

Strategy for School System Development Jan 2024 – Dec 2026



LDBE

Lichfield Diocesan
Board of Education

Approved by LDBE 5 December 2023

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**DIOCESE OF
LICHFIELD**

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Strategy for school system development January 2024 to December 2026

The Church of England has a strong and proud tradition of providing education since the introduction of national schools in 1811.

We give thanks for our Christian heritage and legacy and continue to desire to see God's love expressed in our service to children and young people. Our commitment comes from a belief that each child is unique, special, and made in the image of God.

The Lichfield Diocese Board of Education (LDBE) has developed this school organisation strategy taking into consideration the national educational landscape. Although the White Paper outlining academisation for all schools by 2030 did not come to fruition, that national mood and the vision for schools as outlined in the Church of England's document '[Our Hope for a Flourishing School System](#)' (July 2023), remains and the direction of travel is for all schools, in time, to be in good multi-academy trusts. The ambition being that all can flourish, to experience 'life in all its fullness' (John 10:10).



Therefore, the vision of the LDBE is that all children in Church of England Schools within the Diocese, should be in a family of schools, within the wider diocese family.

As part of 'Growing Faith' the LDBE wishes to develop opportunities for collaborative work and development between schools, and schools and churches, as well as wider faith initiatives. In order that all can '*come follow Christ in the footsteps of St Chad.*'

Our desire is to see an education system that is not only compliant, consistent, and creative – thus ensuring academic robustness, but is distinctive in its care and inclusion of all, underpinned by Christian beliefs and values that promote the development of character and spirituality.

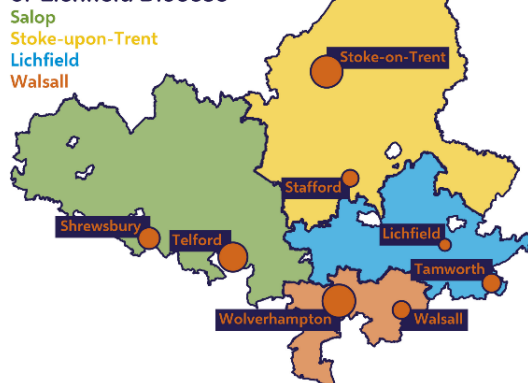
In order to achieve this, the LDBE works within the Lichfield Board of Finance, in particular our mission and clergy teams in order that schools can be supported in the faith and spiritual development and in so doing, schools act as a conduit for Growing Faith and Worshiping Communities.

The LDBE is committed to, and welcomes, the ongoing culture change within the national Church which expects that every aspect of mission and ministry is seen through the lens of what it means for schools, churches and households to all grow in faith together - that is the Growing Faith adventure!

Context of Diocese of Lichfield

The diocese covers 1744 square miles, covering 7 Local Authorities; Stoke, Staffordshire, Shropshire, Walsall, Wolverhampton, Sandwell and Telford and Wrekin.

The Four Archdeaconries of Lichfield Diocese



It is compiled of 429 parishes and 582 churches. From East to West, it stretches from the Staffordshire Moorlands to the Welsh border and from above Stoke in the North to the Birmingham border in the south. Approximately 2 million people live in the diocese. There are 4 archdeaconries and 27 deaneries.

Functions and responsibilities of the LDBE

Every diocese has a statutory Diocesan Board of Education and Director of Education which have a range of advisory and statutory powers with regard to schools, as set out in the DBE Measure.

The main functions are:

- ✚ to promote or assist in the promotion of education in the diocese, which is consistent with the faith and practice of the Church of England.
- ✚ to promote or assist in the promotion of religious education and religious worship in schools in the diocese.
- ✚ to promote or assist in the promotion of church schools in the diocese and to advise the governors of such schools and trustees of church educational endowments and any other body or person concerned on any matter affecting church schools in the diocese.
- ✚ to promote co-operation between the Board and bodies or persons concerned in any respect with education in the diocese.

