

Peterborough Diocese Board of Education

Diocesan Strategy

*This 'Diocesan Strategy' document is a statutory document prescribed by the new model academy articles of association for use by multi-academy trusts with Church of England schools and the new Memorandum of Understanding between the National Society and the DfE, and is the **academy conversion strategy** for the Diocesan Board of Education.*

Executive Summary

1. *The role of the DBE*

The legal framework within which the DBE operates is the DBE Measure 2021 Church Schools in the Diocese and Their Strategic Development. This sets out the general functions of the Board, the advice it is empowered to provide, the directions it is entitled to give, the information it may request from schools and academies, and its governance involvement in academy trusts. Further details about its engagement with academy trusts can also be found in the Memorandum of Understanding between the National Society and the DfE.

2. *Church Schools In The Diocese And Their Strategic Development*

Over the last ten years, the DBE has provided numerous free services for its schools and developed its SLA for schools, to help ensure their success in SIAMS and Ofsted inspections, enabling its schools to perform above national and regional averages. It has supported the academy conversion of 66 of its 103 schools, whilst investing considerable energy and resources into the successful establishment of two new (VA) Church of England primary schools and supporting the growth of eight different MATs. The DBE prefers most primary schools to join its own diocesan MAT, as it regards Peterborough Diocese Education Trust as the strongest MAT, and seeks to educate and influence school leaders and governors accordingly.

3. *The DBE's Vision*

We promote a Christian vision for pupils' educational experience in our Church of England schools which is infused with the abundance of life Jesus came to bring, and so which is deeply Christian and serves the common good

4. *DBE Support for MATs and Expectations of MATs*

The educational culture in Peterborough Diocese, re. the DBE and its partnership with MATs, has been shaped through dialogue, within the scope and spirit of the DBE Measure. The DBE set out its own informal (non-legally binding) Memorandum of Understanding, in a spirit of trust and dialogue, with its MATs in 2018, making clear the support it will offer to MATs and the expectations that it has of its MATs. This has formed the basis of a close and productive working partnership with all its MATs over the last 6 years and continues to do so.

5. Model Documents

Church schools are encouraged to use the latest Church of England model articles of association agreed with the DfE and a Church of England Supplemental Agreement to fully protect the Church of England foundation of each school.

6. Academy Conversion Options

This Diocesan Strategy provides a policy framework for schools to consider options regarding academisation and to work within. It does not prescribe any individual MAT; nor does it regard academy conversion as an end in itself. The choice of which specific MAT a school may prefer to join is for governors and school leaders to make, subject to the approval of the Board of Education Executive Committee, in relation to the DBE's stated criteria re. academy conversion options.

7. Before Seeking Academy Conversion Consent

Before bringing forward a proposal to seek academy conversion consent, schools must ensure that their due diligence process fulfils certain pre-requisites specified by the DBE.

8. Guiding Principles

The Board Executive Committee will be guided by its published guiding principles, when considering academy conversion proposals from schools and MATs.

9. The Process of Seeking Academy Conversion Consent

The Headteacher and Chair of Governors, along with the CEO of the proposed MAT, will normally be invited to formally present their proposal to the Board Executive Committee and respond to the Committee's questions.

10. The DBE Response To Academy Conversion Proposals

The DBE will provide information, advice and support to schools via the DDE and DDDE. The Board Executive Committee will decide whether to consent, give conditional consent, withhold consent or defer, and inform the Headteacher and Chair, and CEO of the proposed MAT, of its decision promptly. The DBE's decision will be final and is not open to appeal.

11. New Schools

Church MATs must comply with the requirement to obtain the DBE's consent to establish a new school with a religious Church of England designation.

12. Review

The DBE will review its strategy in the light of any changes in DfE policy or other circumstances, and in line with the [National MOU between the National Society and the Secretary of State for Education](#).

Section 1 - The role of the DBE

The DBE is a statutory body with wide-ranging responsibilities for Church schools in the Diocese, and especially for RE and collective worship. The DBE consists of members nominated by the Bishop, elected members of the Diocesan Synod and people with experience of Church schools who are co-opted by the DBE. It includes ordained clergy, lay people, headteachers and education professionals from across the diocese.

The DBE Measure 2021 provides the legal framework within which DBEs engage and work with Church schools:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukcm/2021/1/contents/enacted>, detailing its general functions, authority to give advice and directions, information it may require governing bodies and proprietors of Church schools to provide, and its involvement in academy trusts, as detailed further immediately below.

