



Frequently asked questions:

There are 3 sections to the FAQs

1. All about academies
2. Financial matters
3. Day to day school questions



All about Academies!

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 ESFA (Education and skills Funding Agency), rather than through a local authority. The government describes them as independent, state-funded schools. In general academies have more freedom than other state schools over their finances, the curriculum, length of terms and school days and teachers' pay and conditions.

Groups of academies that join together with one Board of Directors are known as Multi-academy Trusts or MATs. The trust Board ultimately carries all the legal responsibilities and is held to account in much more detail and on a wider basis than schools are to Local Authorities. There is a significant amount of reporting on matters of standards, risks, governance as well as finance to both the DfE and ESFA.

What is a CMAT?

Catholic schools under local authority control are known as VA or Voluntary Aided schools. The Governing Body are both the employers of staff and the admissions authority. The majority of governors must be 'foundation governors' appointed by the Bishop.

Any Catholic school becoming an academy must do so according to the legal framework agreed with the Catholic Bishop's Conference. These are different to non-Catholic academies and include legal protection regarding the schools' Catholic status, RE curriculum and their ability to appoint Catholic school leaders. They have Catholic admission policies. Catholic Multi-Academy Trusts are therefore known as CMATs.

Which CMAT will we join?

We will be joining the Blessed Peter Snow CMAT, alongside 15 other schools including 2 high schools.

The size of each family group includes a minimum of two high schools and their partner primary schools, ensuring that the Trusts are serving the education of our young people and their families throughout their school lives. This number has been shown nationally to be the most effective size in order to benefit from national funding streams and economies of scale, whilst continuing to engage with the local community and enable the individual identity of each school and Parish to be preserved. Within the wider academy sector, many MATs operate in trusts with greater numbers of schools covering much wider geographic areas than that proposed. There are advantages of being a minimum size, including access to national funding streams, collaborative working and economies of scale.

What are the particular advantages of the MAT model?


There are obvious advantages in terms of the ability to employ specialist staff to work across all schools, agreeing common shared ethos, policies and practice, economies of scale in terms of brokering services. Succession planning for school leadership, mentoring and opportunities for senior staff across the family of schools for professional development.

What are the benefits of a CMAT system?

- Solidarity - Where no one school is left behind
- A joined-up, family focussed 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
- Teaching schools, CMAT and research institutions working together to make improvements that are evidence-based.
- Capital/ money – 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.

How are CMATs governed/ run?

Accountability and hierarchy chart

Secretary of State for education		Diocesan Bishop – Bishop Marcus	
Regional School’s Commissioner		Members	
<p>The Blessed Peter snow Trust Board (made up of 8 or more Foundation Governors)</p> 			
Trust Board committees	The Headteacher’s reference Group	The Chairs’ reference group	CEO and central team e.g. finance,
The academy councils for all the schools, including St. Paulinus			
The Headteachers of the Schools			
The staff of the school			

The above chart shows that our Academy Council are accountable to the Trust Board. We have to report on finances, use of money, standards and achievement and the catholic life of the school.

The Trust Board is then accountable to the above 2 rows. There are many safeguards in place to ensure that public money is spent well and that all schools are doing well.

What is an Academy Council?

Each academy school will normally have its own local governing body (Academy Council). The majority of local governors (usually 6) are foundation governors appointed by the Bishop, there are also 2 parent and 1 staff governors, who are elected in addition to the Headteacher.

These have a similar status to committees of a maintained governing body and the powers they have are those that are delegated to them by the trust Board. This is formalised into a scheme of delegation, which is a legal document, based on CES and government guidance. Each CMAT has also developed a roles and responsibilities document. This identifies what level within the structure particular responsibilities have been delegated. This is a dynamic document, which will need to be constantly re-visited due to the individual needs of each CMAT, their constituent schools, staff and pupils.

Individuals serving on an Academy Council are no longer able to be directors of the Academy Trust. The purpose of this is to retain some distinction between the layers is important to ensure effective oversight and challenge.

Who are the members?

Members of a company limited by guarantee (like the Academy Trust) are similar to the shareholders in a company limited by shares. They are the 'guarantors' of the academy trust and promise to pay £10 towards its debts should the academy trust be wound up without enough assets to satisfy its creditors.

The role of a member is a 'hands-off, eyes on' role, similar to the governance role of the local authority in a maintained school. Members will have limited powers which will include the right to wind up the academy trust, amend the articles of association, appoint other members and appoint and remove one or more trustees.