The LDBE carries out its functions not only within the national educational landscape but importantly within the visions of the Diocese of Lichfield and the National church.

The statutory powers of the Diocesan Board of Education are set out in the [Diocesan Boards of Education 2021 Measure](#).

School organisation

The view of the LDBE is that all Church of England schools should be proactive in planning for their future. The role of the LDBE and the Education Team is to facilitate, advise and support the further development of established multi academy trusts across the diocese that are strong, sustainable and support Church of England Schools, enabling all to flourish.

By being part of a strong MAT, our family of schools will be part of a strong school-led education system, with MATs accountable for schools within their local MAT community.

Strategy of Diocese of Lichfield

The strong preference of the LDBE is that growth in the academy sector is within the identified academies who hold a majority church articles model, we are aware of exceptional circumstances that may arise when another solution needs to be found. Where a school needs to convert to a MAT, because of OFSTED categorisation or school improvement needs and there is not a suitable majority articles MAT to accept the school, the LDBE may allow the conversion of a voluntary controlled school or former voluntary controlled school into a suitable existing, sustainable minority articles MAT.

The LDBE has identified a number of academy trusts who will, over time, become trusts available for the conversion of Church Schools (both Voluntary Controlled and Voluntary Aided). These trusts have adopted or are in process of adopting, the appropriate articles of association for church schools. One of these trusts is in the process of being set up as a joint trust between the Diocese of Lichfield and the Diocese of Hereford, in order to support schools in Shropshire and Telford and

Wrekin Local Authorities (covering the county of Shropshire).

In these trusts, it is expected that small schools are clustered together in localities, so that they can share resources and expertise in a bid to aid being self-sustaining.

Trusts who have existing church schools within their structure will not have any further transfers of schools to their trusts, unless they have existing majority church articles of association or adopt the new model church articles.

Trusts containing church schools who wish to either merge with another or be taken over by another may do so, on the provision that the old articles are preserved or the new model church articles are adopted. Unless the trust being merged, contains a school which was formerly voluntary aided, in which case the new model articles must be adopted.

By identifying particular trusts to partner with, the diocese will pursue the wider aspects of its work, including Growing Faith and Worshipping Communities.

Key drivers and Key Performance Indicators

Success criteria:

- ✚ to have networks of schools who collaborate together, in which children flourish.
- ✚ trusts that have the Christian vision central to everything they do.
- ✚ Whist in our schools, the children and young people are invited to experience something of God's love and come to understand the good news of Jesus and what it means to follow Him, to help them make informed choices about life and faith.
- ✚ high educational outcomes in our schools that are at or above national comparative averages/benchmarks in the judged performance areas.
- ✚ children and young people receive a broad range of educational experiences, allowing them to flourish and achieve their potential.
- ✚ be inclusive to everyone, as Jesus showed in his teaching and his actions.
- ✚ strong system leadership, supporting national priorities – both at National Church and DFE level.
- ✚ schools being at the heart of the community they serve.
- ✚ working with clergy and mission to grow younger and more diverse.
- ✚ well established network of worshipping communities.

Key performance indicators:

- ✚ all schools and academies in the Diocese of Lichfield receive a J1 judgement in SIAMs inspection.
- ✚ the proportion of Church of England schools in the Diocese of Lichfield that are good or better as judged by Ofsted is at the national average or better. No schools are inadequate.
- ✚ all schools joining a MAT are judged as good or better at their first graded inspection post conversion.
- ✚ attainment measures are at least in line with contextually similar schools nationally.
- ✚ small schools demonstrate performance that is at least in line with large schools (i.e. small schools are flourishing).
- ✚ the number of worship communities continues to grow and thrive.
- ✚ wider diocesan statistics demonstrate greater interaction of the church with younger generations and a more diverse community.

Why join a MAT

Multi Academy Trusts have now existed for approximately 15 years. The government approach was that all schools needed to be in a MAT by 2030, but the whitepaper containing this did not progress through parliament.