General Functions

The general functions of the Board are to:

- (a) promote or assist in the promotion of education in the diocese that is consistent with the faith and practice of the Church of England
- (b) promote or assist in the promotion of religious education and religious worship in schools in the diocese
- (c) promote or assist in the promotion of Church schools in the diocese
- (d) promote co-operation between itself and other persons concerned with education in the diocese.

Advice

The Board is authorised to give advice in relation to matters affecting Church schools in the diocese to:

- (a) the governing bodies or proprietors of those schools
- (b) the trustees of Church educational endowments
- (c) such other persons concerned with education in the diocese as the DBE considers appropriate.

Directions

The Board may give a direction to the governing body or (in the case of an Academy) the proprietor of a Church school in the diocese if the DBE is satisfied that the governing body or proprietor:

- (a) is failing to exercise, or to exercise properly, its functions so far as relating to relevant alterations to the school or to the discontinuance of the school, and
- (b) is accordingly acting in a manner which is not in the interests of the school or of Church schools generally.

Information

The Board may require the governing body or (in the case of an Academy) the proprietor of a Church school in the diocese to provide information to assist the DBE in carrying out its functions.

Academy Trusts

The DBE is represented as a corporate member of all MATs and SATs in the diocese through its umbrella trust, Peterborough Diocese Church Schools Trust. The DBE continues to make available a wide range of support, training and resources to both Church schools and academy trusts as part of the family of Church schools in support of Christian distinctiveness.

Memorandum of Understanding

The DBE operates within the legally binding Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Church of England and the DfE:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/517423/Memorandum_of_understanding_between_the_National_Society_and_DfE.pdf.

This Memorandum and the related articles of association require the following of all DBEs and MATs, in the way that they work together across the whole spectrum of their respective and mutual responsibilities:

i) **Applying for an Academy Order**

- a. A MAT must obtain written consent¹ from both the DBE and the site trustees prior to requesting or acting upon an academy order, and must approach the DBE as early as possible to discuss the proposal in line with the Diocesan Strategy².

ii) **Governance**

- b. A MAT must obtain written consent from either the DBE or the Diocesan Corporate Member (as set out in the articles) regarding: any amendments to the articles of association³, changes to the name⁴ or location of any Church Academy⁵, appointment and removal of additional Members⁶ and Directors⁷, local governance provisions⁸ including the Scheme of Delegation and Terms of Reference⁹ for committees, rules and bye laws¹⁰
- c. Appointments made at all levels within the MAT governance structure must provide the DBE with a written undertaking¹¹ to the Diocesan Corporate Member to uphold the Object¹² of the MAT.

¹ Academies Act 2010 s3 [Academies Act 2010 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/22/section/3)

² National MOU between the National Society and the Secretary of State for Education part 1F.

³ Model AoA Article 10,

⁴ Model AoA Article 10 A

⁵ Model AoA Article 5h

⁶ Model AoA Article 15A & 16

⁷ Model AoA Article 50A & 50 C & 50 D

⁸ Model AoA Article 101B

⁹ Model AoA Article 102

¹⁰ Model AoA Article 137 & 138

¹¹ Model AoA Article 45A, 101B, 103

¹² Model AoA Article 4

iii) **Provision of Information**

- d. From time to time the MAT may be required to provide information to the DBE including, but not limited to, the minutes of meetings and details of insurance provisions as required by the Measure¹³ and any [Church Supplemental Agreement](#).

iv) **Directions**

- e. The DBE may give a direction¹⁴ to the MAT¹⁵ and a decision made by the Members contrary to a direction cannot be implemented by the Directors as this would leave the charity in a position of noncompliance with a statutory duty (in this case to act following a direction under the Measure). For example, where the MAT is, considered by the DBE, not to be acting in the best interest of the Church Academy or MAT.
- f. The Diocesan Corporate Member may stipulate the appointment of additional Directors where the DBE consider the standards or ethos of any Church Academy have fallen unacceptably low¹⁶.
- g. Where the articles provide for it, the Diocesan Corporate Members has a right to appoint additional directors to ensure the character of each Church Academy.¹⁷

v) **Admissions**

- h. A MAT, as the admissions authority, must have regard to any guidance from the DBE when constructing faith-based admissions arrangements, to the extent that the guidance complies with the mandatory provisions and guidelines set out in the Admissions Code¹⁸.
- i. A MAT may also consult with the DBE when deciding how membership or practice of the faith is to be demonstrated for the purposes of admissions at a Church Academy.
- j. Church Academies must, as required by the Measure¹⁹, consult with the DBE about the proposed admission arrangements before any public consultation.

