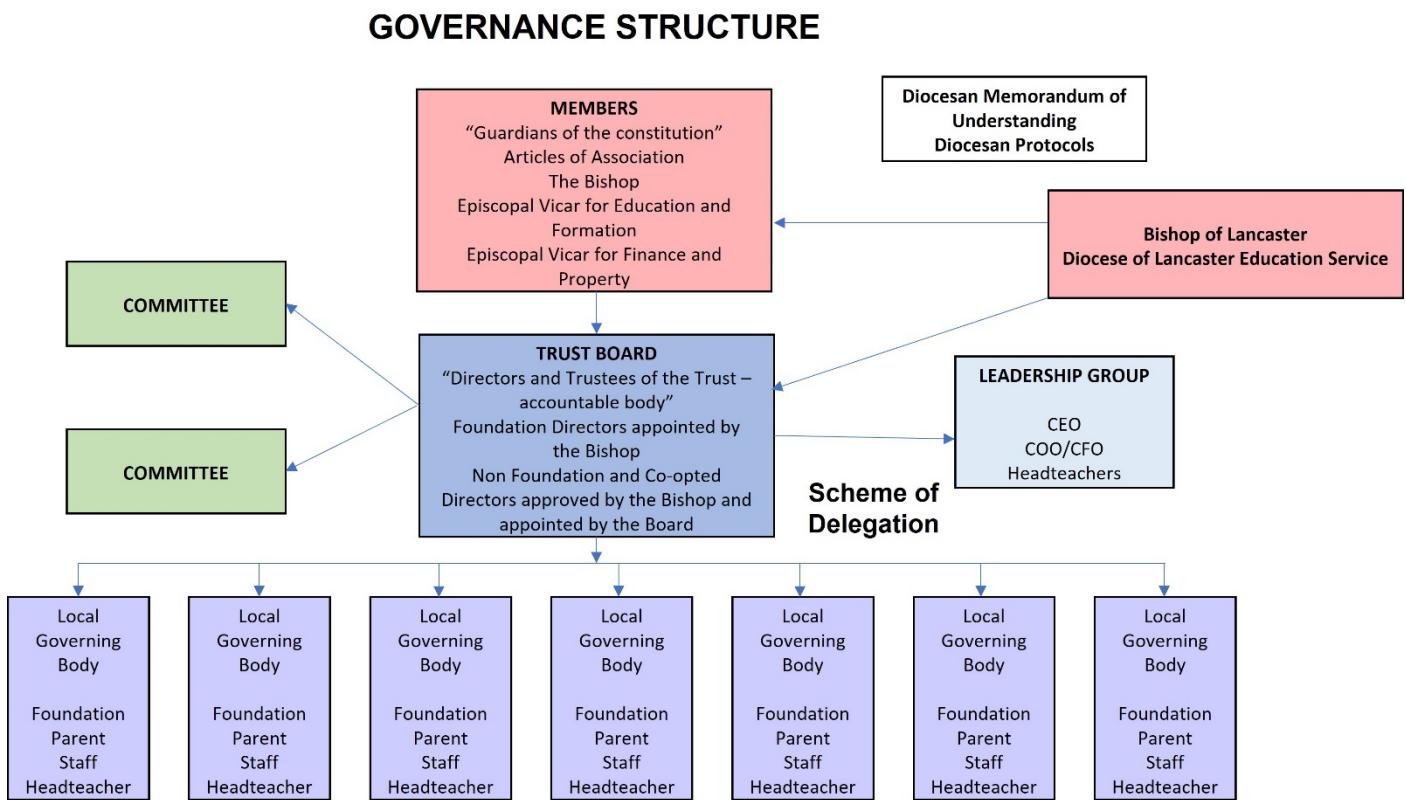
**Can governors decide on school staffing?**

The Local Governing Body is responsible for the delegated budget and for the staffing of the school.

