

Strategy for School System Development Jan 2024 – Dec 2026



LDBE

Lichfield Diocesan
Board of Education

Approved By LDBE, 3rd March 2025

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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. 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 belief of the LDBE is the direction of travel for all schools overtime, is in good multi-academy trusts. The ambition being that all can flourish, to experience 'life in all it's 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.*'

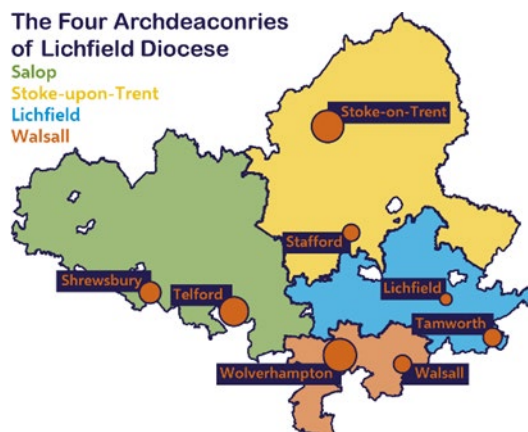
Our desire is to see an education system that is not only compliant, consistent, and creative – thus ensuring academic robustness, but is distinctive in its care and inclusion of all, underpinned by Christian beliefs and values that promote the development of character and spirituality.

In order to achieve this, the LDBE works within the Lichfield Diocese Board of Finance (the synodical governance structure of the diocese). In particular our mission, vocations and ministry teams in order that schools can be supported in faith and spiritual development and in so doing, schools act as a conduit for Growing Faith and the development of 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! Education is fully integrated into the Lichfield Diocese strategy for 2024 – 2030 'Seeking the Kingdom'

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.



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 in the Diocese of Lichfield will join a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) at a point in the future. The role of the LDBE and the Education Team is to facilitate, advise and support the further development of established Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) across the diocese, in the ambition that these are strong, sustainable and support Church of England Schools, enabling all to flourish. The role of the LDBE is not to find schools to join specific MATs, advocate for one MAT over another, to grow MATs or to force the merger of MATs. However, it will challenge views and set-ups within the MAT sector in order that the structure of the sector as a whole has the potential to provide the best education for children and young people.

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. In doing so, we will work with our academy trust partners, Local Authorities and the Department for Education in order to help facilitate the system.

In order to understand the system better, from spring 2025 we ask all maintained settings (i.e. schools not in a trust) to ensure that they discuss joining an academy trust as a Governor agenda item at least annually. There is a feedback form to completed for us regarding this, including school level data to allow us to more closely analyse the sector.

This information will assist us helping to advise the sector on future development in a general sense. It is absolutely not to identify schools for trusts to approach.

The number of MATs available for schools to join within the Lichfield Diocese has increased since our strategy was released in January 2024, with more MATs either having taken Majority Articles of Association (having sought the consent of the LDBE to do so) or be in the process of taking these articles. In the past, the LDBE has relied upon the Department for Education to ensure that a MAT is of sufficient quality for a school or a group of schools to join it. Going forward, the LDBE will take a more detailed view in assuring itself that the trust has the capacity for expansion and that the school will flourish academically under the care of the MAT as well as in terms of its Christian Distinctiveness. This assurance will include:

- The track record of developing and maintaining a strong Christian ethos at school level and evidence of how this is led and developed at trust level.
- Trust level achievement data, including headline figures and achievement for those who are disadvantaged, as well as trends in school performance since schools in the trust joined the MAT.
- The attendance of children across the trust, looking at national benchmarks and trends
- Evidence of appropriate plans being in place for robust school improvement.

The MATs that the LDBE has the privilege of working with identified further on in this document, alongside those school categories which are eligible to join each trust.

Key Drivers and Key Performance Indicators

Success criteria:

- ✚ To have networks of schools who collaborate together, in which children flourish.
- ✚ MATs 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 shown to be providing an appropriate standard of education, is at the national level or better. No schools are inadequate.
- ✚ Ofsted inspections of schools that have converted show strong practice across the Ofsted framework evaluation base, providing a high quality of education.
- ✚ 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 worshipping 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 previous government's 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 was 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.

MATs bring a number of benefits, these include:

- ✚ Organised collaboration
- ✚ A high degree of accountability for progress and standards
- ✚ A school improvement system and model
- ✚ Functions such as finance, HR, buildings covered via the MAT
- ✚ Sharing of resources and expertise
- ✚ Strong financial planning and oversight

Every MAT offers a unique opportunity to schools and therefore schools should explore what is on offer in the MATs that are available for them to join, in order to come a decision about what is right for their setting.

MAT Governance Structure

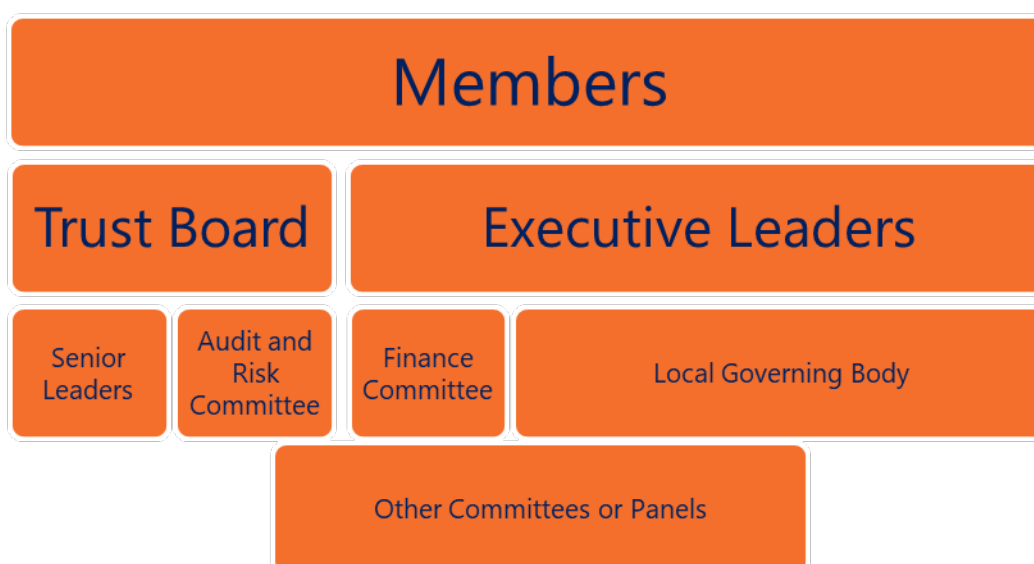
This section is taken from The National College for Learning and Teaching – [governance in Multi academy Trusts](#)

