

Newman Catholic Trust – Frequently Asked MAT Questions:

Governance:

How will each Trust be structured, in terms of leadership and governance?

Our common Trust governance model consists of Members, Trust Board of Directors and Local Governing Committees. The Members are appointed by the Bishop who has ultimate control over each Multi Academy Trust, with the ability to appoint the majority of the Directors and the right to amend the trust's Articles of Association. The Trust Board of Directors are responsible for the same three core governance functions performed by the governing body in a maintained school: setting the direction, holding the executive leaders to account and ensuring financial probity and value for money. As charity trustees, they must also ensure that they are complying with charity law requirements. This leadership and governance model is one of the key structural elements intended specifically to strengthen and protect our Catholic schools for generations to come. Unlike the current model where diocesan schools are Voluntary Aided but maintained by an LA, the MAT model sees all of the major decision makers and holders of responsibility and influence, being appointed directly on behalf of the Bishop to ensure that all schools remain true to their distinctive vision and mission. The key relationship for a successful delivery of this is the creation of positive relationships and good communication between each Trust, the Diocesan Department for Education and the Local Governing Committees.

Will the schools still have governors?

A distinctive feature of the MAT governance structure the diocese has created is the retention of governance at school level. Many MATs and MATs nationally have removed this tier of governance. We however regard local governance as the corner stone for the very important principles of 'Subsidiarity and Solidarity'. Individuals who sit on Local Governing Committees (LGCs) are referred to as 'local governors'. LGCs are a committee of the Board of Directors. Directors delegate certain governance functions to local governors and this is detailed in the Trust scheme of delegation and then outlined in LGC terms of reference. This will make it clear what responsibilities are retained by the board of directors of the trust (the Trust Board) and the responsibilities given to each Local Governing Committee.

What is the LGC responsible for?

The LGC will be responsible for the Catholic Life of the school, day to day oversight of the management of the school and compliance with the Trust and the school's policies and practices, standards, and ensuring the school fulfils its responsibilities to pupils and their families, being at the heart of the relationship between the school and its local parish community. The Trust Board and Chief Executive Officer determine the strategy for the Trust and ensure that this aligns with the broader diocesan strategy and Bishop's directive for Trust growth and development. A key responsibility here is to secure school improvement and academy turnaround overseeing performance and standards, ensuring good practice and holding leadership to account.

Who supports and advises the Trust Board?

The Trust Board will be supported and advised by an Executive Team led by the Chief Executive Officer. Every MAT must have a Senior Executive Leader who is also the Accounting Officer. The Accounting Officer has a statutory responsibility to parliament for ensuring that the trusts accounts are completed, and that the Trust Board adheres to the Academy Trust Handbook. The Accounting Officer cannot delegate this responsibility to anyone else. Every MAT must also have a Chief Financial Officer who is responsible for the day-to-day management of financial processes.

Academy Set-up and structures:

What is an academy?

Academies are publicly-funded schools which operate outside of Local Authority control. They receive their funding directly from central government, through the Education Funding Agency (EFA), rather than through a Local Authority. The government describes them as independent, state-funded schools. Academies have more freedom than other state schools over their finances, the curriculum, length of terms and school days and teachers' pay and conditions.

What is a Multi-Academy Trust?

A Multi-Academy Trust is a charitable company limited by guarantee and is responsible for running the academy. It has three layers of governance: members, who are best viewed as guardians of the constitution; directors, who are legally responsible for the running of the Trust and the local governors who are responsible for monitoring standards in the individual schools in the Trust.



How does the MAT model work?

The MAT model has been designed to maintain the identity of each school in the trust as separate academies each retaining a Local Governing Committee (LGC), Headteacher/Principal and its own budget. The Trust is the employer of all the staff in the MAT. A Scheme of Delegation is put in place between the MAT Board and the LGC to enable each school to operate in much the same way as it does now but the Trust has overall responsibility for standards and as such all schools in the Trust are required to work together to improve standards across all schools in the Trust

Identity:

Do schools need the word 'Academy' in their titles?

It is a requirement that the words 'Catholic and Academy' are included in the formal name of any new academy. This is then the registered school name linked to a new URN number upon conversion. For example, St Teresa's would now be called St Teresa's Catholic Primary School – an Academy convertor. In documentation and the Trust's structures, each "school" is an "academy" – hence the Multi **Academy** Trust. However, the practical reality is that schools will likely keep their same name.

Will schools lose their individuality when they become part of a MAT?

No. MATs enshrine the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity which underpin Catholic Social Teaching. Subsidiarity – decisions are best made by those who are closest to their effects – is key: its express purpose is to avoid excessive centralisation. This can find expression in the MAT's Scheme of Delegation. Our pupils are best served if schools keep their individual charism.

Practicalities & provision:

How are SEND pupils funded?

All the arrangements for SEND pupils' support and funding continue to be managed and supported by the Local Authority, whether the school is VA or an academy.

Will admissions policies change?

