******PORTSMOUTH & WINCHESTER  
DIOCESAN BOARD OF EDUCATION**

Strategy Document for Academisation of Diocesan Schools – March 2024

**Introduction**

The DBE formed a task and finish group, chaired by the Diocesan Deputy Director of Education, to discuss the current education landscape across both dioceses and its impact on the drive for schools to academise. The group included members of the DBE, serving headteachers and Chairs of Governors of diocesan schools from a broad geographical spread. A series of meetings were held between October 2023 and January 2024 to discuss and review a draft academisation strategy document and academisation policy. Key recommendations from the group were for the DBE to:

* Agree and publish separate policy statements for SATs, IOW Schools and all other schools
* Receive feedback to further understand the current context and thinking of governing bodies and school senior leaders
* Publish documentation that communicates clear processes for academisation and that enables governing bodies to understand their voice and responsibilities in such processes

1. **Rationale and context**:
2. The Diocese of Portsmouth and the Diocese of Winchester includes schools and academies situated within five different local authorities, (three of which are unitary authorities): Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole; Hampshire; Isle of Wight; Portsmouth and Southampton. In two of these areas, the majority of schools have joined multi-academy trusts (MATs) whilst in others there are very few academies. Some schools became stand-alone academy trusts (SATs) as early adopters of academy status and are now being encouraged by the Department for Education (DfE) to join strong MATs. Additionally, some schools that have been graded inadequate or twice graded as requiring improvement, have received directive academy orders (DAOs) from the DfE. Currently, there are two diocesan schools under a DAO.
3. **By agreeing an academisation strategy and policy document, the DBE is not stating a position** **that it requires or expects all diocesan schools to academise**. However, the DBE recognises, in addition to reasons described above, that some schools may also wish to consider joining a MAT for strategic reasons. Depending on context, the DBE may agree that this is the best way forwards.
4. Numbers of schools currently with academy status are as follows:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **LA: (Total schools)** | **BCP (12)** | **Hampshire (109)** | **Isle of Wight (13)** | **Portsmouth (3)** | **Southampton (5)** |
| No. of schools in MATs | 4 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| No. of SATs | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 |

In total, there are 140 maintained schools and academies across the two dioceses.

1. **Isle of Wight (IOW) Context –** the strategic partnership for Children’s Services between the Isle of Wight and Hampshire County Council (HCC) ended on 31 January 2024. With respect to education, the IOW Council have appointed a new service manager for schools and will buy back some school improvement services from HCC. Following the announcement of the partnership dissolution, a meeting was held with school leaders to explain the changes ahead, focusing on school improvement and support services. The DfE was also invited to talk about academisation. The local authority wish for schools to focus on school improvement rather than school status changes as support for schools will continue in much the same way as it did under the agreement with HCC; academisation is not necessary but remains an option.
2. Additionally, there is a well-publicised pupil place planning crisis on the IOW which adds to the feeling of insecurity caused by the ending of the partnership. The over-provision of school places is being addressed and further consultation on school closures is taking place from April 2024.
3. Headteachers and governing bodies of IOW schools report the situation on the island feels very insecure. Consequently, many are considering academisation as an option for securing their status and school improvement journey.
4. **SATs Context –** the DfE believe that SATs would benefit from joining ‘strong’ MATs and are being encouraged to do so by the Regional Director. A number of SATs report finding the management and accountability of running a SAT a significant challenge.
5. **Wider diocesan context** – the current education climate is challenging for a number of reasons and therefore school leaders are considering options that will help to secure the future for their schools. In summary, common areas of challenge are: budget pressures, leadership recruitment, staffing and curriculum re-structuring, increasing need for specialist provision for SEND and governor recruitment. These issues are particularly acute for small schools (defined by the Church of England Education Office as less than 210 pupils); in Portsmouth and Winchester there are over 70 small schools – half the total number of schools (views of small school leaders have already been sought). As a consequence, conversations involving the diocesan team, local authorities and governing bodies about federations and formal collaborations are currently ongoing with nine schools. As referred to in point (iii), four schools have enquired about academisation.
6. There is a new OFSTED Chief Inspector of Schools and a general election most likely in 2024. Education policy may well be the subject of key pledges in party manifestos.
7. Regardless of timescale, any school wishing to change its designation must have the approval of the Diocesan Board of Education (DBE). Once begun, the legal process and legislative requirements typically take between nine and eighteen months to complete. This time frame is beyond diocesan control.
8. To determine a strategic direction, consideration must be given to a position that is both immediate and of the future. Therefore, this document includes recommendations for current criteria but also points to policy evolution as the landscape changes.
9. **Further communication**
10. Following the publishing of its initial academisation policy statements, and due to the ever changing landscape of education, it is recommended the DBE enter another phase of receiving feedback to fully understand current opinions. This will include an initial survey to schools, followed by a round of face to face governor meetings.
11. This process should also refer to alternative options to academisation, such as formal ***collaboration\**** and ***federation\****. These strategies could be viewed as long-term or interim, depending on context. \*See Q and A appendix for definitions.
12. Both diocesan Bishop’s Councils and Synods will also need to approve any policy before it becomes live.
13. **Prioritisation summary**
14. **Diocesan** **MAT**:

The Board will consider the establishment of a joint diocesan MAT as a desirable proposition. However, the Board will need to ensure that there are enough schools for whom becoming starter school in a new MAT would be a strategically sound decision before undergoing the necessary preparations to enable this to be a reality.

1. **Academisation Process**:
2. For schools wishing to express an interest in academisation, the Chair of Governors (CoG) must first return the questionnaire and appropriate next steps will be agreed.
3. The DDE will then arrange to meet representatives from governing bodies to discuss the rationale for academisation and its implications at regional meetings.
4. The DDE and individual CoGs will discuss potential sponsors that fulfil the criteria set out in the DBE Academisation Policy.
5. Governing bodies to complete their own due diligence process.
6. The DDE will also enter a dialogue with the Regional Director (RD) to discuss potential sponsors.
7. The DDE will take requests from schools to the DBE Academisation sub-group to make a recommendation to the DBE for approval.
8. A legal process of conversion begins\*.
9. \*If the school joins a diocesan MAT, then the DBE would fund costs. If the school is joining another trust then the governing body would be the client and be required to cover the costs.
10. Note: Schools currently part of a federation of formal collaboration will need to have dissolved their membership prior to any academisation process, unless the entire federation or collaboration of schools wishes to join the same MAT at the same time.
11. Once a sponsor has been agreed, the process typically takes a year to eighteen months to complete.
12. Where ‘geographical considerations’ are referred to, this takes the following into account:

* Existing clusters of schools that currently work together (informally)
* Physical distance – the board to consider whether a maximum journey time between member school is appropriate
* Can schools close to diocesan borders consider joining other diocesan MATs or MATs with CE articles of association that meet the requirements of the DBE policy? (see earlier decisions)