



St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full - John 10:10

Lewis Road | Cheltenham | Gloucestershire | GL51 0HZ

Head Teacher: Mrs N Tippen

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www.st-thomasmore.gloucs.sch.uk

FAQs regarding Academy Conversion

What is a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT)?

An academy trust is a charitable company limited by guarantee. Like all companies, an academy trust will have a memorandum and articles of association. This document sets out the governance structure for the Trust, the company objectives and the rules which govern the running of the company. A multi academy trust (MAT) is one legal entity which contains a number of schools.

Is the Bishop in agreement that Catholic schools should form part of a multi-academy trust?

A clear direction of travel was first communicated by the Bishop to the schools in the Clifton Diocese in the summer of 2017. The Bishop is supportive of the formation of multi academy trusts in order to ensure Catholic education is sustainable and remains true to its key principles for both current and future generations.

What is the vision of the multi-academy trust?

We have agreed the following vision statement for our Trust:

‘Kindness is my only guiding star.
In its light, I sail a straight route, I have my motto written on my sail:
‘To live in love.’

Our Trust family is united in its shared mission to develop our Catholic ethos in order to transform the lives of every child, family and community we serve, in Jesus’ name.

Our vision is to empower every child to excel academically, socially, morally, culturally and spiritually in order that they may flourish as individuals. Assured of the love of God, we strive to educate children within an inclusive and compassionate community, celebrating the gifts and talents of our children and removing barriers to learning. We strive to be a community of life-long learners, contributing to a just and loving society.

Our Trust family is a partnership of equals who work collaboratively, so that everyone can grow and learn together. We celebrate the diversity of our schools, retaining our individual characteristics, whilst working together for the greater good of our whole community.

Through honesty, respect, service and solidarity we value each other as one family. All are welcome.

How does the governance structure change within a MAT?

The Instrument of Governance, which sets out the constitution of governing bodies in the maintained sector, does not apply to academies.

A MAT will have a number of Members who will have certain powers reserved to them, including in most cases, the power to appoint directors and to amend the memorandum and articles of association. Members of a company limited by guarantee are similar to the shareholders in a company limited by shares. They are the ‘guarantors’ of the Academy Trust and promise to pay £10 towards its debts should the Academy Trust be wound up without enough assets to satisfy its creditors. All academy trusts must have at least three members. The board of Directors (Trust Board) has responsibility for all of the academies operated by the MAT and is ultimately accountable for academic standards, the appointment of staff, academy finance and controls and the school estates. A Trust Board may appoint a Local Governing Board, to oversee the work of an individual academy, in effect creating a sub-committee of the Trust.



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What has the Diocese agreed will be the governance structure?

The governance structure for the Multi-Academy Trust has been approved by The Bishop of Clifton and is adopted by all Trusts within the Diocese.

The Trust will have four members who have a general duty to exercise their powers, to further the Trust's charitable objectives. The four members will be the Diocesan Bishop; the Chief Operating Officer from the Diocese; the Director of Schools and Colleges; and a Diocesan Trustee.

The Diocesan Bishop will seek to appoint eight non-executive directors (and charitable trustees). As well as being guardians of the strategic plan, holding the Executive Leadership to account and ensuring financial probity, the Directors will be responsible for establishing an audit and risk committee and a quality and standards committee.

Each school will have its own local governing committee who will operate under an approved scheme of delegation. Foundation governors will be appointed by the Bishop, whilst parent and staff governors will be appointed by their own constituencies. Each local governing committee will have six foundation governors, two parent governors, one staff governor and the Head Teacher (in an ex-officio capacity).

Who are the Trust accountable to?

The Trust would be accountable directly to the Department for Education and our accounts audited by the DfE's Education Skills Funding Agency and external auditors, and we would be overseen by our Regional Schools Commissioner, as well as continue to be subject to Ofsted inspections. As a Catholic Trust, we are also accountable to the Diocese, who appoint the majority of the Directors.

Will staff have to reapply for their jobs?

No, all staff with permanent contracts transfer across to the MAT, as would any on fixed term contracts with an expiry date after the date of opening. Legislation called The Transfer of Undertakings for the Protection of Employment means that existing staff would transfer into the MAT on the same pay, terms, and conditions.

Do teaching staff remain in the Teachers' Pension Scheme?

Teachers working in an academy fall within the scope of the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS), in the same way as colleagues working in the maintained sector. Staff will therefore simply continue their membership of the Scheme. However, as the employer, the Academy Trust will be responsible for making contributions to the TPS and for all other administrative responsibilities that fall to employers under the pension regulations.