**When the governing body is disbanded on conversion, how is the new Local Governing Body (LGB) established?**

When a school becomes an academy, the governing body ceases to exist as the school's status changes to be an academy. In our Diocese we anticipate a majority of governors in our VA schools will be keen to continue as governors serving on the Local Governing Body. When the school converts, the existing foundation governors will be re-appointed to the local governing body through completing a nomination form and a skills audit.

What does the Governance Structure look like?



**What is the role of the diocese in governance? Who are the members?**

The three MATs within the Diocese of Lancaster each has three Members, these being Bishop Paul Swarbrick, Father Michael Docherty, and Canon Peter Hart. The Members determine the governance structure of the MAT, amend the Articles of the MAT as required, appoint and remove Directors, and provide challenge to ensure the charitable object of the Trust is being fulfilled.

**What is the role of the Diocesan Schools Commissioner and Education Service?**

The Diocesan Schools Commissioner (DSC) and the wider education service continues to represent the Bishop in the oversight of Appointments, Governance, Formation, Catholic Life and Worship, Inspection, Property and in all other areas where the Bishop has an interest. The DSC will also provide advice, support, guidance and receive feedback to and from MAT Boards, the CEOs, Headteachers and governors.

**What do Directors do?**

Directors are required to develop effective systems and leadership to enable them to assure themselves of the processes, safety and standards within the Trust. They are responsible for the standards of the MAT and so must ensure robust processes are in place to challenge Executive Leaders and direct interventions or strategic change as required. MAT Boards must have a majority of at least two Foundation Directors. MAT Boards can appoint non-Foundation Directors, though all appointments must be approved by the Diocese. Directors have overall accountability for the actions of the MAT and are directly responsible to the Members and the Secretary of State for Education.

**How many Directors will there be?**

There needs to be a minimum of five Directors, however in practice there will be more than this and the MAT Board will be made up of Directors with a range of skills and experience.

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### **What is the criteria to be a Foundation Governor and Foundation Director?**

The criteria for being a Foundation Director is the same as the criteria for being a Foundation Governor. The candidate must be:

- a practicing Roman Catholic.
- not an employee of the Trust or related to an employee.
- not automatically eligible for re-election after the expiry of any term of office.

### **What is the role of the Headteacher/Executive Headteacher in the structure?**

The responsibility of the Headteacher/Executive Headteacher within a Multi-Academy Trust remains fundamentally the same as those within a maintained school. However, it is anticipated that the MAT structure will allow pooled capacity for areas such as finance, health and safety, and property management, giving Headteachers and senior leaders added capacity to focus on teaching and learning and being the leader of high standards in all aspects of school life.

### **What are Executive Officers?**

Executive Officers may be recruited as part of the central service infrastructure of the MAT. These could include, for example, Director of Catholic Life and Ethos, or Director of School Improvement. These roles would support schools to reach and maintain the highest standards as part of the MAT family. In the early years of MAT development these functions might be offered through part-time staff, or shared capacity from those already working within the MAT family of schools.

### **What does the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) do?**

The CEO is the most senior employee of the MAT Board and is directly accountable to Directors. The CEO is the principal educational and professional adviser to the Board of Directors and is responsible for standards across the MAT.

### **What does the Chief Finance Officer (CFO) do?**

The CFO is responsible for overseeing all matters concerning finance for the MAT and the individual academies within it, and is accountable to the Executive Leader. The CFO liaises with the Schools Buildings Committee about property matters as appropriate.

## **7.Teaching and learning, curriculum and standards**

### **What arrangements will there be to ensure accountability and to quality assure standards?**

Ensuring accountability and assuring standards is vital. Academies are all still subject to Ofsted inspections and their results are published by the Department for Education. Additionally, as Catholic academies, all schools remain subject to the Diocesan Inspections (under the Catholic Schools Inspectorate national framework) carried out on behalf of the Bishop. The MATs 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. It is in the interests of all the academies in a Trust to ensure that each individual academy is successful. Every academy in the Trust will be expected to play a full part in supporting the improvement of standards across all academies in the MAT. The Education Service will continue to monitor standards in schools and will hold the MAT to account.

