



## ROCHESTER DIOCESAN BOARD OF EDUCATION (RDBE) DIOCESAN ACADEMY STRATEGY

89 Church of  
England  
Schools

21 VA Schools

29 VC Schools

38 Church  
of England  
Academies

25,000 children  
educated in  
Church of  
England  
Schools in the  
Diocese

98% schools  
judged  
"Good" or  
better by  
SIAMS.

8 Church  
Multi-  
Academy  
Trusts

94% schools  
judged  
"Good" or  
better by  
Ofsted.

4 Local  
Authorities  
Bexley,  
Bromley,  
Kent &  
Medway

9 Community  
schools within  
Church Multi-  
Academy  
Trusts

£1.7 million of  
public funding  
for school  
capital building  
projects (SCA)

## A. INTRODUCTION

There is cross party support for the expansion of the Academies programme and the RDBE recognises the DfE's aspiration that all schools should become academies and that the vast majority of these will be within Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs).

The RDBE is committed to maintaining a cohesive Diocesan family of schools and working in partnership with stakeholders to promote distinctive and inclusive high-quality education to transform the lives of all children and young people who attend our Diocesan Church schools.

As the number of academy conversions grow, Local Authorities shrink and are further constrained, so the risk of isolation to our Church schools increases. We therefore strongly recommend that all Church schools should urgently consider becoming academies and joining one of the existing Church MATs.

This strategy has been formulated in accordance with the [DBE Measure 2021](#) and the [Memorandum of Understanding \(MOU\) 2023](#) which details the statutory framework and the powers, functions and responsibilities of Diocesan Boards of Education.

The Church of England Education Office (CEEEO) have confirmed that they embrace the government's intentions to move to a single education system where all schools join a multi-academy trust (MAT).

The Chief Education Officer, Nigel Genders, has confirmed that the CEEEO see this as an opportunity for the Church of England to maintain its position as a key partner in state education and to secure the Church of England school estate for future generations of children and families.

## B. SITE TRUSTEES AND THE TRUST DEED

The foundation of many of our Church schools' dates back to previous centuries (our oldest Church school, Gravesend St George's CE Secondary school was founded in 1580).

Church of England school sites (including academies) are usually held on a "Trust Deed", which confirms the charitable objects and the purposes for which the site can be used. The governing documents of the school will confirm the parameters within which the Church school is to be conducted which must be compatible with the Trust Deed. The school occupies the site with the permission of the site trustees, for the furtherance of the object of the Trust Deed. Control of the site is always retained by the site trustees, and that is reflected in the way in which schools occupy the site on a licence (the school has permission to occupy the site but does not have any legal or equitable interest in the site).

In order to preserve these arrangements Church MATs will be required to enter into a [Church Supplemental Agreement](#) for each Church academy.

## C. RDBE OBJECTS AND AIMS

The objects and aims of RDBE, which was incorporated on the 19 November 1895, are as follows.

### 1. Objects

- a. To maintain and extend education in and knowledge of the Christian religion in general and the faith and practice of the Church of England in particular to all sections of the community within the Diocese of Rochester and
- b. To carry out the functions of the Diocesan Board of Education for the Diocese of Rochester under the provisions of the Diocesan Boards of Education Measure 2021 and any legislation amending, supplementing, or replacing the same.

### 2. Aims

- a. To actively promote and support Christian Distinctiveness through developing high-quality teaching and learning, leadership, and effective governance of our Church schools.
- b. To provide focussed support for school effectiveness in order that our Church schools are judged good or better in both the OFSTED and SIAMS inspection frameworks.
- c. To improve the quality of teaching and learning of Religious Education in Church primary schools sharing best practice and offering professional development opportunities for all teaching staff in Church primary schools.
- d. To develop effective strategic partnerships with Local Authorities, Teaching Schools Alliances, Multi Academy Trusts, and other key stakeholders ensuring that every Church school is part of an informal, formal, or structural collaboration which supports their Christian Distinctiveness, school effectiveness and sustainable future.
- e. To ensure the good stewardship and effective deployment of the Board of Education's resources, to ensure its sustainable future and ability to deliver its triennial aims and key priorities, and
- f. To take opportunities for growth through the establishment of new Church schools and maintaining existing Church schools.

