



## St George's C of E School

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## UPDATED

### **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS - prepared by the SDBE MAT (For Parents, Carers & Communities)**

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**Q: Who determines whether a school applies to become an academy and join the SDBE MAT?**

**A:** The governing body. In the case of a maintained school the formal resolution to convert to an academy must be recorded in the minutes of a full meeting of the governing body.

**Q: We work closely with our local schools. Can we continue to do so within the SDBE MAT?**

**A:** Absolutely. This is a fundamental aspect of our MAT's philosophy. It will be important to maintain existing links with pyramid schools and families of schools. Our aim is for local hubs to develop within the SDBE MAT so that local schools support and strengthen each other. Good and Outstanding members of school staff will be encouraged to share their expertise across both these local hubs and more widely across the MAT.

**Q: What would be the timescale and process for conversion?**

**A:** The DfE (Department for Education) estimates that it usually takes between 4-5 months for a school to convert to an academy. Conversion can take place at any time during the year from the 1st of a month. Should your school decide to join our MAT, we would work closely with your school through the conversion process, providing project management support to make the conversion process as seamless as possible for your school.

**Q: If we convert will we lose our individuality?**

**A:** No. We recognise that schools have their own unique identity, and we want to celebrate this. We see this as a key benefit of being part of our MAT. There is currently no expectation that your school's uniform, name or its distinctiveness would be altered as a result of your school's conversion, other than losing the term Voluntary Aided or Controlled.

**Q: How will the SDBE MAT be structured?**

**A:** As with other MATs there will three levels of governance: Members, Directors and Local Governing Bodies (LGBs).

The Members of the SDBE MAT Company have the strategic oversight and are responsible for reporting annually to the DfE on the performance of the Trust, holding the directors to account

for the performance of the SDBE MAT. They appoint the Directors.

The Directors have responsibility for the overall management of the Company and hold the master Funding Agreement with the Secretary of State. They will oversee the delegation of responsibilities to the LGBs of each academy and hold the LGBs to account, manage compliance and monitor performance of the Academies in the SDBE MAT. The LGB is likely to mirror the current model and will have delegated powers from the Directors (see below).

**Q: Who is the MAT accountable to?**

**A:** The MAT is accountable to the Secretary of State. As a company limited by guarantee, the MAT must prepare and file an independently audited annual report and accounts with Companies House.

**Q: Will the school's Governing Body remain the same when it joins the SDBE MAT?**

**A:** Each school within the SDBE MAT will have a local governing body (LGB). The SDBE intends that these will mirror the current model as closely as possible and, therefore, that those currently on the governing body will remain. Technically, however, the SDBE MAT appoints all governors including those traditionally appointed by PCCs (Parish Church Councils), Deaneries, etc. In practice the SDBE MAT would seek nominations from these bodies. Local incumbents would, as now, be ex officio governors and current links with local parishes/deaneries would be retained. Staff and parent governors would continue to be elected by their constituencies.

**Q: Will the LGB have powers?**

**A:** LGBs will have delegated responsibility for the governance of their school under a Scheme of Delegation. We envisage that good or outstanding schools will see a minimal change in governance and will have delegated responsibility for appointing senior staff, admissions, finance, buildings, etc. The SDBE MAT would technically have the right of veto over all decisions, but is likely to exercise such rights only in extreme circumstances.

**Q: Will a church school retain its religious character on becoming an academy?**

**A:** Yes. The religious character remains the same for an academy and cannot be changed through the process of acquiring academy status. The academy would be deemed to be an independent school with a religious character. The SDBE MAT will ensure that the school's Christian ethos is protected. The SDBE will insist on certain safeguards in its Funding Agreement with the Secretary of State and any supplemental agreements for each academy in relation to RE and collective worship, appointment of the Headteacher, etc.

**Q: What would happen to the ownership of our school land and buildings?**

**A:** Church of England school site ownership is often complex and typically involves Trustees holding parts of the site and the Local Authority owning others. In the case of each school a report on title would be commissioned by the MAT to establish existing arrangements. For Church schools, the land and buildings remain with the site Trustees, usually the SDBE. Any playing fields are typically held by the Local Authority and a long lease (125 years) based on the DfE model lease would be granted by the Local Authority to the MAT.