In reality, 2030 is too soon for all schools to be in MATs, as the system does not have enough capacity to expand at that rate and Local Authorities do not have the capacity to convert schools at such a rate.

For church schools, the MAT will have a biblically underpinned vision that will thread through all of its church schools but

allow individuality and expression at school level.

The primary benefit of being part of a MAT is the opportunity for collaboration between

schools

within the

trust, as

resources,

expertise,

CPD and

knowledge can be shared between academies. Across a region, academies in one area can often gain access to training and development that they normally could not receive, by being part of a MAT.

Additionally, pooling resources across schools within the trust allows for greater financial stability. The trust's governing body can allocate funds to areas of schools that need it most rather than having to stretch resources thinly across multiple locations in a single school.



Another advantage of joining a MAT is that it gives each school direct access to a network of other professionals in the education sector. Trust members can easily contact peers in their field and gather advice where needed.

Students can also benefit from being part of a MAT by taking advantage of opportunities and experiences they may not have had access to as part of an individual school.

Joining a MAT also ensures that every school within the trust follows similar standards when developing curricula, training teachers, or assessing students, resulting in more consistent educational experiences for pupils across all member schools.

Finally, all MATs have an accountability and quality assurance system that can give confidence to those responsible for their governance and oversight that the information shared about the trust is accurate and reliable.

MAT governance structure

This section is taken from The National College for Learning and Teaching – [governance in Multi academy Trusts](#)

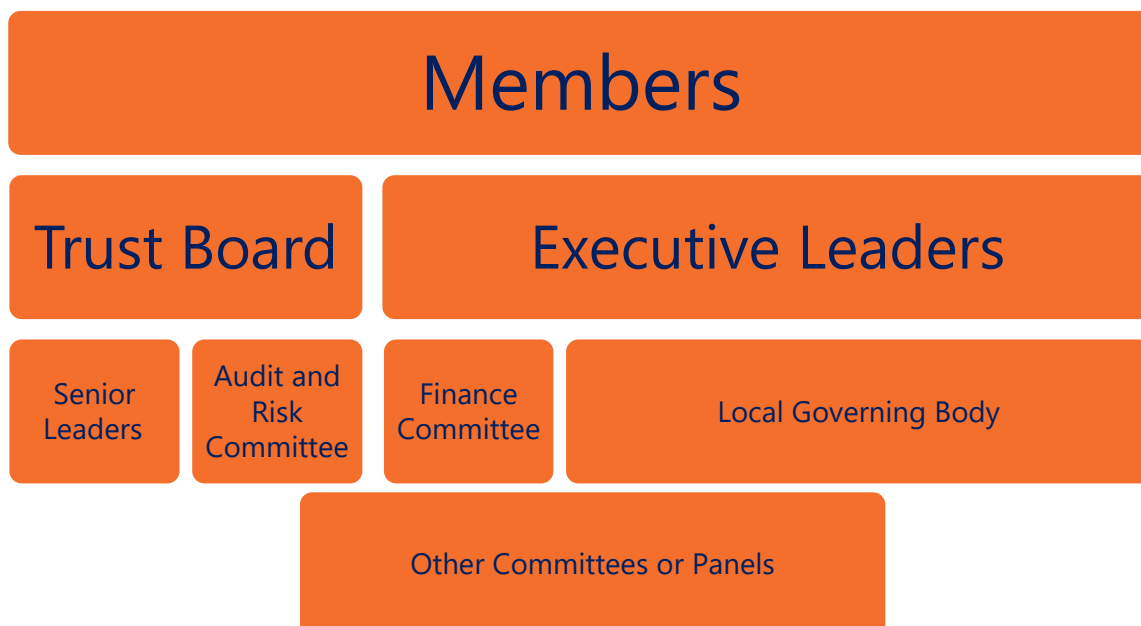
Members

The members are akin to the shareholders of a company. They have ultimate control over the academy trust, with the ability to appoint some of the trustees and the right to amend the trust's articles of association. The diocese has produced separate guidance about being a Diocesan Corporate Member.

