



Becoming a Multi-Academy Trust: Frequently Asked Questions

These questions have been created from discussion at our Parent Forum, Staff Consultation and discussions with other Multi Academy Trust convertors. We hope they will answer many of your queries, but if not, please don't hesitate to ask.

What is a Multi-Academy Trust?

A Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) is a group of academy schools overseen by an educational charity. Our MAT would be formed by a partnership between Bexton and Holmes Chapel primary school. Our charity trust board would be made up from governors from the schools and, as appropriate, other trustees specifically recruited for their skills. Rather than being funded by and accountable to the local authority, a MAT is directly funded by and accountable to the Department for Education. Academies are still part of the community and serve children and families in a particular area and retain the same responsibilities as any maintained school as part of the learning community. Outstanding MATs also help to support other schools. The Trust is accountable for all of the schools that are a part of it, and through Schemes of Delegation decide which powers are retained by the Trust and which are delegated to individual schools.

Why are we considering forming a Multi-Academy Trust?

The direction of Department for Education policy is for all schools to become academies and become part of a multi-academy trust. Rather than join an existing trust and potentially losing some of the unique character of our school, we want to be the leaders in this and create our own MAT. By creating our own MAT now we would get to lead the way and keep our characteristics and the huge success that we have had. This is the opportunity to shape, control and future-proof our school.

As we have learned through our partnerships, collaborative working with other schools can provide an improved educational experience for our own students through various areas including teaching and learning, an enhanced and engaging curriculum, staff development and progression opportunities, finance and human resources, legal services, school improvement structures and governance arrangements. In addition as an academy we would have greater control of our school budgets and greater autonomy over our curriculum. Over the next few years there is going to be a tightening of budgets and we need to prepare for cuts. By being in a MAT we can secure greater opportunities for financial savings.

Would the admissions arrangements change?

The current admission arrangements would remain in place and we see no reason to change them. If for some reason the academy wanted to change its admissions arrangements in the future, consultation would be required and would still comply with the Admissions Code.

Will our schools change?

We want to continue to be great schools where every child is valued. We therefore do not intend to change except in ways we think will improve the schools even more. For children, it is unlikely that they would see much, if any, change in their day-to-day school lives. Academies have more freedom than other state schools over their finances, curriculum, length of terms and school days. However, we do not intend to take any such steps and would engage with parents/carers, staff and students if we did ever intend to make such changes in the future.

Will the term dates change?

All schools have the ability to set their own term dates. We currently work with our cluster schools and the local high school to try and provide term dates that suit both the needs of our children and parents. There is no intention to alter the current arrangements.

Do academies have to follow the National Curriculum?

Academies do not have to follow the National Curriculum, however over the past few years we have adapted the National Curriculum to follow our values and approach. Our schools already have an excellent curriculum framework recognised by Ofsted.

Would academy status affect the SEND provision?

No, SEND services would stay exactly the same and we would continue to provide SEND services as we do now.

What would the changes mean for staff?

Staff would not notice significant changes in their everyday working lives. They already experience and champion the benefits of partnership work and that would not only continue but grow. Terms and conditions for existing staff would remain the same and pensions would transfer (including pension contributions). Their contracts would TUPE across to the Trust. Professional development would further expand and there would be a greater range of opportunities for advancement.

Who makes the final decision on whether each school converts to an academy?

The Board of Governors.

Would other schools join us and who would make the decision on if additional schools join us?

Any decision on additional schools joining our group would be made by the Board of Trustees. We would expect other schools to join as time goes on and any school that joins us would be expected to abide by our vision & ethos and governance structure and to fully contribute to and learn from the other schools.

Would the schools have to change their names?

No, schools would retain their names and uniform policies.

What would the group of schools (the Trust) be called?

The Trust will have a separate name but we would still be called Bexton Primary School. The trust vision would build on our core ethos and values – we would maintain and strengthen our focus on each child enjoying their learning and achieving their academic best in a stimulating, nurturing environment, maintaining our high expectations and approach to inclusion.

Are academies free from Ofsted inspection?