**Q: Will our school ethos change as a result of joining the SDBE MAT?**

**A:** No. Each church school will retain its individual ethos and unique identity as part of the diverse Diocesan church family. The SDBE is determined that the Diocesan family of schools stays together and it is committed to continuing and enhancing its support for and development of the church school family. Academisation is a process to a different status and different way of working, but it must do nothing to diminish the Church of England foundation of our schools.

The SDBE will do all in its power to secure the Christian ethos of our schools for future generations of children.

**Q: Will the role of the Headteacher remain the same?**

**A:** Yes. It is anticipated that the Headteacher's role will remain the same. Each school will retain a Headteacher unless there is a need to consider a different model for an individual school or schools on the retirement, or resignation, of a Headteacher.

**Q: Will staff be able to work in other schools within the MAT? Will they have to?**

**A:** If a need arises in another MAT school staff could have the opportunity to work in other schools within the MAT. We believe this will be a great opportunity for staff development. The Headteacher will not allow staff to move (and the MAT will defer to the Headteacher) if this would be detrimental to the school. In line with the current arrangements, no member of staff can just be moved and the school will continue to collaborate with other schools where they share similar goals and ethos.

**Q: Are there costs associated with academisation?**

**A:** Yes, there are one off costs to join the MAT (as with any academy trust) which depend on the trust and the situation within each individual school wishing to convert. The DfE provides a £25,000 conversion grant, payable to the MAT, which will be mainly spent on the legal costs surrounding conversion as well as other costs associated with conversion into the MAT.

**Q: How much say do individual schools have in their own budgets?**

**A:** Individual schools will still set their own budgets with assistance from the MAT. Budgets will need to be signed off by the school's local governing body, and then the MAT Board, prior to formal submission to the EFA.

**Q: If an academy goes into deficit who is ultimately responsible? Individual Academy or MAT?**

**A:** Deficits are not permitted under any circumstances when a school converts to become an Academy. If an Academy did go into deficit, both the Trust and the school would receive a financial notice from the DfE meaning the school is then directly controlled by the DfE and the Trust is no longer the sponsor. The DfE implement a series of measures including removing the Governing Body, removing all delegated financial responsibilities etc.

**Q: How will SEN funding work?**

**A:** Special needs remains the responsibility of the Local Authority so the LA is obliged to deliver the same levels of support to academies as they do to Local Authority maintained schools. This includes access to high tariff needs funding as well as access to specialist provision via the same systems and procedures that maintained schools are subject to.

**Q: Will we still have OFSTED and SIAMS inspections?**

**A:** Yes, OFSTED is responsible for monitoring academies and SIAMS inspections will continue for Church schools.

**Q: What will be the process should our school's results drop, or an OFSTED report identify areas for improvement?**

**A:** As the SDBE MAT is responsible for standards, it will regularly monitor the performance of schools in the SDBE MAT and intervene as necessary (e.g. if pupils are not making required progress). The SDBE MAT would support the school's action plan and broker external support if required. It would also be responsible for ensuring that areas for development in an OFSTED

or SIAMS report are followed up. We would also expect schools to notify the SDBE MAT of any issues.

**Q: Are there benefits of conversion in terms of educational outcomes?**

**A:** Evidence suggests that schools working together in formal partnerships leads to improved standards. Joining the MAT will give you increased opportunity to collaborate with other academies within our MAT.

**Q: Will there be greater flexibility in the curriculum?**

**A:** Yes. Academies do not have to teach the national curriculum and greater freedom allows the school to best meet the specific needs of our pupils. However, all academies must teach a broad and balanced curriculum which includes RE. For pupils below Key Stage 1, academies are required to follow the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The SDBE MAT Board will determine how much flexibility there is to depart from the national curriculum and, as such, schools will be expected to put a case to the SDBE MAT if they wish to exploit this flexibility. It is anticipated that the SDBE MAT will wish to support creative, exciting curricular approaches.

**Q: Does the LA still have responsibilities for academies within the MAT?**

**A:** Yes, the LA still has responsibility for the following:

- home to school transport, including transport for pupils with special educational needs (SEN)
- education psychology, SEN statements and assessment
- assigning SEN resources for pupils who require high levels of additional resource (this is a top-up to formula funding under a separate contract with the LA)
- monitoring of SEN provision and parent partnerships
- prosecuting parents for non-attendance
- provision of pupil referral units for a pupil no longer registered at an academy.