### **What will have to be common and what can remain different? e.g. curriculum/policies/assessment etc.**

All schools are unique and serve a local community. Whilst there is an acknowledgement that there is also a need to align some policies and assessment, for reason of improved leadership and accountability, schools nonetheless have the principal responsibility in determining their curriculum and it is not anticipated that there

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will be a uniform curriculum across all schools.

**Will schools have full autonomy in relation to teaching and learning and for instance assessment systems?**

The CEO will have a role to play in overseeing how schools are operating and deciding what information needs to be shared with the MAT Board and how it is communicated. For this reason, there may be alignment of assessment systems or data collection, and this is often created in consultation with schools themselves using the Headteacher forums mentioned above.

**How will issues such as child protection and safeguarding work in the new MATs?**

It is our legal and moral duty to ensure a caring, positive, safe and stimulating environment which promotes the social, physical and moral development of the individual child, and strive to make sure that every student in the MAT feels secure, well cared for, and able to reach their full potential. Each MAT has safeguarding policies and procedures in place, setting minimum expectations in each school. Nonetheless safeguarding remains a local responsibility of Headteachers/DSLs and governors, and all LA safeguarding reporting procedures and arrangements will continue to be followed.

## 8. Services

**Would it be possible to set out what the cost of the services delivered centrally by the Trust will be and what those services will look like?**

Each of the MATs will establish a core central team. Services will be delivered in different ways depending on the needs of the schools within the MAT. Discussions and information is available directly from the MAT and will be shared via the Leadership Group. The core team will offer support for schools around finance, standards and operational running of schools. They will work with the Education Service to offer strong support in developing each school's Catholic life.

**What impact will conversion have on local authority services? What will be the impact on the capacity of the LAs if all Catholic schools become academies?**

The Education Service has been communicating with the Local Authorities to keep them informed of the academy policy. Each Trust is required to purchase services that are of best value and best quality. Local Authorities can tailor services that could be used by MATs where they are of quality and good value. A number of Local Authorities within the Diocese already sell services to the existing MATs. Local Authorities still retain their statutory responsibilities.

**Will schools be able to buy in provision that is not the same as that which the Trust has decided it will use?**

Having collective buying power is an important way that the MAT can make savings by economies of scale. This money can then be used for the education of the children. It is also true that if a MAT has instructed a particular (for example, a specific MIS system) then it will expect all schools to use this resource. However, schools still maintain a delegated budget and they may choose to use this to access additional services to the MAT offer.

**If a school is geographically isolated from other schools, will communication and a feeling of 'being involved' improve in a trust?**

We very much hope so and this is a key consideration in developing the MAT families. The challenges of being a Catholic school with no local neighbouring Catholic schools is recognised. Each MAT will be challenged by the Education Service to ensure that all the academies within it have a shared sense of mission and work together to support one another. Regular communication and contact between the schools, and a sense of community through peer to peer working and school support, will be vital to achieving this.

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### **What about school meals, grounds staff, and other support obtained the local authority?**

If the Local Authority offers good quality services providing value for money the MAT may elect to 'buy in' these services. It could also choose to procure these services from other providers, or to have in- house provision. An advantage of being within a MAT is that schools can take on the same provider for certain services with potentially a reduction in cost for that service.

### **Will Local Authorities support schools that become academies?**

Yes. The Local Authority continues to work closely with the Diocese and is committed to offering support for all children in their area, whether their schools is in an academy or not.

## **9. Finances and resources**

### **What is the financial model for the Trust – will each school be responsible for submitting returns to Company House?**

The MAT Board will be responsible for presenting the consolidated accounts for the Trust as a whole.

### **With the pressures on school budgets, will there be redundancies?**

No school would ever want to make redundancies and the MAT structure gives the security and resilience to try and avoid this situation. However, as with maintained schools, all schools must operate under budget requirements and ensure their staffing aligns with their funding arrangements. The MAT financial model suggest that centralising contracts and service delivery will yield considerable savings on school budgets.