¹³ DBE Measure 2021 s 12 [Diocesan Boards of Education Measure 2021 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

¹⁴ DBE Measure 2021 s 10 [Diocesan Boards of Education Measure 2021 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

¹⁵ Model AoA Article 18 sets out that the DCM is not precluded by its membership of the MAT from exercising delegated functions under the Measure.

¹⁶ Model AoA Article 50C and 50D

¹⁷ Model AoA Article 50 A

¹⁸ School Admissions Code 2021 point 1.38 pg. 16

¹⁹ DBE Measure 2021 S 7 (2) (d)

vi) Significant Change²⁰

- k.** The DBE must be consulted regarding the proposed discontinuation or significant change to a Church Academy²¹.
- l.** The acquisition or disposal of school sites²² including leasehold arrangements and lettings²³

vii) Capital Works

- m.** The MAT must seek advanced consent in writing from the DBE before entering into any agreement or arrangement in connection with an alteration to or repair of the premises of the school²⁴.
- n.** The DBE must establish a threshold for the approval of capital works in Church Academies²⁵.

viii) Recruitment

- o.** The MAT must seek the involvement and consent of the Diocesan Corporate Member for the appointment of the Chief Executive Officer and the DBE regarding the appointment of any Principal²⁶ to a Church Academy²⁷.

ix) Appointments

- p.** The DBE may set out how authority for appointments is exercised including local governance appointments to committees as delegated by the MAT board²⁸.
- q.** The DBE may set out expectations for the appointment process and key considerations for Members when making director appointments to the MAT board²⁹.

Section 2 - Church Schools in the Diocese and Their Strategic Development

There are 103 Church schools in the diocese, 100 of which are primary and 3 of which are secondary. As at 1 December 2023, 61 of these are academies, 23 are voluntary controlled (VC) and 14 are voluntary aided (VA). Almost 100% of our schools buy into the DBE SLA at the highest level, benefitting from termly conferences, courses and consultancy support. 94% of all schools and academies are good or outstanding in Ofsted terms (81% and 13% respectively) and 93% are good or excellent / JI in SIAMS terms (60% and 33% respectively) i.e. above

²⁰ [Academies: making significant changes or closure by agreement - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/academies-making-significant-changes-or-closure-by-agreement)

²¹ These include: change of category or closure, transfers to new sites, expansion, change of age range or PAN

²² See also [School land transactions: guidance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/100000/school-land-transactions-guidance) and [Advice template \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/100000/advice-template)

²³ See also Model AoA Article 5 (h) and (q)

²⁴ DBE Measure 2023 s 8 (4) [Diocesan Boards of Education Measure 2021 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukmg/2023/1/8/4)

²⁵ DBE Measure 2021 s 8 (5) [Diocesan Boards of Education Measure 2021 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukmg/2021/1/8/5)

²⁶ Including Executive Headteachers, Head Teachers and Heads of School.

²⁷ Model AoA Article 107

²⁸ Model AoA Article 101B

²⁹ Model AoA Article 50A

national, regional and diocesan average levels of performance in Ofsted and SIAMS terms. These overall levels of performance are continually improving, following a pattern of continuous improvement over several years. This momentum has been sustained whilst investing considerable energy and resources into the successful establishment of two new (VA) Church of England primary schools in the last ten years, and supporting the growth of eight different MATs.

The DBE seeks to ensure that there is sufficient capacity for Church schools to join a strong MAT in which the DBE is represented. The DBE prefers most primary schools to join its own diocesan MAT, as it regards Peterborough Diocese Education Trust as the strongest MAT overall when considering all of the following criteria:

1. Commitment to the Peterborough Diocese and Church of England Vision for Education
2. Proactive engagement in meeting SIAMS expectations across the MAT
3. School Improvement capacity – transformation
4. Inclusivity
5. Governance and leadership
6. Sustainability – finance and operations
7. Wellbeing of the school communities
8. Serving the disadvantaged
9. Serving the diocesan family of schools – working collaboratively to support the wider system and sharing best practices
10. Commitment to the service level agreement between the DBE and its academies.