Trustees

The trustees are responsible for the same three core governance functions performed by the governing body in a maintained school: setting the direction, holding the headteacher to account and ensuring financial probity. As charity trustees, they must

also ensure that they are complying with charity law requirements. Academy trusts are charitable companies, and the trustees are company directors and must comply with company law requirements. This may sound daunting, but, in reality, the duties are largely the same as those of a governor of a maintained school, such as regularly attending meetings, managing conflicts of interest, seeking advice from the academy's leadership team and ensuring the academy has appropriate procedures in place for reporting financial information. The model articles state that the chair of the board of trustees will also be a member, thereby ensuring a link between the two layers. However, while trustees can also serve as members, the most effective governance models recognise that the members are responsible for holding the trustees to account. Some separation between those serving as trustees and those serving as members is, therefore, desirable for achieving robust accountability.



Local governors

Individuals who sit on local governing bodies (LGBs) are referred to as 'local governors'. This is because trustees can delegate governance functions to the local level. Trustees have complete discretion over what is delegated to each LGB. They may, for example, decide to delegate all functions to academies in the chain that are performing well and only a few to those academies that need greater support. Alternatively, where a MAT wishes to retain all governance functions centrally, it may establish an advisory body at the school

level, which has no formal governance function, but which advises the board of trustees on its decisions.

The details of what is delegated from the trustees to local governors should be detailed in a scheme of delegation for each LGB. This should make it clear what functions the trustees have delegated to the LGB and for which academies. It is important to note that local governors are not trustees of the academy trust unless they also sit on the academy trust board. Everyone involved in the MAT governance

arrangements should ensure that they understand what their role is. This should be clear from the scheme of delegation. It should be noted, however, that even where trustees have delegated functions to local governors, the trustees remain accountable and responsible for these functions. Trustees should, therefore, be satisfied about the LGB's ability to adequately perform any functions delegated to them. It is understood that the Department for Education (DfE) is considering using the next version of the funding agreement and model articles to give MATs even greater flexibility in their governance

arrangements. This would allow a MAT to establish an LGB that is responsible for more than one academy. The DfE also intends to remove the current requirement that, where an academy does not have a LGB, it must have an advisory body. This would be replaced with a more general requirement that the governance of each academy must be informed by local intelligence. This will shift the focus away from prescribing structures to focusing on outcomes, leaving the MAT free to decide what mechanism would work best for each academy in the chain.

Which MATs are available to convert to

Historically, voluntary aided schools could only join a MAT which held majority church articles. This meant that the 'members' of the trust had to be greater than 50% from diocese appointments.

Voluntary controlled schools could join a MAT with either majority articles or one with minority articles. A minority articles MAT has member appointments from the diocese that make up less than 50% of the membership.

In September 2023, the Department for Education, in consultation with the national church, changed the model articles so that no distinction is made between minority and majority church articles, they are simply the [church articles](#). These are used as alongside a [memorandum of understanding](#) between the national church and the DfE to manage the process of academisation of schools.

Following this change, all church school, whether voluntary aided or voluntary controlled, must join a MAT that has either majority church articles or has adopted the new model articles (as a majority).



The following trusts are the diocesan trusts; they hold either majority church articles or the new church articles (post September 2023). These are the only trusts that are currently available for schools to convert into.



Plus, The Shropshire MAT, which will be a joint MAT between the Dioceses of Hereford and Lichfield, Name TBC

There are further trusts who are currently considering adoption of the new church model articles. Should these be adopted, the education team will consider how best to include them within the MAT strategy.

Currently, there are a further 22 MATs/SATs in the Diocese of Lichfield who have church schools in their family. These trusts may not accept further Church of England Schools into the MAT until the new church model articles have been adopted. If a MAT that does not hold the new Church articles or majority articles and wishes to adopt such articles and become part of the diocesan academisation strategy, contact should be made with the Director of Education.