### **What will be the contribution to pay for central services?**

The aim is that the schools will contribute no more than 5% of their General Annual Grant (GAG) total to central services and the amount taken will only suffice to cover Central costs. Details of the services that this contribution pays for are in the MAT Central Services guide for schools joining a MAT. Any changes in contribution would be discussed with all partner schools prior to changes being made.

### **Will local governors still manage the budget for the local school?**

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. Final approval of all budgets is at MAT Board Level.

### **Will support be shared across the three Diocesan MATs?**

Close collaboration and sharing of resources and expertise across the three MATs is important and actively encouraged. There is already a collaborative working relationship between the MAT executive leaders and this is proving a vital tool in ensuring our MATs are supported to develop and to maintain the highest of standards.

### **What happens to a budget surplus on conversion?**

On voluntary conversion, schools will keep their surplus.

### **How will the Diocese prevent schools who have not yet converted and who hold a surplus balance (reserves) from spending those reserves prior to conversion to prevent the Trusts from having access to the funds?**

Any reserves (surplus) held by the school will be retained on transfer. All funding available to schools should be spent responsibly. Each MAT has a reserves policy that is reviewed annually.

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The ESFA expects schools within MATs to pool money for projects, but this could only happen after discussion and with agreement from the schools involved.

### **Will budgets be delegated?**

Each school will receive its delegated budget. All monies will be held in one account by the MAT with the General Annual Grant (GAG) delegated to each school.

### **Will a school be able to convert with a deficit budget?**

This would not prevent conversion. However, there will need to be a plan for the school to pay back the deficit to the Trust or the ESFA as the case may be. Due diligence would have to take place to determine if the Trust could carry the risk of the deficit budget.

### **What happens to school fund or any money fundraised e.g. PTA on conversion? Can a school raise its own school fund and keep the money?**

Due to financial regulations, academies are not able to hold a school fund account. On conversion any school fund would be transferred into the school's budget and maintained by the school together with any budget surplus. Academies can only have one bank account. Once an academy, if money is raised through fundraising, this money can be put into a PTA account.

### **Will a school needing support have to pay more money to the Trust or will it be included in the central services?**

This is included in the central services contribution. There would be no added fee for schools requiring enhanced support.

### **Do all services have to be bought from the Trust or are some optional?**

There will be an increased number of central services provided by each of the MATs. Some services will be bought through the MAT whilst other services may continue to be paid for by the school. Where the school has a Service Level Agreement (SLA) adopted centrally, the expectation is that this SLA replaces any current arrangements. However, some services are purchased at school level outside of the Central Services and this is a school-based decision. Please look the central services provided by the MAT for more information.

### **Will there be better SEND provision within a MAT?**

MATs are responsive to need and are able to provide solutions and offer greater capacity – we hope they can also in the future provide specialist teaching provision and better access to difficult-to-procure services, such as Education Psychologists, counsellors, or speech and language therapists. The MATs may also be able to explore more specific interventions, such as having the scale and capacity to open resource provision within the MAT.

## **10. Employment**

### **Will MATs employ Catholic senior leaders?**

All national and Diocesan expectations around appointment to reserved posts would remain in place for MAT schools.

### **What happens to terms and conditions for teachers?**

Standard Teachers Pay and Conditions (STPCD) will be adhered to for as long as they are in existence. Terms and conditions of employment are protected by the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 ('TUPE'). This means that, on the day staff transfer employers, all staff will transfer with their terms and conditions as they were before. Terms and conditions are a contract between an employer and

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employee and so can only be changed by agreement

#### **What happens to terms and conditions for support staff?**

As above, all support staff will join the MAT on the same terms and conditions as their current employment, under the TUPE process. Where MATs have employees who come into the MAT on different terms and conditions, due to their schools sitting within different authorities with different policy arrangements, then employees will retain their current terms and conditions of the authority in which their schools sits. It is recognised that at some point in the future, the MAT may wish to regularize terms and conditions, and any process to do so would be with full engagement of unions and staff and following the principle of 'levelling up' staff toward equal terms across the MAT.

