

Hereford Diocesan Board of Education Academisation Strategy

Introduction

A flourishing education system places children instinctively at the heart of decision making and leadership thinking at all levels. As a result, all agendas, structures, budgets and systems are deliberately designed around the flourishing of children. Although measurable academic excellence is central to flourishing, it is not the full story – the moral, spiritual, cultural and relational development of pupils offers a broader, more expansive vision of what education is for.

From Our Hope for a flourishing School System: Deeply Christian Serving the Common Good 2023

The vision, mission and ministry of the Diocese of Hereford is focused on living out our values in every church, home, school and community across our diocese: Christlike, prayerful and engaged.

Our shared diocesan strategy seeks to unite our diversity around a common vision to proclaim Christ and grow disciples in communities marked by our behaviours towards one another and outwardly to others in our communities. We are called to partner with a generous God so that lives are changed by an encounter with Christ and this overflow into families, homes and communities which will be changed for the better.

The last decade has brought significant changes to the education landscapes, particularly around academisation. This strategy sets out the strategic plan for academisation and organisation of existing Church of England schools and academies within the Diocese of Hereford.

The following three Multi-Academy Trusts have been approved by the Hereford Diocesan Board of Education (HDBE) as the academisation options for the remaining Maintained schools and Single Academy Trusts (SATs). All three trusts are predicated on the current Model Articles of Association and adhere to the Memorandum of Understanding between the National Society and Department for Education (DfE):

- Diocese of Hereford Multi-Academy Trust
- Orchard Multi-Academy Trust
- Shropshire Church of England Academies Trust.

The HDBE has the strategic responsibility, and is committed to, the sustainability of the trusts within this strategy. Given the local context within the Diocese of Hereford, the HDBE will not consider any Maintained

school or SAT joining any other trust and will not support the setup of any additional trust predicated on Church of England Articles of Association.

Where are we now?

We seek to ensure that every school and academy flourishes and delivers an education for its communities, which enables children to live life in all its fullness. This can be achieved with a range of different organisational structures.

Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs)

Currently, over half of pupils in state-funded education are educated in the academy sector. A multi-academy trust is a charitable organisation which oversees the running of multiple schools in England with 'academy' status.

Academy Trust Governance

As the accountable body, the trust board is the key decision maker. They are accountable to the Members. The board may delegate operational matters to executive leaders and governance functions to committees (including local governing boards (LGBs) in multi-academy trusts). The trust board as a corporate entity, remains accountable and responsible for all decisions made. Executive leaders operate within this structure with powers and functions delegated to them by the trust board through the Scheme of Delegated Authority (SODA).

Multi-academy trusts, due to their scale, employ a central executive team, to help them discharge their oversight responsibilities.

In academy trusts, the purpose of governance is to provide:

- *strategic leadership*
- *accountability and assurance*
- *strategic engagement*

*The board has collective accountability and strategic responsibility for the trust. It has a focus on ensuring the trust delivers an excellent education to pupils while maintaining effective financial management and **must** ensure compliance with:*

- *the trust's charitable objects*
- *regulatory, contractual and statutory requirements*
- *its funding agreement*

The board also has strategic and statutory responsibility for:

- *[safeguarding](#) and [special educational needs and disabilities \(SEND\)](#) arrangements within (and across) the academy trust*
- *promotion of pupil welfare*
- *keeping the trust's estates safe and well-maintained*

- *making sure that it delivers its commitment to other schools and academies*

DfE Academy Trusts: governance guide (November 2025)

The trust board is legally responsible as the employer, for every employee employed by the trust, whether they are based in the central team or at individual schools. The accountability for everything from health and safety, to safeguarding, to staff-wellbeing, sits with the trust board of directors. Some of these functions can be delegated to local governing boards or committees under a scheme of delegation, but it is the trust board, which is ultimately accountable.

Historic Choices

Much of the current landscape, within our Church of England schools can be traced back to decisions taken at the time of the 1944 Education Act. Decisions were taken at a local level, that determined which schools would become *aided* by the newly formed local authorities and which would be fully *controlled* by them. Decisions taken at that time, determined the governance structures in place within our Church of England schools and academies today. This point serves to illustrate those decisions on changes to our governance and organisational structure now, will be significant for us, long into the future of education within this diocese.

Moving Forward Together

As our education system continues to evolve, the Hereford Diocesan Board of Education's strategy is to develop and grow strong organisational structures, which will be sustainable, stand the test of time and the inevitable personnel changes within leadership and governance.

Our Vision for Education in the Diocese of Hereford

Since the work of Joshua Watson in the early 1800s, the Church of England has been involved in delivering education for the whole community. This continues in our work in support of the Church of England's 'Vision for Education' (2016) and 'Our Hope for a Flourishing Schools System' (2023). Paying deep regard to this, the mission of the HDBE is to ensure that every child and young person in our diocese has access to a high-quality education, which will enable them to flourish and to live life in all its fullness (John 10:10).

