



**Our Lady  
Help of Christians**

**Our Lady Help of  
Christians Catholic  
Academy Trust**

**Frequently Asked  
Questions**

## What Is an Academy?

Academies are independent state schools funded directly by the government (through the Education Funding Agency) rather than via the Local Authority as maintained schools are. Academies have more freedoms than other state schools, for example, over their finances and curriculum. The current government still has an ambition for all schools to become Academies. The number of schools who have converted to Academy status continues to increase; the majority of secondary schools in England are now Academies and just over a quarter of primary schools. Like the vast majority of Catholic Dioceses, Shrewsbury Diocese has the ambition for all its schools to be academies by 2030.

## What is a Multi Academy Trust?

A Multi Academy Trust (MAT) is where a number of schools join together and form a single Trust with a Board of Trustees overseen by the Trust's Members. Maintained schools who want to join the Trust will need to convert to become an academy. We are experienced in taking schools on this journey and will support you throughout the conversion. For details about Members and the Board please [click here](#).

## Will the school have a new name or lose its individuality?

We recognise that schools have their own unique identity, and we want to celebrate this. We see this as a key benefit of being part of our MAT. There is currently no expectation that your school's uniform, name or its distinctiveness would be altered as a result of your school's conversion.

Academies remain part of the community. They serve children and families in a particular area and retain the same responsibilities as any maintained school.

The Headteacher in an academy continues to work in partnership with the governing body on strategic and operational matters.

## Will all schools have to have identical structures?

There is no 'template' of staffing, curriculum, or teaching style. This will be a decision for the local governing body and the headteacher. The school's ethos and culture will be the responsibility of the local governing body and headteacher as it is now.

The Trust has a mission and values statement which all schools must actively support.

## Who is responsible for the running of the school?

The day to day running of schools remains with the headteacher with support and challenge from the governing body. The Trust is very clear that headteachers are responsible for their schools. Legal responsibility for the schools lie with the Headteacher and Board of Directors. However, through the scheme of delegation, key responsibilities are apportioned to the governors.

- Academies are subject to the same laws on employment, equality, admissions and special needs as maintained schools
- Academies are required to follow the same rules over pupil exclusion as maintained schools
- Academies are subject to the same Ofsted Inspection regime as maintained schools
- Academies must operate a robust complaints policy in the same way as a maintained school
- Academies are subject to Freedom of Information requests, the same as a maintained school.

## Who appoints staff to the school?

The Board is the employer of all staff in the schools. The appointment of senior posts including the headteacher and deputy will have the involvement of the Board, usually through the CEO. The appointment of the key Catholic leadership posts (Headteacher, Deputy, Head of RE and Chaplain) will continue to have the involvement of the Diocese. For other appointments, the schools be responsible for appointments using their own established scheme of delegation. The Trust will provide support with the recruitment process.

## Will staff be forced to move to other schools in the Trust?

Although staff are employed by the Trust, their contract will specify the school they are working in and they will not be forced to move to another school.

It is possible that a member of staff is a joint appointment but this will be agreed in advance between the schools and the employee and be part of their contract.

Being within the Trust may allow staff opportunities for professional development in other schools and in so doing improve talent development and succession planning, but this will only be done with the agreement of all parties.

## How will the Trust be funded?

The Trust takes a management fee (top slice) from the schools budget to fund the support. The management fee will only be taken from the money allocated to schools based on its pupil numbers (for academies, this is called the General Annual Grant or GAG). SEND, Pupil Premium, Sports Premium or any other grants awarded to schools are not part of the management fee and remain wholly with the school.

## What does the management fee cover?

The management fee pays for the CEO, the Chief Financial Officer (CFO), finance staff, HR lead and support and the School Improvement Lead. It also covers the legal team and administrative support, overheads (including the Trust's website) and cost of the external audit. As the number of schools increase along with the management fee, additional support and services will be provided.

## What happens to a school's reserves?

All funding is the responsibility of the Trust however, schools will retain all their budget apart, from the management fee. Schools will not be responsible for the financial deficit in another school, although combined reserves could potentially be used to deliver a project on a 'loan' basis. The CFO will provide additional support to school business managers/school finance staff and provide additional assurance to the Board and the Accounting Officer that money is being used appropriately. As a Limited Company the Trust must publish audited accounts each year.

## What if a school's performance is a cause for concern?

The Trust, through the CEO meets regularly with the Regional Director and DfE to review the performance of all the schools in the Trust. There is an expectation that being part of an academy trust will improve schools' performance. As is now the case, robust actions plans would be agreed and support and challenge for rapid improvement if required. The trigger for serious concern about a school from the Regional Director is primarily Ofsted judgements.

## What happens with school inspections?

Academy schools are inspected in the same way as all schools. During inspection, the lead inspector will want to speak to the Chair of Governors and the Trust representatives. The CEO is also involved as part of the evidence gathering on the leadership and management of the school.

Schools that become academies are treated by Ofsted as new schools. Schools that become academies in the Trust, and were most recently judged good or outstanding, are treated as new schools for inspection purposes and are usually subject to an ungraded inspection (formally known as Section 8 inspection) as their first inspection; this will normally take place within three years of the school becoming an academy.

Section 48 Inspections/CSI will take place in Trust schools as they do now.

## What about staff contracts? Will they change?

Teachers and support staff remain under their current terms and conditions (ie Burgundy and Green Book) and The Trust follows current and future school teachers pay and conditions and national agreed public sector pay. Pensions remain unchanged as they are now and are underwritten by government. The main teacher and support staff unions are recognised and part of ongoing consultations on policy. Staff transfer to the Trust on the same conditions as their previous post and maintain their existing rights and benefits (this is known as TUPE).

## What are the advantages of being in a Trust?

There is no doubt that Local Authority capacity to support schools is reducing - the national expectation is that schools will group together to support and challenge each other through effective governance and accountability at local level.

Our Multi Academy Trust allows our schools to remain in charge of their own destiny and help secure even better outcomes for our students.

We believe pupils and staff benefit from the greater opportunities that formal partnership, through the MAT, brings. These include:

- extending learning opportunities and activities for students, e.g. by sharing specialist facilities and resources
- enriching the curriculum through greater partnership working for all students
- increasing the sharing of excellent practice in teaching and learning
- enhancing the professional development of teaching and support staff, improving recruitment and retention
- securing cost and resource efficiencies through joint commissioning of services; this will help headteachers, especially in these more austere times, to re-direct funds to teaching and learning;
- As a part of a multi academy trust, schools can access capital funding more easily. This will be managed for schools by the CFO, working with school business managers. School improvement funds are increasingly directed through Multi Academy Trusts.