#### **Is there an expectation that staff will have to travel around the new trust?**

There would be no expectation that staff would be required to work in different locations unless they agree to do so, usually as part of an opportunity for cross-school leadership or support. There may, however, in the future be some specialist appointments that could be working across more than one school, and all staff within the MAT would have the opportunity to apply for posts as they arise.

#### **Where will the CEO and central teams be located?**

Whilst there may be a fixed location for central services, the MAT exists in every one of its schools and so no single place should be seen as 'Head Office'. As things stand, there may be locations where some central work takes place, however this could be subject to change, or might only include one aspect of central service work (for example, finance, or estates) and so only captures a proportion of the work of the MAT. It is important to recognise this to avoid the perception that any one particular locale is more important than any other.

Nonetheless all MATs require a central address for registrations and the current registered administrative centres are:

- Blessed Edward Bamber Catholic Multi Academy Trust - Metro House, Blackpool.
- Mater Christi Trust - Blessed Christopher Robinson House in Carlisle (with the COO/Finance team based in Barrow).
- Mater Ecclesiae Trust - currently based within the academy schools in Preston.

#### **What about succession planning in the MATs for future Headteachers and CEOs?**

This will be a big area for the MAT. The MAT should be well placed to develop a strong succession planning model within each organisation, and will work closely with the Diocese to identify and develop future leaders. This will include developing bespoke training pathways and helping ensure all staff – both future Catholic leaders and those with leadership ambitions outside of the Catholic sector – are supported to develop their potential and contribute in ever more developed ways to the wider MAT family.

#### **What advice is there on vacancy filling in the interim period?**

If vacancies arrive within the current staffing structure of the school, then an appointment can be made to these posts. However, no new posts that are extra to the current school staffing structure should be created without a discussion with the CEO of their regional Trust.

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### **What will staffing structures be like for the MAT?**

The MATs are currently growing and developing the staffing team necessary to operate a central service operation. The DfE allocate a pot of money called the Trust Capability Fund (TCAF) to facilitate the development of these services in the initial phases and MATs have become skilled at successfully applying for these funding streams.

### **What is the viability of small schools? Will they be closed down by the MAT?**

The aim of the academy policy is to preserve, protect and develop Catholic education. The Diocese aims to ensure that schools are supported by the MAT and savings through economies of scale can help this. The MAT does not have the power to close schools. Only the Bishop and the Trustees have the authority to determine whether to cease to provide education in a particular area, taking into consideration a multitude of contextual and canonical factors. We see the Diocesan academisation policy as providing greater security for our more vulnerable schools by creating a MAT family able to support smaller schools during times of difficulty and challenge.

## **11. More Recently Asked Questions**

### **Will the Bishop change his mind?**

This strategy represents a fixed wish of the Bishop who wishes all his schools to enter into the MAT structures that have been developed by founder schools. This desire is consistent with his vision for education in the Diocese of Lancaster.

### **What if the Bishop leaves?**

Bishop Swarbrick's vision for academisation is in alignment with many of the other Catholic Bishop's across England. The Education Service has a commitment to the academy strategy and its implementation across all of the diocesan schools.

### **What if government policy changes?**

This plan is independent of government policy to the extent it represents the settled wish of Bishop. Any change of government policy will be given due consideration, but it is not envisioned that it will change the current vision for education in the Diocese.

### **Can we choose a different MAT to join?**

The MAT structures have been developed and set according to the final capacity each will attain upon completion. The MAT families identified are the outcome of countless conversations around the best way to deliver strong trusts best able to support the needs of all whilst maintaining a shared sense of mission and identity. For this reason, the current geographical divisions are fixed.

### **Can a school choose not to convert?**

A governing body may choose not to align itself with the Diocesan vision for education. However, we trust all schools will be mindful of their responsibility as leaders and governors of Catholic schools, as set out in various documents relating to governance and leadership in our schools.