For the above reasons, DBE Officers strongly commend PDET to all schools and insist that every primary school considering academisation receives a presentation from PDET. However, the DBE avoids playing a ‘match-making’ role and directing certain schools to join PDET, believing that individual governing bodies are best placed to understand the context of their school and which MAT would be the best fit for them. At the same time, the DBE believes it is incumbent upon PDET to have a compelling marketing strategy to address the needs of all schools, which builds increasingly strong relationships with them, and to win over governing bodies’ hearts and minds. The DBE does reserve the right to direct schools to join PDET though, and this would be most likely to apply, though not exclusively, in the case of two consecutive ‘Requires Improvement’ Ofsted judgements or one ‘Inadequate’ Ofsted judgement, and the need for an academy sponsor under an academy order.

Section 3 - The DBE’s Vision

The Church of England’s vision for education inspires the work of the DBE with its focus on Jesus offering ‘life in all its fulness’:

https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/1687943692_2016-church-of-england-vision-for-education-web-final.pdf.

We promote a Christian vision for pupils’ educational experience in our Church of England schools which is infused with the abundance of life Jesus came to bring, and so which is deeply Christian and serves the common good:

[Diocesan Board of Education Vision - Diocese of Peterborough \(peterborough-diocese.org.uk\)](https://www.peterborough-diocese.org.uk).

Our key priorities are to:

1. support and lead school leaders in improving the quality of Church school education and making it more distinctive, in order to support every Church school effectively in becoming excellent in every way
2. increase the number of Church school places, where a quantitative increase will complement qualitative Christian aspirations for improving education in a local area.

The DBE believes that joining a MAT is essential for improving the quality of Church school education in most instances. Consequently, the DBE has successfully pursued and continues to pursue a strategy of educating and influencing headteachers and governors about the merits of academy conversion and joining a successful MAT in Peterborough Diocese. This strategy has also encompassed holding headteachers and governing bodies to account in relation to an agreed set of guiding principles (as detailed in section 8). The strategy has been pursued in the context of the DBE's commitment to respecting the integrity of each school governing body, upholding a 'mixed economy', believing that what would be best for one school may not be best for another, and that some schools may still be best served by remaining as VA or VC schools with LA support. The DBE is also mindful of the need for MATs to grow in a purposeful and measured way, and that 'herding' all its schools towards academisation at the same time would not be beneficial for this reason also.

The DBE's strategy has been effective in supporting academy conversion and MAT expansion, bringing its influence to bear on all schools and educating governing bodies about the potential pros and cons of academy conversion, whilst maintaining good relationships with all schools and MATs. As a consequence, approximately twice the proportion of schools in Peterborough Diocese have undergone an academy conversion, in comparison with the diocesan average. In this context, the DBE has sought to ensure that the greater number of schools academising join PDET, the diocesan MAT, and, as previously mentioned, our strongest MAT. The DBE is very proud of PDET's achievements and wishes to see PDET flourish and grow further, with supporting the development of all the other MATs in which it is involved, with integrity.

The DBE has taken note of the indication given in the government's recent White Paper and recently withdrawn Schools Bill, preferring all schools to have joined a strong MAT by 2030. The DBE has also noted that the current government would need to serve two successive terms of office to achieve this goal if a Schools Bill with this commitment was eventually 'resurrected'. Notwithstanding a possible change of government, the fulfilment of this government aspiration would involve a further 37 schools (14 VA and 23 VC), along with our 5 standalone academies, joining or forming strong MATs by 2030, over the next seven years, at an average rate of approximately 6 schools per year. So, this would be an achievable target for us, with our level of MAT infrastructure and DBE influence, but this is not our overriding concern.

Most importantly, the DBE would agree with the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Baroness Barran, that academisation is not an end in itself, and that it is better to see schools academising at a measured pace and it being a great success, rather than herding all schools towards academisation at once. The DBE shares the Baroness's view that academisation is not an end in itself, and that the most

important strategic question relates to how we can help all our Church of England schools to become excellent schools. Hence, the first stated priority of our DBE, to support and lead school leaders in improving the quality of Church school education, of which academisation is only a part. So, we would not deem our academisation strategy to be worthy of the title 'Diocesan Strategy', as now required by the Church of England Education Office's MoU with the DfE, but have set out our academisation strategy here and named it our 'Diocesan Strategy' in a spirit of compliance and conciliation.