What about pension arrangements for associate and support staff?

It is a requirement of the Academy Funding Agreement that all support staff are offered membership of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS). As the Trust is obliged to offer LGPS membership, staff transferring from a maintained school will simply continue scheme membership, or be enrolled in the LGPS as new members.

Why are schools joining MATs both locally and nationally?

Schools can use the strong collaboration and accountability afforded by the MAT to drive up standards and share best practice and services across the Trust, replacing aspects of former local authority support.

What geographical area will our Trust serve?

The Little Way Catholic Educational Trust will be made up of the Catholic Primary schools in Gloucestershire County Council Local Authority. The schools are located from Chipping Camden in the north of the County to Schools in Cheltenham, Gloucester, Churchdown, Nympsfield and Stroud. Our schools serve a diverse socio-economic



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community from rural schools to schools serving large urban areas. The schools have a history of collaboration and have worked in partnership with St Peter's Catholic High School & Sixth Form College and St Roses Special School.

What are the potential benefits of multi-academy trust status?

There are many potential benefits of forming a MAT, these include:

- Pupils benefitting from being educated within a bigger, single legal entity which operates with a number of common policies, systems and practice, enabling individual Head Teachers to focus on teaching and learning.
- Opportunities to share teaching expertise across a larger group of schools.
- Enhanced professional development opportunities for staff, including opportunities for career progression within a larger organisation.
- Cost savings created through bulk buying power.
- Centralised support for all business and finance functions.
- A tiered governance structure which enables expertise to be employed at appropriate levels.
- The potential appointment of specialist support which may not be affordable for a single stand-alone school, e.g. speech and language therapist, sensory play equipment, IT technician support.
- Opportunities to build internal capacity to support school improvement, therefore being less dependent on support from the Local Authority or commercial providers.
- Opportunities to develop shared-resources and curriculum and extra-curriculum opportunities, whilst still recognizing the uniqueness of each school's contribution to The Trust.

Will the name of the school change?

There is no plan to change the name of the school.

Will the uniform change?

There is no plan to change the uniform.

Will there be changes to the term times?

There is no intention to make any changes to the term times at present or for the foreseeable future as these would conflict with the opening times of other schools and cause difficulties for parents.

Will there be changes to the length of the school day?

There are no plans to change the length of the school day. Changes could be made but these would only be done after full consultation with parents and staff and even then would only be made if it were in the best interests of the learners in each school.

How is academy funding calculated and who receives the funding?

Academies receive the same level of per-pupil funding as they would receive from the LA as a maintained school. The general annual grant (GAG), funding will therefore be based on the level of Local Authority funding already calculated for the school. The Government is clear that becoming an academy should not bring about a financial advantage or disadvantage to a school. However, academies have greater freedom on how they use their budgets. The GAG is received by the MAT, as the Funding Agreement has been signed by the company Directors. It is common practice for the MAT to deduct any central costs associated with membership of the MAT before delegating the funds to each academy.



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Can schools convert with a budget deficit or surplus?

If a school has a significant deficit, applications may be postponed until it has been managed down to a reasonable level and has a recovery plan. Schools with surplus balances can carry these forward when they become an academy.

What support is available to academies if they get into financial difficulty?

Academies, like all schools, are expected to maintain strict budgetary controls and are required by their Supplementary Funding Agreement to balance their budgets. The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) monitors academies' financial position on behalf of the Secretary of State, and the ESFA has intervention powers if a Trust is not managing its budget. The Trust must submit an annually approved budget to the ESFA.

Who controls the school budget?

The annual budget for the Trust must be ratified by the company Directors, who ultimately have responsibility for the financial health of the company. However, Local Governing Bodies (LGB) usually work with the Trust to set the budget for the individual academies. Once the budget has been ratified by the Trust, the school and its Governors are often responsible for monitoring and authorising expenditure within budget and in accordance with the Trust's Finance Policy.

What happens to admissions arrangements within a MAT?

All schools, whether maintained schools or academies, have to abide by the Admissions Code. Whilst the academy trust will become the admission's authority, any changes to admissions arrangements must be consulted on in the same way, as is currently the case.

Can a school exit a MAT once it has joined?

Schools can be directed by the Department for Education to move MATs if their performance is not being well managed within their existing MAT. Schools cannot exit a MAT to return to being a Local Authority maintained school as on joining a MAT each school contracts with the Department for Education to receive its funding directly.