### **We want to academise earlier – is this possible?**

Yes. Schools are welcome to approach the Diocese to discuss earlier conversion, according to the capacity of the various stakeholders to support that process.

### **Why must we accept this timetable – we want to choose our own academy dates**

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Schools have been consulted to give an indication of when they believe they will be academy ready. This has been considered in the development of the MAT timetable and as far as possible has been used to assign conversion windows. However, to enable MATs to grow in a sustainable and planned way, a clear conversion timetable is essential. If all schools were to choose their own exact dates, this would impede the capacity of the Diocese to control the conversion process and limit the capacity of the MATs to have dependable growth programs, stopping them from planning for future growth. For this reason, a timetable has been developed which will make the conversion process manageable for all and deliver the implementation plan according to the timelines set out in the academisation strategy.

**If the governing body wishes to academise earlier do we still need to consult?**

Once governors vote to enter their MAT family the usual conversion process will take place, including full consultation with parents and staff.

**We have serious concerns about our ability to academise – what should we do?**

As schools move closer to joining the family of schools, it is important for governing bodies to consider how “academy ready” they are and to consider how to strategically align with the trust you are joining. One- to - one conversations with the MAT and Diocese may assist the steps towards academisation and we encourage any governing bodies who feel they will not be in a position to academise to open dialogue with the Diocese as soon as possible.

**Will we get support to academise?**

Yes. There is a comprehensive support package which will guide schools through academisation and into their MAT family. This will include due diligence and ongoing support, from both the Diocese and the MAT, funded out of the academy conversion fee each school will receive.

**Can we still work with schools outside Catholic education?**

Yes. This strategy has been developed to facilitate greater collaboration and communion between our Catholic schools – it is not to be interpreted as a call to work less-closely with schools outside the Catholic sector. We anticipate all schools will continue to be important partners in their local clusters.

**DFC: I understand that, as an academy school, the 10% Governor contribution to DFC project costs would no longer need to be paid; Could an explanation be provided of why this would be the case?**

As a VA school the governing body are legally responsible for their own capital works. The Secretary of State may assist and the law states that they can contribute no more than 90% of the costs, so we deduct 10% from VA allocations, this is set out in DfE condition funding documentation. For academies where there are under 3000 learners, schools can apply Condition Improvement Fund (CIF). CIF is managed by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and more information is available on the ESFA website.

**Does CIF funding follow individual schools?**

Yes, CIF-eligible schools will be invited to apply to the fund for their projects and retain their funds. For detailed information about eligibility for CIF please refer to <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/condition-improvement-fund>.

**What roles would become a centrally provided service; when would this happen and how would the service cost to individual schools be determined?**

The Trusts have central services paid for by a small % of the school's General Annual Grant in a comparable way to how the Local authority would previously have administered services to the school with Service Level Agreements (SLA's). Within the MAT central team there are finance officers who provide an oversight of the school's financial aspects and strategic support, but frequently the day to day running of the schools can often

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remain similar with tasks such as managing the delegated budget, reconciling, maintaining accurate accounts, reporting all spending directly monthly and oversee the front of office staff often remaining as an on-site role.

**Can we have a list of policies that will be held centrally by the MAT?**

Yes. The policies held centrally by each MAT are available on the Trust website. For details of the policies please go to

<https://mater-ecclesiae-trust.co.uk/key-information/policies>

<https://mater-christi.com/policies/>

<https://bebcmat.co.uk/trust-policies/>

These are the policies that apply to all schools in the Trust. For School specific policies please visit that school's website.

Many policies are in line with the local authority policies.

**Will there be a period of grace (post academy conversion) from Ofsted inspection?**

Generally, there is a grace period of seven terms post conversion. However, the timing of the next inspection will depend on the Ofsted grade of the predecessor schools and any risk assessment information that is collected by Ofsted. As an academy convertor, Ofsted provide detailed guidance in their school inspection handbook as to which type of inspection will follow and if it is graded or ungraded.