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

Types of Trust

Majority Member and Trustees – The Diocese appoints more than 50% of the Member board (usually 3 out of 5) and the majority of the trust board. Any type of school can join these trusts, including non-church schools.

Majority Member, Minority Trustees - The Diocese appoints more than 50% of the Member board (usually 3 out of 5) and a minority (usually 25%) of the trust board. Voluntary Controlled and non-church schools can join these trusts. Voluntary Aided Schools cannot join these trusts.

Minority Member and Minority Trustees - The Diocese appoints less than 50% of the Member board and a minority (usually approx. 25%) of the trust board. non-church schools can join these trusts. Voluntary Aided and Voluntary Controlled Schools cannot join these trusts anymore.

Majority Member, Majority Trustee Trusts

- [St Bartholomew's CE Academies Trust](#)
- [St Chad's Academies Trust](#)
- [The Key Education Trust](#)
- [The Moorlands Primary Federation](#)
- [Staffordshire Schools Multi Academy Trust](#)
- [Shropshire Church of England Academies Trust](#) (joint MAT with Diocese of Hereford)
- [The Talentum Learning Trust](#)
- [Three Spires Trust](#)

Majority Member, Minority Trustee Trusts

- [Empower Trust](#)
- [The Marches Academy Trust](#)
- [St Martin's Academies Trust](#)

Multi Academy Trusts where schools can join are all asked if they would like to provide information to appear on the LDBE website. The information we receive is shared on [our website](#).

Minority Member, Minority Trustee Trusts

- Fields Multi Academy Trust
- Innovate2Educate Partnership
- Orchard Community Trust
- Penk Valley Academy Trust
- St Bart's Multi Academy Trust (Stoke)
- Staffordshire University Academy Trust
- John Taylor Multi Academy Trust
- Mid-Trent Multi Academy Trust
- The Arthur Terry Learning Partnership
- Ignite Learning Partnership
- Future Generations Trust
- Manor Multi Academy Trust
- Codsall Multi-Academy Trust
- Affinity Learning Partnership
- Woodard Academy Trust

Single Academy Trusts/ Single School MAT

- St Edward's Church of England Academy, Leek (Middle)
- St Paul's Church of England Academy, Tipton
- Blue Coat Church of England Academy, Walsall (Secondary)
- St Mary's C of E Primary School, Tunstall

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, there was distinction in articles of association between Majority and Minority Church article MATs. The LDBE took the decision that schools must join a MAT that has either majority church articles or has adopted the new model articles with a majority at Member level.



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 must arrange to meet the Director of Education to discuss the trusts available and suggestions on schools to partner with in the process. A meeting

with the Director of Education is a pre-requirement of academy conversion requests being presented to the Lichfield Diocese Board of Education for consideration.

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 SATs should be actively considering a MAT to join and should review the options available above at least yearly.

Termination Warnings and Academy Orders

If the DFE determines that a school requires 'structural change' i.e. needs to join a MAT or move from one MAT to another, Group level. 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.

Mergers and Acquisitions

It is inevitable that in the medium term, there will be consolidation in the MAT sector. A number of smaller and medium size MATs are likely to decide that they serve the education of the children best by being part of a larger organisation.

The LDBE takes the view that the system will deliver this. We will however, explore options with trusts investigating this prospect and arrange introductions or meetings between trusts as appropriate.

The policy is as follows:

Trusts containing church schools may absorb other MATs into their MAT, without any change of Articles of Association. This does not require consent of the LDBE.

Where a formerly Voluntary Aided school is to be included, the Articles of Association must be 50% Church of England at Member and Trustee level, even if they are not currently so.

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 in a majority model at both Member and Trustee level.

In considering an application for a trust to be absorbed into another, the LDBE will want to see evidence that trusts with the relevant existing articles (i.e. trusts already containing Church of England schools) have been thoroughly explored.

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

New Multi Academy Trusts

The default policy of the LDBE 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.

There are two possible routes to establishing a new MAT or an existing MAT becoming a Church of England MAT. These are that there is not a suitable MAT for the school or schools to join and / or the establishment of a new MAT would support the Lichfield Diocese 'Seeking the Kingdom' Strategy (2025-2030).

Should a group wish to establish a new MAT under these provisions, they need to arrange an appointment with the Diocesan Director of Education to discuss the proposal.

In the considering the establishment of new MATs, the LDBE has set out the following requirements.

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 or reflect a similar picture across the new Ofsted report card 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.
- ✚ 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.

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](#)

**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.

Shropshire Church of England Academies Trust was set up to serve geographical Shropshire and therefore covers both dioceses (and Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin Local Authorities).

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.

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, in time, be in a trust with nearby Church of England Schools. Thus, strengthening the local bond and enabling local partner working.