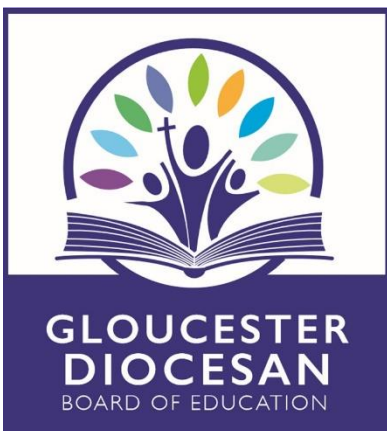


Gloucester Diocesan Board of Education

Schools' Strategy 2024 A Good Home for All Church Schools



With high aspiration for excellence, we are passionate for all within our family of schools to experience God's love in a culture of care, dignity and hope.



Rationale

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 Gloucester Board of Education (GDBE) has developed this school organisation strategy taking into consideration the national educational landscape, including Church of England and Government policy, and the varied contexts of the schools in this diocese.

It is written to provide schools with an understanding of how the GDBE, schools, multi-academy trusts and churches will work together to sustain the family of church schools and ensure that they flourish for the benefit of the children and families they serve.

The aim is to enable the pupils, students and staff in schools across the diocese to thrive in their education, work and wider lives; that is, to experience 'life in all its fullness' (John 10:10). The GDBE aims to ensure that all children can experience life in all its fullness through high quality provision that enables them to flourish in all that they are and all that they do. This is through an education that is not only academically robust, but is distinctive in its care and inclusion of all, underpinned by Christian values that promote the development of character and spirituality.

In the context of current Government policy and the national education landscape, the GDBE supports the benefits of all church schools finding a good home within a Multi-Academy Trust and this strategy seeks to support all in our family of schools to achieve this. The GDBE takes seriously the responsibility to ensure there is sufficient capacity to enable this. The MATs that the GDBE works with are expected to work collaboratively to the benefit of all schools within them and within our Diocese and to become part of our Diocesan Education Family. In addition, the GDBE 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

The Diocese of Gloucester family of schools spans two local authorities (Gloucestershire and South Gloucestershire), two archdeaconries and nine deaneries. There are a variety of Church Schools across the Diocese, including small rural primary schools with mixed age classes, large city schools, schools with attached nursery provision and wraparound care, as well as All Saints Academy - our only Church of England secondary school. Some schools are maintained by a local authority and are designated as either Voluntary Aided or Voluntary Controlled; some maintained schools have entered into a formal agreement as part of a federation or group of schools. An increasing number of schools are part of a multi-academy trust (MAT), including those in the diocesan trust – the Diocese of Gloucester Academies Trust (DGAT). In addition, some schools are standalone academies (SATs).

[The Current MAT Options for Church Schools in the Diocese of Gloucester](#) document gives an overview of the organisation of church schools within the Diocese and the options currently available to schools exploring joining a MAT. The GDBE values all its schools equally for their individual and unique contribution to education across the diocese, alongside schools that are not designated as CofE. The GDBE encourages schools and MATs across the diocese to support one another regardless of their size, location or leadership model.

Do not look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. Philippians 2:4

The GDBE recognises and values the role of small schools in community cohesion and living out the CofE Vision for Education, 'Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good'. This perspective is captured well in national documentation.

The GDBE recognises that schools with deficit budgets may feel that they have limited appeal to a MAT as it is the responsibility of the MAT to take on any deficit at point of conversion. As a maintained school, it is expected that they will be working in partnership with the local authority to ensure a clear deficit recovery plan and should share this information as part of the process of due diligence and conditional consent. Nevertheless, for all schools, where forward plans are weak and viability issues have not been addressed, including falling roll and financial challenges, it must be recognised there is the potential for school failure and even closure if robust partnership arrangements and financial management have not been clearly agreed.

Functions and responsibilities of the GDBE

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

(<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/gs-2131b-draft-dbe-measure.pdf>).