The trust board are the legal admissions authority, and are bound by exactly the same law, government guidance and diocesan protocols as all our Diocesan schools. There will be no changes to admissions policies as part of this process. If any school within a MAT wished to change its admission policy it would have to follow exactly the same process of consultation and Diocesan approval as at present.

How will we ensure Safeguarding and child protection?

The Local Authority have legal responsibility for children's social services and this applies to all children within that geographic area, irrespective of what type of school they attend. The legal requirements for anyone working with children, apply to school staff in exactly the same way as they do at present. The responsibilities of governors are ultimately those of the Trust Directors.

Staffing:

How will membership of the Trust affect staff?

All teaching staff will transfer to the Trust on their existing terms and conditions of employment. The Trust will consult unions and staff bodies during the conversion process - to ensure all staff terms and conditions are optimal upon transfer. At the point of conversion staff will have the best possible terms and conditions which may be an improvement on their current terms and conditions. This process would be known as a "measure" at the point of conversion. These are expected to be broadly consistent with CES contracts and policies, reflecting some local flexibility. Each MAT will follow the burgundy and green book conditions for staff.

Will staff be moved between schools?

Staff do not need to worry about being moved to other schools in the Trust. This is not something that is really practical given that many staff live locally to their school and have specific roles within their current school. The opportunity to work across schools is something that in the longer term has many benefits, but would only ever be done if for example it was a development opportunity and agreeable to all parties. As MATs grow it is possible that some newly appointed staff will be employed to work across a number of schools – e.g. Sports Coaches, ICT Network Management, HR, Speech & Language Support etc. In these situations, it would be made clear through the recruitment documentation and new employee's contract of employment.



What CPD and support is available in a Trust?

The Trust will work with all schools collectively and individually to create CPD networks intended to provide real professional development benefits for all employees. More formal networks with a focus on subjects, leadership and safeguarding for example ensure staff can discuss with likeminded colleagues how best to improve practice and skills. These networks will be targeted at Trust wide areas of need. This is an exciting opportunity for the Trust to recognise, reward and promote expert teachers and leaders in a manner which is not available to non-academy schools. Therefore, the development of internal school improvement and professional development systems can be of significant benefit to all Trust schools.

Strengths and concerns:

Isn't taking the schools out of Local Authority control a risky move?

Catholic schools are not, and have never been, under Local Authority (LA) control. Catholic schools are Voluntary Aided (VA) not Voluntary Controlled (VC) schools. The governors of Catholic VA schools are the employers of the staff, are able to set the length of a school day and term times, following consultation with parents. The decision to admit children to the school is already made by the Governing body and not the Local Authority. All of these will be unchanged when a Catholic school goes into a MAT.

What about LA support?

Our schools have had a good relationship with the relevant LAs and it is envisaged that this will continue as LA's continue to have statutory responsibility for children with additional needs (SEND) and for the overall planning of school places in their local area. However, this support is variable across different regions and Local Authorities face their own problems. For example, school improvement support was historically provided by local authorities and is now delivered through the 'school-led system', where funding streams that are only available to support it. These services are now increasingly provided by independent contractors. The provision of other school support such as HR, finance and legal are being reduced by Local Authorities, the quality and availability of such services are falling and schools are being asked to pay additional costs for them. There is an increasingly complex mixed economy of schools and academies, with the reduction of the role of local authorities within education. Our schools need to all be able to be protected, where we can retain their Catholic nature and offer the same high quality of Catholic education within all our school and to all our families.

Can we still use our local authority services after our conversion?

As a recipient of public monies, the academy trust must ensure that it can demonstrate 'value for money' in the use of its funds, which the Academies Financial Handbook defines as "achieving the best possible educational and wider societal outcomes through the economic, efficient and effective use of all the resources in the trust's charge, the avoidance of waste and extravagance, and prudent and economical administration". Academies must also comply with procurement law. Therefore, whilst it is possible for academy trusts to buy back services from their local authority, it is important to be able to demonstrate that these services represent value for money. In many cases the group of academies will be able to save money by buying back a single service across the trust, thereby allowing more funds to be used on their pupils. Such strategies usually form the shared services charge that may be on a per pupil basis or on square metres say for grounds maintenance. Audit, accountancy, payroll, HR and health and safety support are often provided in these ways and the CMAT may have existing contracts to that effect.

Schools are facing unprecedented challenge as a result of COVID-19. Is this really the right time to press ahead with such a significant decision?

Whilst COVID-19 has caused unprecedented disruption to the smooth running of schools and has significantly increased responsibilities and workload for headteachers and governors, establishing MATs would be a longer term strategic objective which will benefit pupils and staff for generations to come. COVID-19 has highlighted the strength and resilience of MATs in response to a crisis. Schools are stronger when they collaborate. During the pandemic MATs have been able to reduce the workload for individual headteachers, teachers and support staff by allowing for a common approach to undertaking risk assessments for schools, joint procurement of PPE and signage, implementing schemes to provide free school meals vouchers to vulnerable families and providing appropriate learning materials for pupils during lockdown. It is easier for larger organisations to allocate resources to these activities than it is for individual schools



What are the benefits of Catholic Academy Trust system?