We seek to play a full part in contributing to national and regional educational initiatives that could benefit schools. We take every opportunity to meet with Ministers, DfE Regional Directors, CEEO Officers, DDEs and Chairs of DBEs, as well as with MAT CEOs, Chairs of Governors and Headteachers. We contribute to all related national and regional educational consultations as fully as possible. In short, we take our role as system leaders seriously. We would echo the wisdom of the Revd Dr Martin Luther King when he wrote a letter to clergymen from a Birmingham jail saying: 'We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly'.

Section 4 - DBE Support for MATs and Expectations of MATs

The educational culture in Peterborough Diocese, re. the DBE and its partnership with MATs, has been shaped through dialogue, within the scope and spirit of the DBE Measure. The DBE set out its own informal (non-legally binding) Memorandum of Understanding, in a spirit of trust and dialogue, with its MATs in 2018, making clear the support it will offer to MATs and the expectations that it has of its MATs. This has formed the basis of a close and productive working partnership with all its MATs over the last 6 years and continues to do so, as detailed below.

The DBE endeavours to:

- provide suitably experienced members and directors for each multi-academy trust and academy trust
- offer training for suitably experienced foundation governors for each local governing body
- provide an appropriate INSET and CPD programme for staff and governors in Church of England schools, through its service level agreements
- track, monitor and enhance the performance of Church of England schools
- work closely with school improvement officers / chief executive officers in multi-academy trusts, in order to coordinate our support and challenge for school leaders, when this would be welcomed
- provide appropriate direct support and challenge to school leaders, through the Education Directorate and particularly through the Diocesan School Effectiveness Adviser and the Diocesan School Consultants, through its SLA
- operate a call centre / advice helpline, in order to provide telephone and email advice to the leaders and governors of Church of England schools, and to the CEOs of multi-academy trusts, as and when required
- ensure that school leaders are enabled to fully address the standards set out in the SIAMS framework, through its SLA
- provide appropriate pastoral support for Church of England school leaders
- support, with advice, guidance and diocesan education officer / DBE member presence, on all headteacher appointments

- offer an Affiliated Schools Scheme to multi-academy trusts, so that the DBE can support non-church schools in trusts with the development of their values, RE and collective worship, and open up the wider of benefits for all trust schools of receiving diocesan support, but without any of the formal obligations which Church of England schools are under in relation to SIAMS
- provide advice, guidance and information to the DfE and the RD in relation to all Church of England schools across the diocese.

The DBE expects Church school MATs to:

- ensure that the DBE is included and represented at member and director level on each trust
- ensure that their local governing bodies have the full quota of foundation governors / church governors, in line with their trust board scheme of delegation
- involve the DBE in headteacher appointments, including observation of candidates leading collective worship, with a DBE member or officer included on the interview panel and with input from the DBE Directorate on interview questions
- request a third / additional reference for headteacher appointments; a character reference provided by the minister of the church attended by the applicant or by a community leader who can comment on the applicant's character in relation to voluntary activities undertaken in the community
- ensure all Church of England schools in the trust subscribe to a DBE SLA, to ensure that their Church of England ethos is effectively developed, maximizing the diocesan partnership and support available
- demonstrate an equal commitment to addressing SIAMS standards as Ofsted standards, whilst recognizing that in many areas these are complimentary
- provide and present an impact report on school improvement every year to the DBE, so that the DBE and its officers are able to have a direct discussion with each MAT's CEO or principal school improvement officer about school improvement work undertaken each year and its effectiveness, together with a wider strategic report on the trust's finances, structure and plans for expansion
- consult with the DBE on all plans for expansion and, when requested, provide a presentation for the DBE, seeking the DBE's approval, every time there is a proposal for a new school to join the trust
- encourage non-church schools in the trust to become affiliated to the DBE, through the DBE Affiliated Schools Scheme and its benefits
- conduct governance and board meetings in accordance with the governors' Christian vision and associated values.

Section 5 - Model Documents

Church schools are encouraged to use the latest Church of England model articles of association agreed with the DfE – [Church academies: model documents - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk).