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 GDBE carries out its functions not only within the national educational landscape but importantly within the visions of the Diocese of Gloucester, the GDBE and the National church. The GDBE itself is both the appropriate religious authority and, in the case of Multi Academy Trusts, the Diocesan Corporate Member (DCM). The GDBE derives its authority for these roles from the Diocesan Board of Education Measure and conducts itself according to this legal framework. The GDBE, through its DDE and Education Team, will challenge and support its family of schools and MATs, and advocate for them at regional and national levels in regard to the above functions and responsibilities and to enable their distinctively Christian flourishing.

The GDBE treasures its partnership with the Trusts that provide homes for our church schools and will expect to work in collaboration with them to support the flourishing of church schools within them. It has the right to quality assure the work that MATs do to support the flourishing of church schools within them and provide guidance on how their Christian Distinctiveness is to be supported.

School Organisation

The view of the GDBE is that all Church of England schools should be proactive in planning for their future. By finding a good home within a strong MAT, church schools within our family will be part of a strong school-led education system – with MATs accountable for schools within their local MAT community. The GDBE encourages and supports its schools to be proactive in finding the right home within a MAT landscape by considering the following questions:

- Who are we?
- Why are we here?
- How then should we live?

This includes an expectation that existing SATs and Federations would consider moving towards a good home within a MAT context.

The GDBE is convinced of the argument that in the current education landscape, there is greater support for church school flourishing, and thus greater resilience to the challenges and demands facing the education sector, for church schools that find a good home for their church school within a suitable MAT and maintain active engagement in the relationship with their Diocese. This landscape includes the financial strains upon all elements of the education sector, caused by the national economic situation.

The role of the GDBE and Education Team is to establish and sustain relationships with strong Multi Academy Trusts that are value aligned to our approach to education and committed to working together within our Diocesan family to support our family of schools. This commitment and value-alignment of approach includes working collaboratively and supportively with other MATs within our family. This approach enables the GDBE to ensure that all our schools are able to seek and secure good homes within a MAT context.

The current strategy of the DfE Regional Groups, informed by the Commissioning High Quality Trusts approach, includes a principle that the sustainability of the MAT landscape requires the avoidance of monopolies and the development of trusts that are large enough to flourish. MATs are thus required to have a growth strategy and this is increasing a landscape of mergers and MATs working across Diocesan borders. The GDBE, through its DDE, will work closely and transparently with the Regional Directors' Office and neighbouring Dioceses to ensure that any MATs seeking to join our family are committed to becoming collaborative participants in our family and committed to the flourishing of church schools and relationship between schools and their Diocese. This work will ensure that the MATs the GDBE works with are able to plan for growth and flourish and that all schools within our family are able to find a good home for their church school.

As the complexity of the MAT landscape develops the GDBE expects any MAT working with our schools to actively engage with the Gloucester Diocesan Education Team, drawing on our expertise and engaging with our quality assurance processes to support them to ensure the flourishing of their church schools in line with our Diocesan policies.

This strategy leads to the following principles that will be enacted when a MAT seeks to begin working with Diocese of Gloucester Schools, Academy Trusts (whether MAT or SAT) seek to merge, or new MATs wish to work within our context.

1. All church schools are equal members of the Diocesan family in the eyes of the GDBE whether academy, VC or VA.
2. The GDBE supports the flourishing of both church and non-church schools and the benefits of formal partnerships between these. Therefore, there is no requirement for church schools and/or percentage of pupils within church schools to be in a majority within a MAT offering a good home to our church schools.
3. However, the principles of the National Memorandum must be upheld to ensure that the MAT and all its schools work productively together without compromising the strong Christian Distinctiveness of church schools within the MAT.
4. The MAT vision, structures, including governance structures, and commitment to training and engagement with the Diocese, must support the unique nature of church schools within the MAT.
5. To support this the GDBE expects every MAT to agree to its Memorandum of Understanding.