**What is the intention and focus of academisation?**

Bishop Paul has invited schools to academise to form Trusts "to protect, secure and develop the Church's mission in education in the Diocese." In his letter 2020, he states "The move to establish a network of Multi-Academy Trusts in the Diocese seeks to ensure that Catholic schools work closely together to assist with school improvement, leadership recruitment, formation, governance, and cooperation to strengthen our Catholic mission. This development enables a new spirit of collaboration where the success of Catholic schools in our Diocese can remain productive and protected." For more explanation and highlights of the intentions of the academisation project please read this booklet in conjunction with the 'Academisation Update: Growing our Family of schools'

**If schools have reserves, do they keep them?**

Yes, on voluntary conversion, schools will keep their reserves as they are returned from the Local Authority.

**Can we have more detailed information regarding due diligence e.g., finance?**

Early due diligence is important to determine if the financial status of the school can support conversion to academy status. This should be discussed at governing body meeting prior to conversion. A more detailed analysis of the financial status of the school will be undertaken prior to joining the Trust in the project management stages. Please refer to the Project Management timeline in the appendix. section.

**Who is responsible for pensions?**

Each Trust is a member of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) and the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) and pensions are protected as part of the TUPE transfer. Therefore, staff pensions will be unaffected by the transfer.

If you are already a member of an occupational pension scheme such as the TPS or the LGPS you will see no difference to your scheme membership. Where appropriate staff pension records will be automatically transferred into the name of your new employer Trust, there will be no change to the pension benefits you accrue, and no need take no further action. Staff will receive confirmation of the change in employer in due course.

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**As part of a MAT, would training needs be assessed for each individual school or would schools just have to go with the needs of the bigger schools?**

Yes, access to training would be continuously assessed in order to meet the needs of the schools within the MAT. Being part of the Trust will bring an improved offer with wider access and opportunities. Enhanced capacity enables more possibilities and high-quality training especially for smaller schools.

## 12. Further Information

Please refer to the websites for more information on the Trust and the conversion process.