The articles of association include the commitment that: 'Church of England schools designated as such are conducted in accordance with the principles, practices and tenets of the Church of England both generally and in particular in relation to arranging for religious education and daily acts of worship, and having regard to any advice issued by the Diocesan Board of Education.'

Furthermore, each MAT is required to enter into a Church of England Supplemental Agreement with the Secretary of State, the DBE and the site trustees to protect the Church of England foundation of the school and the rights of the school to continue to occupy the land. Each MAT has a Master Funding Agreement and each school within the MAT has a Supplemental Funding Agreement. The school's occupation of the site, which continues to be held by the site trustees, is dependent on the trust ensuring that its Christian character is protected. The SIAMS inspection process is used to judge whether the trust has been successful in discharging this responsibility.

Section 6 - Academy Conversion Options

This Diocesan Strategy provides a policy framework for schools to consider options regarding academisation and to work within. It does not prescribe any individual MAT. The choice of which specific MAT a school may prefer to join is for governors and school leaders to make, subject to the approval of the Diocesan Board of Education Executive Committee, following a process of due diligence, in view of the following:

- the DBE respects the decision-making powers of governing bodies to make informed decisions in the best interests of their pupils, whether to remain as a maintained school, federate or become an academy
- the DBE recognises the importance of schools working together across a reasonable geographical area
- the DBE will normally decide on granting consent once a MAT has completed its due diligence and agreed to accept a school
- the DBE continues to have a role in both maintained schools and academies in relation especially to RE, collective worship and SIAMS inspections.
- Voluntary Controlled (VC) schools will be given consent to join a Church majority or minority governance MAT, whereas Voluntary Aided (VA) schools will only be permitted to join a MAT with majority governance. This reflects the previous maintained status of the school involved and helps to safeguard its future as a Church school in line with its Trust Deed. (The Church majority governance MATs in Peterborough Diocese are: Peterborough Diocese Education Trust, The Rutland Learning Trust and the Evolve Church Academy Trust. The Church minority governance MATs in Peterborough Diocese are: the David Ross Education Trust, the Innovated Multi-Academy Trust, the Nene Education Trust, Pathfinder Schools and the Learning for Life Education Trust)
- the DBE is supportive of The King's (Cathedral) School forming its own Church majority MAT, with a view to King's sponsoring a new Church secondary school in Peterborough, and open to the possibility of The Forest Church of England Federation bringing forward a proposal to form a Church majority MAT or become a hub within an existing Church majority MAT, in order to future proof its schools, but neither currently provide DBE approved options for other schools to join
- local governance will be secured to strengthen and protect the local relationship between the diocese and the school as part of the family of Church schools
- the DBE will not support applications from Church schools seeking to join multi-academy trusts solely with non-church schools
- in line with the MoU, schools requiring sponsorship will be sponsored by a MAT with appropriate Church of England governance and capacity. The DDE

will work proactively with the Regional Director (RD) to determine the most appropriate solution which best meets the needs of the school and its community. This applies to maintained schools judged Inadequate and to maintained schools which receive a second (or further) Ofsted judgement of below good.

Cross-diocesan support may be considered in exceptional circumstances. The absolute pre-requisites for joining a MAT in another diocese bordering Peterborough Diocese would be: MAT Church majority governance, Peterborough Diocese Member and Trustee representation, and a commitment to the schools continuing to be part of the Peterborough Diocese family of schools and receiving SIAMS related support through the Peterborough Diocese SLA (with staff in those schools benefitting from Peterborough Diocese courses, conferences and consultancy support).

Section 7 - Before Seeking Academy Conversion Consent

Before the DBE's consent is sought, schools should ensure that they:

- have sought advice from the Diocesan Director of Education (DDE) and have followed the guiding principles in section 8 (also published on the diocesan website), to ensure that their plans align with this diocesan strategy
- have considered thoroughly the pros and cons of becoming an academy, familiarised themselves with the process involved and researched all the information available. This should involve receiving an introductory presentation from the DDE or DDDE to the governing body. Useful links include the DfE website - [Convert to an academy: guide for schools - Guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/convert-to-an-academy-guide-for-schools), which includes model documentation for schools. Schools should consider their reasons and expectations carefully and undertake appropriate due diligence on MAT options, in line with the details provided in DDE / DDDE presentations
- have passed a governing body resolution to apply for academy status, not simply discussed the matter, but resolved that it is in the best long-term interests of the school to proceed
- have already sought and obtained the informed consent of the PCC.
- have consulted staff and parents as fully as possible
- complete a declaration, and any supplementary information, in good time for the papers to be circulated in advance of a Board Executive Committee meeting.