## D. APPROVAL CRITERIA AND PROCESS

The RDBE should be consulted as early as possible over schools and Church MATs plans for academy conversions.

The RDBE's approval criteria can be found within our [Academy Approval Criteria](#) document and RDBE officers will assist throughout the process, offering guidance and support.

## E. DIOCESAN CONTEXT

Across our Diocese and within the four Local Authority (LA) areas, Church of England schools, (Voluntary Aided (VA), Voluntary Controlled (VC), Primary and Secondary), that have not yet converted to academy status can be summarised as follows.

LA Area	No of VA schools	No of VC schools	Totals
Bexley (Primary)	1	-	1
Bromley (Secondary)	1	-	1
Kent (Primary)	16	27	43
Medway (Primary)	1	2	3
Totals	19	29	48

We have the following school led Church MATs across the Diocese.

Church MAT	Member Schools			
	Church Primary	Church Secondary	Community Primary	Community Secondary
Aletheia Anglican Academies Trust (Majority – Gravesend)	8	1	2	
Amadeus Primary Academy Trust (Majority – Bexley)	4		2	
Aquinas CE Education Trust (Majority – Bromley)	8	1	1	1
Inspire Academy Movement Trust (Majority – Sevenoaks)	1		2	
Medway Anglican Schools Trust (Majority – Medway)	4			
The Pilgrim Multi Academy Trust (Minority – Medway)	4			
The Tenax Schools Trust (Majority – Tunbridge Wells)	6	1	1	
Trinitas Academy Trust (Majority – Bexley)	4	1	2	

The table below shows Church schools within the Diocese with less than 200 and 100 pupils on roll.

LA Area	Less than 200	Less than 100
Bexley	1	-
Bromley	3	1
Kent	28	6
Medway	3	2
Totals	35	9

## F. THE QUALITIES OF STRONG CHURCH MATS

There are many factors that result in strong Church MATs, and we consider the following as some essential indicators.

1. Commitment to the [Church of England Vision for Education](#) at both Diocesan and national level.
2. Proactive engagement with the SIAMS inspection process across the MAT.
3. Evidential and demonstrable school improvement record of improving vulnerable and challenging schools with the necessary personnel to deliver same.
4. Being inclusive and welcoming to all schools (small, vulnerable, and challenging).
5. Strong governance and leadership with appropriate skill sets and experience.
6. Financially and operationally sustainable, with a growth plan.
7. A focus on wellbeing for the whole school community.
8. Serving and supporting the disadvantaged and
9. Serving and collaborating with the wider Diocesan family of schools.

## G. KEY FACTORS

1. In accordance with the "as is" principle and the Memorandum of Understanding the RDBE stipulates that VA schools can only join Church Majority MATs whilst VC schools can join either Church Majority MATs or Church Minority MATs. Majority or Minority MATs are defined by whether the Church Trust members are in the majority or in the minority.
2. Community schools are very welcome to join Church MATs, many will be attracted to the Church of England's proven track record and ethos .
3. Only the nationally agreed Church model documentation should be used for church schools converting to academy status. MATs that comprise of only community schools do not usually have any Church Trust members; in which case they would not be seen as appropriate MATs for church schools to join and Diocesan consent will be withheld.
4. The written consent of the school Governing Body, site Trustees, the Diocesan Board of Education and all those who appoint Foundation Governors is required before a Church of England school can convert to academy status.
5. The expectation is that Church of England schools will join one of the existing Church MATs and it is very unlikely given the number of Church MATs that consent will be granted to establish new Church MATs.
6. The RDBE will support the growth of our existing Church MATs to achieve scale, through incremental academy conversions and by merger with other Church MATs where necessary.
7. All outstanding statutory land transfers will need to be completed prior to an academy conversion being completed.
8. Where the Department for Education (DfE) requires a school to be sponsored due to underperformance, the sponsorship arrangement will be brokered by the DfE Regional Director, working with the RDBE, (whose consent is statutorily required), to determine the most appropriate solution and improvement package within an existing Church MAT.
9. The RDBE will work with Governing Bodies and Church MATs to identify and support solutions for vulnerable and small schools.