

# **Becoming an Academy & Joining a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT)**

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

You will almost certainly have some questions about academies and we have tried to answer some of these below. The questions are split into three main sections and relate to:

- A. Academies and Multi-Academy Trusts
- B. St Barnabas' current situation
- C. Once a decision has been made

### **A. Academies and Multi-Academy Trusts**

#### **1. What is an academy?**

Academies are independent, state-funded schools.

When a school converts to an academy, it ceases to be maintained by the Local Authority and will be run by a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) (please see below). The MAT receives funding for the academy directly from the Department for Education (DfE) and is responsible for its operation.

The day-to-day running of the school remains with the Headteacher, with oversight from the Executive Principal of the MAT.

There are some ways in which academies can be different to Local Authority schools if they choose, for example, they don't have to follow the national curriculum. However, they still have to follow broadly the same rules on admissions, special educational needs and exclusions as other state schools.

Further information generally on academies provided by the DfE can be found at [www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/academies](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/academies).

#### **2. What is a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT)?**

In a Multi-Academy Trust, schools work together as a group of schools. A MAT is a charitable company limited by guarantee. It has Members, who are similar to shareholders but act on an unpaid basis and have certain oversight powers e.g. amending the MAT's constitutional documents and appointing and removing directors/trustees. It also has Directors/trustees who direct the MAT's operations and are responsible for making key strategic decisions in relation to the academies.

In general, each academy will have a Local Governing Committee (LGC) which both advises the board of directors/trustees and takes on responsibility for decision making and oversight of specific areas relating to their academy. The amount of governance (decision making) kept at a local level varies according to the MAT. For example, in the Pathfinder MAT, each school has its own LGC, so the individual characteristics and ethos of each school continue. Strong schools, like St Barnabas, can expect a high level of delegation to their LGC. We intend that St Barnabas' LGC would largely reflect the current composition in terms of the appointment process and individual members.

### **3. Are all MATs the same?**

No. For example, they vary in format, size and effectiveness. Some are close together in a local area and some are further apart across a wider geographical area. Some may include only a small number of schools, and some are very large with 20 or more schools. Some delegate a lot of responsibility to the local level and others retain more control centrally.

### **4. How is a MAT/academy accountable?**

Like maintained schools, academies are inspected by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and (if a Church of England (C of E) academy) under the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) framework.

A MAT is answerable to the Secretary of State/DfE, the Education Funding Agency and the relevant Regional Schools Commissioner, each of whom have certain responsibilities for taking action in the event that an academy/MAT is underperforming and/or not complying with its academy arrangements.

MATs also need to comply with additional financial and other reporting requirements to satisfy the requirements of education, company and charity law (this burden is managed by the MAT centrally and not by individual schools.)

Additionally, MATs are responsible, in relation to C of E academies, to the relevant Diocesan Board of Education.

### **5. How would staff be affected?**

Staff contracts would automatically be transferred from the Local Authority to the MAT (which would become the employer of the school's staff on conversion) under the Transfer of Undertaking (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE). Staff will therefore retain the same terms and conditions of employment. There may be opportunities for staff to work across multiple schools in the MAT, but this would be discussed and agreed with members of staff where this is something they want to explore. Staff consultation will be carried out as part of the wider consultation process. Staffing will, of course, change over time (as it would if we remained a Local Authority maintained school).

### **6. Would there be a change to admissions?**

There would be no changes to the school's current admission arrangements on conversion, save that the MAT would become the admissions authority with responsibility for setting admissions arrangements. (The admissions policy would be updated to reflect this.) We would continue to be part of the Local Authority's Co-ordinated Admissions Scheme.

Any future changes proposed to the admission arrangements would need to be made in accordance with the statutory admissions code and related legislation and would be the subject of consultation. In considering any changes to the admissions arrangements, we would also need to have regard to the YDBE's guidance and advice.

## 7. How is the Church of England foundation of C of E schools protected in MAT arrangements?

Pathfinder MAT's governance and leadership structure reflects the collaborative arrangement between the Church and non-Church academies within it, and there is a strong Church of England presence within those structures. Further information on governance can be found on Pathfinder's website ([www.pathfindermat.co.uk](http://www.pathfindermat.co.uk)).

Like the school, the academy would be designated with a C of E religious character and the York Diocesan Board of Education (YDBE) would remain the relevant religious authority. If the school were to convert to an academy, the YDBE would work with the MAT to ensure that the C of E character would be preserved and developed in the new structure. Some of the key ways this would be secured are:

- a. **Securing an important role for Foundation local governors on the local governing committee of the academy:** Foundation local governors, like foundation governors on the current school governing body, would have a special role in, and responsibility for, ensuring that the C of E character of the academy is preserved and developed and that the academy is conducted in accordance with St Barnabas' trust deed relating to its land. Foundation local governors would make up 25% of the local governing committee and would be appointed by the YDBE following consultation with the local Parochial Church Council.
- b. **Careful consideration of leadership appointments:** When the headteacher of a C of E school is appointed, the governing body considers matters such as the individual's ability and capacity to preserve and develop the religious character of the school. In making future appointments, the same kind of questions would be asked to ensure that any new headteacher is the right person to lead the academy, and advice from the YDBE would be sought in connection with the appointment process. The same would apply to any Executive Principal (or similar) who might be appointed to oversee the work of the academy.
- c. **Ensuring that the school converts to an academy on an "as is" basis:** When a Voluntary Controlled (VC) school converts to an academy, it ceases to have its VC status. This is because the status can only apply to a school maintained by the Local Authority. However, the legal arrangements put in place with the DfE seek to ensure that the protections that apply in the VC school context apply in much the same way to the school after it becomes an academy. For example, the legal framework would require that:
  - **Religious education** continues to be taught **as previously**.
  - The **daily act of Collective Worship** continues to be provided **in accordance with the trust deed/Anglican tradition**.
  - The special provisions **relating to the appointment of staff** at a VC school continue to apply in relation to academy staff.
  - The academy continues to be **inspected** in the same manner under the SIAMS framework. (SIAMS stands for Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist

Schools and provides a process for evaluating the extent to which Church schools and academies are distinctively and recognisably Christian institutions.)