Section 8 - Guiding Principles

In its decision-making, the Board Executive Committee will be guided by the following guiding principles, to:

- protect the Anglican heritage of our Church schools and ensure the Christian character will continue to be developed
- ensure sufficiently robust partnerships of Church schools supporting one another to ensure long-term and sustained improvement for the schools, with improved standards of achievement and enhanced well-being of the children in their care
- encourage schools of a suitable size to benefit from economies of scale together

- support the sustainability of our small schools by actively promoting multi-academy trust (MAT) structures
- establish sufficiently strong MATs, which may be in a position to support (sponsor) an 'underperforming' Church school where action is needed to raise standards. Peterborough Diocese Education Trust (PDET) will normally be the sponsor for underperforming Church schools requiring sponsorship, but if this is not possible it will normally be a VA style / Church majority governance MAT
- enable governing boards to have a healthy choice of MAT options for academy conversion
- promote a coherent and cohesive organisational and governance structure for diocesan schools
- avoid the fragmentation of the diocesan Church school family into too many different Trusts, making it hard for the DBE to maintain any meaningful relationship with them and creating the challenge of finding sufficient experienced and skilled individuals to sit as members and directors
- provide a secure structure that can welcome and support non-church schools too
- be open to the possibility of our MATs expanding by taking in prosperous maintained schools, if that helps them to take in a more vulnerable Church of England school, and does not dilute the Christian ethos of the MAT
- be willing to work together on a regional basis with other dioceses, when approached by other dioceses about taking one or more of their Church of England schools into one of the MATs with Church of England schools in Peterborough Diocese
- be proactive in educating and influencing school leaders and governors to make the best possible strategic decisions for the long-term future of their schools, taking all of the opportunities and relevant contextual factors into account
- support schools through the process of academy conversion and joining a MAT.
- support schools and MATs, following conversion, through the DBE SLA and additional cost free support that is available to them, and through the DBE's SS&E Committee's annual reviews with MATs.

Section 9 - The Process of Seeking Academy Conversion Consent

The Academies Act 2010 requires church schools to obtain consent from those who appoint foundation governors before they may apply to the DfE to become academies - <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/32/contents>. This means the DBE and the site trustees of the school land, and so:

- schools are asked to complete a declaration, and any supplementary information, in good time for the papers to be circulated in advance of the next calendared Board Executive Committee meeting (normally every two months)
- decisions will be made by the Board Executive Committee. In exceptional circumstances, consent may be sought by electronic approval between meetings.
- the Headteacher and Chair of Governors, along with the CEO of the proposed MAT, will normally be invited to attend a Board Executive Committee meeting for that item.

Section 10 - The DBE Response to Academy Conversion Proposals

The DBE will:

- provide information, advice and support to schools via the DDE and DDDE
- decide whether to consent, give conditional consent, withhold consent or defer, pending further information and inform the Headteacher and Chair, and CEO of the proposed MAT, of its decision promptly, following the meeting
- provide a letter of consent once due diligence by all parties has taken place and the due diligence confirms the determination of all parties to proceed.

The DBE's decision will be final and is not open to appeal.

The DBE will need to satisfy itself that:

- due process has been carried out
- the proposal is supported by the Headteacher and Governing Body
- the school has fully consulted staff and parents
- the school has sufficient capacity to become an academy and the MAT has sufficient capacity to support the school
- the decision is in the best interests of the children who attend (or who will attend) the school.

Section 11 - New Schools

As part of its commitment to education, the DBE is keen to promote more opportunities for children and young people in Northants, Peterborough and Rutland to have access to a Church of England education. Where there is a need for a new school in Peterborough Diocese, as indicated by the communities and LAs it serves, the DBE is committed to considering whether it will be possible to establish a new Church of England school. Church MATs must comply with the requirement to obtain the DBE's consent to establish a new school with a religious Church of England designation.

Section 12 - Review

The DBE will review its strategy in the light of any changes in DfE policy or other circumstances, most particularly in line with the [National MOU between the National Society and the Secretary of State for Education](#) dated September 2023 (the MOU).

Diocesan Board of Education
January 2024