

A Statement for Non-Church Schools exploring the option of joining a majority church multi-academy trust (MAT) in the Diocese of Lincoln.

The Lincoln Diocesan Board of Education (LDBE) welcomes the diversity and choice of educational settings for pupils and their families in the diocese of Lincoln. Church of England schools make up about a third of all schools in Lincolnshire and they provide an inclusive Christian ethos where all pupils and adults are valued. Church schools are sometimes the only school in the village and they proudly serve families of all faiths and none.

In a rural diocese, church schools value the collaborative partnerships with other schools and agencies. Many church schools and non-church schools work together to share good practice and to support each other. The links between church schools and community schools have become very strong over time in that they would find it difficult to develop standards without partnership arrangements such as peer review, sharing a Special Educational Needs Coordinator and sharing the coach for school trips for example.

It is important for all schools to look over the horizon and consider how they secure a sustainable future. The challenges on schools are many including recruitment and retention, finances and providing a rich and exciting curriculum to meet the needs of all learners.

In considering the future, schools are quite right to consider the strong partnerships they have established in addition to the benefits of forging new relationships with other organisations. Recognising the value of established and strong partnerships between church schools and non-church schools in the maintained sector, it is important there is the option for these strong relationships to be able to continue in the academy sector. All schools should consider the options and benefits of becoming an academy within a MAT and the LDBE provides an option for church schools and non-church schools to stay in close partnership within a MAT.

It is the LDBE policy that church schools wishing to join a MAT can only join a MAT where the majority of the Members are appointed by the diocese. These majority church MATs are formed, however, in a way that enables non-church schools to join them as well. In fact, the Infinity Trust in the Boston area is a majority church MAT with two church schools and three non-church schools in it. The character for each type of school is protected. The non-church schools are **not** converted to church schools. They maintain their unique character to serve the community in which they are located.

Within the context of the diocesan vision for education, non-church schools within a majority church MAT will continue to:

- Develop their distinct vision and values to enable all pupils and adults in their school community to flourish.
- Ensure the quality of education meet the needs of all learners and provides them with the knowledge, skills and rich learning experiences they need to thrive in the wider world.

- Ensure that Collective worship is led in accordance to the 1988 Education Reform Act. That is Collective worship in maintained schools and academies of no religious designation must be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character.
- Ensure that Religious Education will continue to be taught in accordance to the Locally Agreed Syllabus. The law states that all maintained schools must provide religious education for all registered pupils, and promote their spiritual, moral and cultural developments.
- Parents will continue to have the right to withdraw their children from both RE and collective worship.

The majority church MATs therefore provide an opportunity for church schools and non-church schools to maintain their partnerships, preserve their character and identity and secure a sustainable future within a multi-academy trust.