Academies are still subject to Ofsted inspections. Any school which is not making satisfactory progress or does not meet expected standards is at risk of intervention.

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 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.

Will you be the only primary Multi Academy Trust in Cheshire East?

No. There are already existing primary MATs within Cheshire East for example Aspire, based at Ash Grove Primary in Macclesfield. In addition, a number of schools are currently undergoing the same consideration process we are. Schools recognise the value in working closely together for the benefit of the students by developing self-improving school systems. They also recognise that this is where the future lies.

Who runs a MAT?

The Board of Directors runs the MAT. The current headteachers would continue to contribute to the leadership of their schools under the leadership of the Board of Directors. The MAT structure will be published later in the consultation process.

Each school would continue to have its own Local Governing Body (LGB). Above the Local Governing Bodies would be The Trust, essentially functioning as one board of governors overseeing the local boards. They would be the main decision-making group and accountable for all schools within the Trust. The Trust would consist of nine Trustees, specifically selected for their skills, tasked with ensuring the excellence of all schools and delegating powers to the local governing bodies. As with governors, Trustees receive no remuneration for their function and serve as volunteers for our charitable endeavour. Trustees would come from the LGBs as well as through a recruitment process to secure key skills on the Trust.

Above the Trustees would sit Members. The Trust would be a registered charity and the Members would sign the Articles of Association turning the group of schools into a charitable trust. Members would function as founders and shareholders of the Trust, but absolutely no financial benefit would be obtained. The Members would create the charitable trust because they believe in the vision and values and methods of this enterprise and are responsible for appointing the Trustees and ensuring the success of the Trust at an annual general meeting.

I have seen on the news that there have been academies that have had troubles with financial management.

The Trust will monitor the finances closely and the Trust board will have financial expertise on it.

As a partnership of schools will you have increased purchasing power?

Yes, it's probably the case that a group of schools will be able to obtain better value when negotiating contracts for services essential for running a school, such as insurance, accountancy, HR, Payroll, broadband and other internet and IT services.

Will you be introducing any new charges?

No. There is no intention to charge in the future for anything that is currently free.

A lot of news reports I've seen are about failing schools being forced to be taken over as academies. What does this have to do with us?

A school that is failing, or 'coasting', can be taken over by a sponsor and turned into an academy with the aim of the sponsor driving improvement in the school. But what does not make for dramatic news is that strong schools are able to start their own Multi-Academy Trusts and lead on school improvement in their group. We want to make this move because we are a good school with strong leadership and we want to continue to build on this. By running our own Trust, we would be able to keep everything great about our schools and continue to make improvements that work for our schools without some other Trust taking over in the future. Like local authority schools, academies can also perform poorly. But in any type of school, the success depends on the Leadership & Management in charge.

What process have the governors gone through in deciding to begin this process and will we definitely become a Multi Academy Trust?

Each school's board of governors voted individually to confirm that we would proceed with consultation on the formation of our MAT. This is not a decision we have come to quickly, this is the result of the evolution of everything we have been through on our drive to become outstanding, and a vast amount of research and training undertaken by governors. At the end of the consultation period, which includes a rigorous process of due diligence, each school's board of governors will further consider their decision and then have a final vote on whether to convert to MAT status. After both schools have voted, we will update you with the result.

Can schools withdraw from the conversion process?

Schools are able to withdraw right up to the point that they sign the Funding Agreement. Once this is signed there is a legally binding agreement between the Secretary of State and the academy and the termination process would require a long notice period.

What is the timescale for conversion?

The entire process from start to finish generally takes 3-5 months, with conversions being official on the 1st of the month. It would be a smooth transition in which children, staff and parents are unlikely to perceive any change, and no disruption to the normal running of the school. If we convert, the date would be determined with the Department for Education and we would let you know when it is confirmed.

How will the money raised by each PTA be used?

Each school will continue to have its own autonomous Parent Teacher Association (PTA), although they will be free to collaborate if they wish. The money raised by each school's PTA will only be used for its own school. Each PTA are currently and will continue to be independent of the school, raising money for agreed resources or projects that have been asked for by the schools leadership.