- Academy **admission arrangements** will be determined having regard to the YDBE's guidance and advice.
- **School land** (except the playing fields) continues to be **held on trust by Church site trustees**.

The YDBE and the site trustees' consent will be required prior to any conversion taking place.

## **B. St Barnabas' Current Situation**

### **8. What have the Governing Body of St Barnabas done so far?**

The Governors have been discussing this issue for over a year, considering the best option and the best timing for St Barnabas in regards to becoming an academy and joining a MAT. They have met with representatives from a number of MATs, some of them more than once, and questioned them on their values, structure, strengths and plans for the future. The Governing Body believe that exploring the possibility of becoming part of the Pathfinder MAT is the best option for our school.

### **9. Why Pathfinder MAT?**

Evidence shows that MATs that meet the following criteria are successful and high performing, because they:

- are in local geographical clusters with the right balance of schools
- have a clear educational vision and a strong skill set
- offer increased support and challenge for school improvement
- promote consistency and innovation
- articulate and live out shared values and ethos
- have a clear plan for sustained growth.

Governors are confident that Pathfinder MAT meets all those criteria and that St Barnabas would continue to flourish if it was to become part of that MAT. Being part of Pathfinder MAT would enable us to:

- work collaboratively with other schools to secure the best outcomes for all of our children
- improve teaching and learning and develop our curriculum
- enable our school leadership to focus more on teaching and learning and whole school improvement as a result of a reduced administrative burden on individual schools on issues such as policy development and procurement
- improve recruitment, retention, professional development and succession planning
- achieve economies of scale and improve value for money.

## **10. Which other schools are currently in or looking to join Pathfinder MAT?**

There are currently five schools in the Pathfinder MAT:

- One Secondary school: Archbishop Holgate's School, a Church of England Academy
- Four Primary schools: Badger Hill Primary, Hempland Primary, Heworth Church of England Primary Academy and St. Lawrence's Church of England Primary School.

A number of others are currently consulting on joining.

## **11. Are there other Multi-Academy Trusts in the local area?**

There are a number of MATs in York. These include Hope Learning Trust, Southbank Multi Academy Trust and Ebor Academy Trust. A number of York schools are consulting on joining an existing MAT or setting up a new MAT.

## **12. Can we just stay as we are and not become an academy?**

Half of the schools in York have now become academies or have started the process of becoming an academy. As more schools leave the Local Authority it becomes more difficult for them to support schools effectively. Staying as we are is not a realistic option for the future.

## **13. Has a decision already been made?**

No. Governors will not make a decision until parents, staff and others with an interest in our school have been consulted. The consultation period will last from 8<sup>th</sup> May to 16<sup>th</sup> June 2017.

## **14. How can I share my views or ask more questions?**

This consultation is vital to find out the views of parents and carers and others who are stakeholders in our school so please do get involved. Although this is a decision that the Governing Body will take, no decision has yet been taken - your views will be taken into account as the school makes a final decision.

You can:

- Make an appointment to see Miss Boardman and / or Mr Grant (Chair of Governors) at a convenient time
- Speak to Miss Boardman at the start or the end of the day
- Email the school with 'Academy Consultation' in the subject line
- Return the comments sheet included with this letter to your child's class teacher or the school office
- Attend one of the following meetings to be held at school:
  - Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> May 2:15pm
  - Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> May 9am
  - Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> May 6pm

## **C. Once a Decision Has Been Made**

### **15. How long would it take for the school to become an academy?**

Once Governors do make a decision it can take upto a year for the school to become an academy.

### **16. What would the changes mean for my child at St Barnabas?**

It is very unlikely that you or your child would notice any difference to day-to-day school life. For example, their school day won't change. Schools joining the Pathfinder MAT will retain their own distinctive characters and identities – including their own uniforms.

The school will have to change its name slightly, because it would no longer be a Voluntary Controlled School. Staffing and curriculum will change over time as they would if we remained a Local Authority maintained school.

### **17. Will St Barnabas still work closely with our neighbouring primary schools and the Local Authority?**

Yes. We will continue with our existing partnerships, working with the local authority and others as appropriate. We have good relationships with local schools in the west of York (Poppleton Road, Carr Infant/Junior, Acomb Primary, Hob Moor, Westfield, Rufforth, Woodthorpe) and work closely with them. We expect these relationships to continue regardless of which MAT these schools are in. Other local schools, Clifton with Rawcliffe and Clifton Green are consulting on joining Pathfinder MAT.

### **18. Will it change which Secondary School my child attends?**

No. Admissions to secondary school will still be co-ordinated by the Local Authority and our children will still have the choice to attend different schools as they do now. We will continue to have similar transition arrangements with Manor Academy and Millthorpe Academy as the majority of our pupils move on to these schools.

**Thank you for reading this document and please do get involved with the consultation as outlined above.**