The DfE have clear preferences regarding members which state that:

- governance structures in which members are also employees are not considered by the DfE to be best practice. Members must not be employees of the trust unless permitted by the articles of association;
- members should no longer be trustees to ensure segregation, retaining some distinction between the two layers ensures that members, independent of trustees, provide oversight and challenge. This is especially important in multi academy trusts.

Within our CMATs the members are the Bishop, The Episcopal Vicar for Education and the Vicar General of the Diocese.

Who are the directors?

The individuals appointed to make strategic decisions about the day to day running of the academy trust have three names:

- they are directors because the academy trust is a company;
- they are trustees because the academy trust is a charity (albeit one that is exempt from registering with the Charity Commission);
- they are governors because the academy trust is responsible for running the school(s).

For the purposes of this document, we refer to them as 'directors' so as not to confuse them with the Diocesan Trustee which is the Charitable trust holding the diocesan assets. In a Catholic MAT, the Bishop appoints the foundation trustees.

Each CMAT will be able to outline their existing governance structures and current membership. As other schools within the family group join, the membership and structures will need to develop to reflect this, involving all governors in these strategic decisions.

Directors therefore fulfil their role as part of the Trust Board and not as 'representatives' of any particular school or grouping.

What does the Board do?

The directors come together to form the Board of trustees ('Board'). The Trust Board is the legal entity responsible for all schools within the CMAT. The CMAT is the employer and admissions authority and has ultimate responsibility for the Catholic nature and ethos, pupil progress and standards and finance. As this role is across a number of schools within the CMAT it is a very strategic role. As well as their responsibility as Catholic governors under Canon Law, there are additional duties under company and charity law that they will also be responsible for undertaking.



Money matters

How are academies funded?

Funding is calculated per pupil according to the national funding formula, with additional funding such as pupil premium in exactly the same way as VA schools, but paid directly to the CMAT from central government via the Education Funding and Skills Agency (EFSA), rather than via local authorities. Local Authorities decide how much of this funding goes directly to schools and what is held back to pay for services they provide centrally. This is in addition to services that individual schools 'buy in'.

How does funding go to individual academies?

The EFSA identify the funding individually for each academy, but pay it to the CMAT.

What are Central and Shared Services?

One of the benefits of being a CMAT is a much greater freedom to choose providers for all services. Services can also be shared across the Trust and with other schools and MATs. The wider Diocesan family of schools are developing this, supporting each other, sharing expertise and experience.

Different structures of trust-wide staff and responsibilities have developed within each CMAT. These will change according to the size and local need of each CMAT.

Any central and shared services are funded proportionately from all of the member schools. This funding is often referred to as a 'top-slice'. The extent, level and way in which these shared services are funded is agreed by each CMAT locally. This amount will obviously vary according to the size,

stage of development and local needs of each CMAT. What is included and the method of calculation is an integral part of the Trust's planning and will involve Directors, Headteachers and the central team.

The purpose of any shared services and staff are to support the delivery of sustainable excellent Catholic education to all our pupils, in the most flexible, locally focussed and cost-effective way.

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 affect.



Day to day School Questions

Will our school name change?

No, we will still be St Paulinus Catholic Primary School but the word Academy may appear on letters, school signs and the website.

Will our school uniform change?

There are no plans to change the uniform at this point, the school may choose to update the uniform in the future but this will not be because we have converted to become an academy.

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 CMAT 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.

My school currently works with local partnerships of schools- will this change?

Each school will continue to be a part of their unique locality and community and it is important that they work with other schools in a collaborative and supportive way. Many of these local partnerships are invaluable and as an Academy and part of a CMAT these relationships will be able to continue and flourish for the good of all the young people.

Will school hours, holidays or uniforms change?

These will remain exactly the same as at present. Any proposed changes would have to follow the same process as they do now, any changes would need to be approved by the existing Governing Body/ new Academy council in the future.

Will parents of children at primary schools still have a choice of which secondary school to send their children?

Yes. There will be no change to admissions policies or impact on parental choice.

What about exclusions?

Academies have to follow the law and government guidance on excluding pupils. This includes reporting exclusions to the local authority. However, academies do not have to consult the local authority before deciding to exclude a pupil and they can arrange their own independent appeals panels which would be supported by the Diocesan Education Service.

Will the teachers stay the same?

Yes, all the staff that are here now will remain, unless they choose to leave due to retirement, career progression or other reasons.

What will change for my child on a day to day basis?

Very little, the curriculum will still be taught, the timetable will remain the same, we will still have visitors in to help bring topics alive and we will still host our fundraising events. The purpose of joining the CMAT is to work closely as a family of schools to develop and share the best practice we can. We will continue to be a good school providing our pupils with a good education.