6. A consideration of the effect of any formal partnership, offering service and mission to the wider community and the opportunities that may arise for creating connections should always be made and should ensure that those who will be outside the partnership, but potentially affected by it, are not cast out or excluded. This includes decisions around the formal partnerships that occur within MATs.
7. In all cases of voluntary conversion, the GDBE's legal consent to proceed is required. This is not automatic and should not be assumed. The GDBE will consider each request individually based upon the proposal received and its impact on the school, MAT and wider family of schools and MATs. It may apply conditions to an approval where schools and/or Trusts must carry out certain tasks prior to approval taking effect.
8. The GDBE will work proactively and transparently with the Regional Department of Education (RDE) and its officers (Regional Directors) in all cases of strategic planning and determining academy proposals and arrangements within the Diocese.
9. To ensure that the church foundation and Christian distinctiveness of schools is upheld the GDBE expects all MATs offering a home to our VA schools to have Majority Articles, and those offering homes to our VC schools to have a minimum of Minority Articles (25% church governance). This is a starting principle, and deviation from it would only occur where a VA school were able to make a compelling case that it had explored and exhausted for good reason, all options to join a MAT with Majority Articles.
10. It is important to ensure that our VA schools are not isolated from their church family and geographic neighbours and have sufficient options to join a suitable MAT. Therefore, where a MAT that does not already include GDBE schools, seeks to offer a home to any GDBE school, whether VA or VC, for the first time, our starting point would be an expectation that the MAT would have or take Majority Articles. However, where an existing MAT had less than Majority Articles and the following criteria were met, the MAT could be considered as a home for VC schools if the following conditions were met.
 - a. The MAT had strong evidence of its ability to support Church School Flourishing and a demonstrated commitment to working in a collaborative way within the Diocesan family, including with its existing family of MATs.
 - b. There was evidence of a need for additional MAT capacity for our VC schools, either in a specific area of our Diocese or across the Diocese that justified exploring this option.
 - c. The MAT had sound contextual reasons within its existing family and relationships that meant taking Majority Articles was problematic, but these contextual reasons did not suggest that there would be tensions that would inhibit Point 3 above being met.
 - d. The geographic context of the area (s) of the Diocese in which the MAT wished to take schools did not create a risk of VA schools being cast out or excluded from local relationships in the manner described in Point 6 above.
11. Any MAT wishing to work with Diocese of Gloucester Schools must have the GDBE as a Corporate Member.

The process and procedures for joining a MAT are laid out in separate documents which can be found with relevant supporting documents and forms on the Diocese of Gloucester website

<https://gloucester.anglican.org/schools/academy-conversion/>

If there is a disagreement about the basis of the GDBE consent to an academy proposal, or if a C of E school within the Diocese wishes to convert into an arrangement outside the GDBE policy (or outside arrangements envisaged by the Memorandum of Understanding between the National Society and Secretary of State), then the governors proposing this can make an approach to the Diocesan Board of Education to discuss this. The Board may request that a written case is produced, and that the governors meet with representatives of the DBE before a decision is made.

GDBE and the Corporate Member role

As the Diocesan Corporate Member (DCM), the GDBE operates within the Member Group of each trust to carry out its legal obligations to promote and protect church schools in Trusts.

The GDBE will take up our role as Diocesan Corporate Member, including alongside other Diocesan Corporate Members from other Diocese in Trusts that span more than one diocese.

When this involves membership alongside other Diocesan Corporate Members, the DGBE will utilise cross Diocesan Memoranda and Presumptions to secure robust collaboration, healthy dialogue and closely coordinated activity across our multiple diocesan contexts.

As the trust landscape continues to mature, the DGBE will continually review the appropriateness of our insistence of having a multiple DCM arrangement in place within applicable contexts. In doing so, we will remain alert to any developing need to make adjustments as regional influences may from time-to-time dictate.

This policy was approved by the Diocese of Gloucester Board of Education on 6 February 2024

This strategy will be reviewed at least annually and more frequently if there is a significant change either to national or local policies and guidance.

This document will be available to all stakeholders on request and via the GDBE website <https://www.gloucester.anglican.org/schools/academy-conversion/> and should not be reproduced, adapted or used without advance permissions.