It should be noted; that not all the trusts above may be able to accept schools joining them at all times. It is quite normal for trusts to have growth phases and consolidation phases. This is influenced by, but not limited to: the Ofsted profile of the trust, current capacity and leadership stability, results of recent inspections, recent data sets.

Before talking to potential trusts, schools should arrange to meet the Director of Education to discuss the trusts available and recommendations on schools to partner with in the process. A meeting with the Director of Education will be a pre-requirement to new conversions being presented to the board from January 2024.

Specific Situations:

Stand-alone trusts (SATs) and single school MATs

Maintained schools can no longer form a SAT or a single school MAT, they must join a MAT. Current SATs and single school

MATs should be actively considering a MAT to join and should review the options available above.

Termination Warnings and Academy Orders

Dependent on Ofsted gradings and capacity, schools and academies can either be given notice to join a trust or told they need to move from one trust to another by

the DFE. In this situation, the LDBE will work with the academy/trust concerned and the DFE to identify an appropriate trust for it to join and will support it along the way. New Multi Academy Trusts:

The default policy of the diocese is not to allow the establishment of any more multi-academy trusts. The diocese has developed capacity within its strategy and has a potential route available to all schools.

However, if conversion cannot be managed into one of the established MATs, there is the possibility of a new MAT achieving diocesan approval, subject to the conditions and provisos outlined below.

Potential trusts should also be aware of have regard to:

- ✚ Guidance – [Commissioning High Quality Trusts](#)
- ✚ [Memorandum of Understanding between the National Society and the DFE](#)
- ✚ Guidance – [Church academies: model documents](#)

Circumstances and provisos:

- ✚ A school seeking to form a new trust should seek advice from the Director of Education before proceeding with any further preliminary work. All routes available to join an existing MAT must have been explored prior to this.
- ✚ The new MAT establishment and development plan clearly identifies how it will rapidly meet all the criteria of the [Trust Quality Descriptors](#), with particular emphasis on school improvement and accountability.
- ✚ The founding schools must be graded at least good by Ofsted in all areas and the data profile for academic achievement and progress must be at the national average or better.
- ✚ The new MAT must produce a growth and financial plan that demonstrates how it will rapidly reach 3000 pupils in size* (naming the schools converting and giving their commitment) and be financially sustainable and healthy.
- ✚ The new MAT identifies where it will source and broker highly effective project management support and experienced leadership advice in the setting up of the MAT.
- ✚ There is no financial contribution required from the LDBE. Potential newly forming MATs should be aware of the limitations on TEG and TCAF funding.
- ✚ The DFE is satisfied with the proposals.

- ✚ The new MAT must adopt the new model church articles.
- ✚ The information related to the above will be discussed by the Lichfield Diocese Board of Education who will make a decision on if the new MAT will be formed or not. Their decision is final.

**Unless the function of the trust is to be for small schools, in which case an ambition of less than 3000 will be considered.*

Cross Diocesan Multi Academy Trusts

The Lichfield Diocese Board of Education will not allow any schools within the Lichfield Diocese to join a MAT that is based within another diocese. The exception to this is Shropshire MAT, which was specifically set up for this purpose.

Our approach to small schools

All schools are loved by the communities they serve, and this is particularly the case in small schools. They are usually rural and are the centre of their community, often alongside the church. They provide an essential service and a focal and meeting point in the community. The diocese wants to preserve small schools and see them flourish into the future.

Small schools face difficulties in balancing their budgets, appointing and retaining high quality staff and having a scale to make them economically sustainable.



Therefore, the diocese has designed a strategy for the future of small schools within the academy sector.

Approach option 1:

In joining a trust, the approach of the Diocese of Lichfield is for small schools in nearby localities to join the same MAT. Ideally, this should be together or as staged growth. Schools waiting to join could become associate members in the interim.