- Solidarity - Where no one school is left behind - A joined-up, family of schools and Parish linked system - An ethos of 'our schools' not 'my school' and therefore 'our children' not 'my children'
- A wider pool of staff and governors looking for more opportunities and helping each other.
- Opportunities to develop future teachers and future school leaders and establish pathways for staff development
- Curriculum development, shared working and school improvement - Peer to peer support
- Sharing services and developing imaginative ways of supporting our schools - Business services - Training - Value for money Funding Opportunities
- Bid-funding that is only available (capital and revenue) to MAT based academies
- Capital funding – unlike VA schools academies do not need to find 10% of any capital funding - There are guaranteed capital grants and opportunities to bid for additional funds that are only available to academies
- MATs provide a formal framework for collaboration, shared curriculum expertise across schools and enhanced opportunities for sharing good practice in a variety of settings and phases
- Formal collaboration frameworks allow for more shared planning, more shared examples of good practice, more shared resources and more shared assessment and moderation.
- Inbuilt collaboration facilitates buddying/mentoring systems to enhance teaching and learning and enriches school-to-school support.
- Shared curriculum events such as Science Days, Languages Days and shared creative arts events become much more practicable.
- Greater opportunities for career progression enable schools to grow their own leaders. The Ambition Institute research shows that MATs have much higher rates of promotion from classroom teacher to middle leadership, particularly at primary school, than non-MAT schools.
- Improved recruitment and retention. The evidence is that MATs, with the flexibility and career progression opportunities they allow, attract more applications.
- In short, MAT's systemically enrich professional dialogue and practice, thereby improving pupils' learning experience

How will academies make a difference to the challenges we face? How would MATs help with falling pupil roll or lack of finance or deficits in schools? Will there be more money for schools?

The principle of a problem shared being a problem halved will apply: in MATs, headteachers by definition no longer struggle alone; they are key members of a larger network with a CEO carrying the can. The very existence of a Catholic Executive Leader (CEO) with oversight of a group of schools allows for a more coordinated approach in mitigating risks to that group, and to the sector as a whole. With government borrowing at record levels and a contracting economy, there is very little chance that more money will be put into schools. We therefore have to make economies where we can and MATs will help to alleviate the stress schools are under. They will not remove that stress, but they will help; in fact, they are the best mechanism available to us to create that help. As far as falling rolls are concerned, the more money that can be directed back into front-line education through economies of scale, and the better the educational provision that MAT structure will provide, the more popular it will prove with parents. The hard fact is that the only way in our power to increase numbers is to render ourselves more attractive to parents who are applying elsewhere. The MAT Trust Board will have responsibility for a group of schools, and so will not allow, insofar as they are able, one or more to languish at the expense of others. Furthermore, academies are able to share staff across schools and deploy them flexibly to respond to cost pressures from falling rolls.

The process of a school becoming an academy is outlined below.

The actual legal process involves some key documents:

- Articles of Association - These have been drawn up in agreement with government and the Bishops' Conference via the CES. They outline the legal make-up of the MAT and how it is established.
- Scheme of delegation - This is another standard legal document from the CES, which clarifies what legal powers and responsibilities there are within each level of the MAT (as described above)
- Funding agreement - The process by which the Government makes funding available to schools within the MAT.
- Commercial transfer agreement - The legal process by which any existing legal contracts and Local Authority land are passed to the MAT and school on becoming an academy.

All MATs will have these documents, but the way in which each works will differ, as they develop to serve the local needs. There will be policies, procedures and differing roles and responsibilities within each MAT and effecting each different school.



Academisation process:

What is the process for converting to academy status?

There are several steps to conversion. In the current circumstances:

- putting in place a funding agreement between the academy trust and the Secretary of State for the running and funding of the academy school(s)
- transferring the employment of the staff of the school(s) from the governing body in accordance with TUPE
- negotiating a commercial transfer agreement for the transfer of assets and contracts of the school(s) from the local authority and/or governing body to the academy trust (usually assets worth >£5,000)
- arranging for the academy trust to have use of the land and buildings of the school(s), usually either by way of a 125 year lease with the local authority or the transfer of the freehold of the land, on licence from the diocese. Voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools will need to enter into a church supplemental agreement with the Secretary of State and their diocese, which sets out the use of any church lands by the academy trust and protection of the religious designation of the school.

Which groups of schools go when? Governing Bodies will need to work with the Trust and Diocese to identify a suitable plan and timeline for conversion, so that groups of schools can be identified to convert together. The actual timing and order of this will depend on a number of local issues including appropriate support for the conversion process, the capacity within the Trust so that the MAT can grow in a sustainable way. At all times the needs of all our pupils will be paramount.