Mater Christi Multi Academy Trust



<https://mater-christi.com/>

Blessed Edward Bamber Catholic Multi Academy Trust



<https://bebcmat.co.uk/faqs/>

Mater Ecclesiae Catholic Multi Academy Trust



<https://mater-ecclesiae-trust.co.uk/>

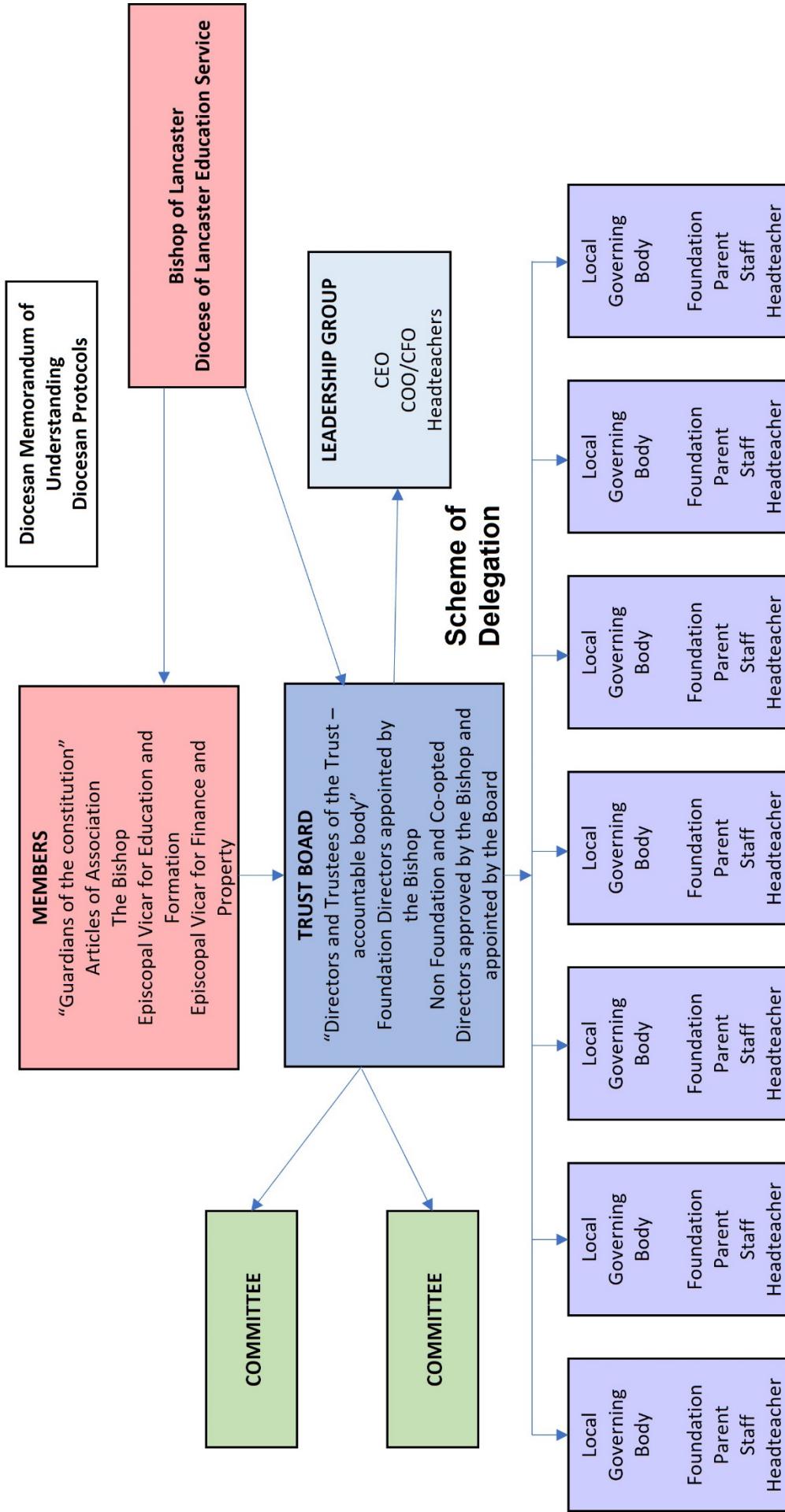
Mater Christi	Blessed Edward Bamber	Mater Ecclesiae
CEO: Jacky Kennedy <a href="mailto:Jacky.Kennedy@mater-christi.com">Jacky.Kennedy@mater-christi.com</a>	CEO: Helen O Neill <a href="mailto:hon@bebcmat.co.uk">hon@bebcmat.co.uk</a>	Interim CEO: Mia Barlow <a href="mailto:mia.barlow@materecclesiae.co.uk">mia.barlow@materecclesiae.co.uk</a>

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## 13. Other useful documents

- The Bishop's Letter, 14<sup>th</sup> September 2020
- "Implementing the Bishop of Lancaster's Vision for Academisation." 2021
- Articles of Association for the Academies in the Diocese of Lancaster
- Model Scheme of Delegation for Academies in the Diocese of Lancaster
- Diocese of Lancaster Protocols re-issued Sept 2022
- Diocesan Estates Management Policy and Occupancy protocols
- Governance Structures
- 10 steps to join the MAT family

## GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE



## **10 Steps to Join the MAT Family of Schools**

**Step 1: Academy Ready**

**Step 2: Consultation**

**Step 3: Regional Director Academy board application**

**Step 4: Due Diligence**

**Step 5: TUPE Process**

**Step 6: Land and Legal**

**Step 7: Commercial Transfer Agreement**

**Step 8: Church Supplemental Agreement (CSA) and Supplemental funding Agreement (SFA)**

**Step 9: Pre-opening actions**

**Step 10: Academy conversion achieved.**