As a group of local small schools, the schools work with the trust to form a local hub where resources and staff can be shared. This will be different in each locality and for each trust, so it isn't possible to identify exactly how this will look. However, some of the features that it could include are:

- ✚ Executive leadership
- ✚ Sharing of site staff/ resources/ contracts
- ✚ Sharing of learning resources
- ✚ Sharing of specialist teaching provision and resources
- ✚ Sharing of staff or use of staff across sites for cover arrangements
- ✚ Sharing of business management and finance arrangements
- ✚ Use of shared improvement plan across a number of sites
- ✚ Federated governance arrangements

By working collaboratively, schools can make efficiency savings which make the school sustainable and prioritise teaching and learning. This in turn, allows more resources into teaching and learning, giving children a better educational experience.

Approach option 2:

A small school or small schools, near a large school join the same MAT, forming a local cluster of schools. The small schools therefore receive the benefits of the resources of the larger school and receive the same benefits as a cluster of small schools.

The Lichfield Diocese Board of Education has completed a mapping exercise of schools within the diocese and can therefore make recommendations around schools which could be grouped together to join MATs in collaboration. We have also worked with our diocesan MATs to identify areas of operation – i.e. which geographical areas of the diocese the trust covers. The suggested working group is just that, a suggestion. There may be particular local concerns or needs that would make some modification to that list appropriate. Some

schools are also large enough to carry being in a more dispersed trust. The Director of Education can explore potential working groups and potential trusts with a school considering academisation as part of the initial meeting.

It should be noted that the strategy and mapping exercise the LDBE has completed only applies to Church of England Schools. We encourage working together with non-church schools and these schools can join a MAT together, provided it is one of the diocesan MATs as outlined in this document.

New Schools

Where a Local Authority announces a Free School tender process, the Diocese of Lichfield Board of Education will work with one or more of our diocesan academy trusts to place a bid for the school.

The new school must fit in with the strategic direction of the academy trust and so it is possible that there will not be a bid for all free schools. However, we hope and expect that as the system grows and develops this will no longer be a concern.

Middle Schools

Areas of Staffordshire, within the Lichfield Diocese have middle schools. Wherever possible, the LDBE would like to see middle schools in a MAT that includes other middle schools and primary or/and first schools. All the middle schools in Staffordshire are deemed secondary, as they run to the end of Year 8. However, their Key Performance Indicators are in Year 6 – with the Year 6 SATs tests. The blend of expertise for

primary years and middle years will be of benefit to middle schools. Any decisions regarding this should be balanced with how geographically close other schools in the potential trust are, thus enabling collaborative working.

There are no high schools (exclusively Year 9 and above) with Church of England designation within the diocese.

Secondary Schools

A minority of secondary schools remain in Local Authority control or are in single academy MATs. The opinion of the LDBE is that these schools should be in a trust with nearby Church of England Schools. Thus, strengthening the local bond and enabling local partner working.

Education Services Company and Property Company

The Diocese of Lichfield Board of Education will undertake a business case exercise, with a view to exploring the establishment of an education services company. This company, if established, will be separate to the Diocese of Lichfield Education Trust and owned by the Diocese of Lichfield. It would be a not-for-profit company.

The most important aspect of consideration is does this development enhance and support the strategic aims of the Lichfield Diocese Board of Education. It should also be explored and noted that this work must enhance the core work of the education team in developing the Christian distinctiveness and foundation of our Church of England schools.

The following elements are suggested for consideration:

- ✚ Governance professional and clerking services, at school level and trust level
- ✚ School improvement services – offering a core function of improvement partner visits and external quality assurance. Access to specialists for particular areas either through retained staff or by contracting independent advisors and / or work upskilling school improvement professionals in how their development work supports Christian Distinctiveness development.
- ✚ Human resource's function and advice
- ✚ Payroll services
- ✚ Financial management function – budget management, setting and accounts.
- ✚ Property management function, including compliance.