In providing a holistic, distinctive, inclusive and effective education, which is 'hospitable to diversity, respects freedom of religion and belief, and encourages others to contribute from the depths of their own traditions and understandings', the HDBE looks to all church schools and academies to make an outstanding contribution to the lives and opportunities of our children and young people.

The HDBE and its academy umbrella arm (Diocese of Hereford Educational Trust (DHET) Ltd) are committed to working with all strategic partners and stakeholders to provide the very best learning opportunities for all children and young people, irrespective of ability, gender, sexuality, culture, faith or no faith background in all of its church schools and academies.

Working with Local Authorities

The HDBE's commitment includes being proactive in supporting models of school organisation and leadership that ensure the best outcomes for children and young people, where all schools are effective and populated by the most skilled leaders, teachers and support staff. As a diocese, we are committed to working in partnership with the four local authorities that span our diocese. This continues to be important in all of our schools but especially within the maintained sector.

Church of England Vision

The HDBE expects all church school learning communities to be built on clear foundations which embrace an underlying Christian ethos that supports a strong moral purpose, which, in turn, promotes high aspiration and excellence. Church school communities should demonstrate a collective responsibility for the results and achievement of all children, working to an ethic of 'inclusivity and belonging', within and beyond individual school communities.

The HDBE also expects that in its schools and academies, children and young people will gain a rich understanding of the Christian tradition and a positive encounter with Jesus that will provoke them for the whole of their life so that 'they might have life and have it abundantly' (*John 10:10*). The national vision articulates four key elements that contribute to a deeply Christian learning experience: educating for wisdom, hope, community and dignity. The HDBE is committed to working in partnership with its schools, academies and other stakeholders to create and deliver learning communities that exemplify these four key characteristics.

Reorganisation within our Changing System

The view of HDBE is that all Church of England schools should be proactive in planning for the future, in developing strong collaborative arrangements and recognises that for some within the Diocese of Hereford family of schools this may lead to discussion about conversion to academy status as part of a multi-academy trust or moving from a single-academy trust into a multi-academy trust.

Memorandum of Understanding

The HDBE strategy adheres to the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the National Society for Education (NSE) and DfE, which has the approval of the Secretary of State for Education (updated September 2023). It also takes full account of the Academies Act 2010 and the Education and Adoptions Act 2016.

The Church of England academies: model Articles of Association (September 2023) link to the latest MOU and replace all previous versions. It should be used by academy trusts in the process of being established and by existing multi-academy trusts updating their articles or taking in additional church schools. This document consolidates the Church of England majority and minority Articles of Association, predicated on the Church of England majority model with flexibility to adapt according to the published Diocesan Strategy.

The Members appoint the majority of the Board of Trustees (also known as Directors under company law). The Board of Trustees (Directors) run the company. Trustees (Directors) are appointed on the basis of their skills. They are required to be effective in holding the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or equivalent to account and to represent the interests of the Members as dictated and directed by the Objects of the company. The

company must be established using the 2023 model Articles of Association that have been approved by the Church of England with the DfE. This safeguards the instrument that has established the Church school at its foundation: the Trust Deed.

Church of England multi-academy trusts open to all schools.

Church of England multi-academy trusts will not be exclusive trusts for church schools or exclusive trusts for historic Ofsted outstanding and good schools. They are open to any and all schools that decide to join them (subject to due diligence and a full business plan).

Non-church community schools can join a Church of England trust. Their status and ethos are protected and it will be expected that such schools will play a full and strategic role in the development of the trust. Church trusts wishing to admit non-church academies must include the HDBE in such decisions.

Church of England schools and non-Church of England multi-academy trusts

It is not possible for a Church of England school to join a non-Church of England multi-academy trust other than in very exceptional circumstances (such as a formal direction from the Secretary of State for Education). Church schools within the Diocese of Hereford must join a trust that is identified within this strategy.

Church of England multi-academy trusts and vulnerable schools

Church of England trusts will play a full and committed role in school improvement and must be ready and prepared to admit vulnerable schools to the trust where and when the HDBE makes such a request.

The HDBE recognises that the Education and Adoptions Act 2016, Section 7, places a duty on the Secretary of State to make an Academy order in respect to a maintained school in England that is eligible for intervention by virtue of Section 61 or 62 Education and Inspections Act 2006. The HDBE expects that schools subject to such intervention will be placed in secure church trust homes and the diocese will seek to influence existing church trusts to invite such schools to join them; there will be no 'lost sheep'.

While considering the management and growth of any multi-academy trust, it is important to maintain a balance between the schools which need a great deal of support, drawing on capacity, and those that need much less support and are able to add to the multi-academy trust's capacity to support others.

The HDBE has an on-going commitment to the flourishing of all schools within the Diocese of Hereford and trusts identified in this strategy. So that all individual schools may flourish, the HDBE may ask that trusts welcome schools that require greater support when providing consent for those that will bring additional strength. It may also be the case that when providing consent for larger, more financially sustainable schools that the HDBE asks for smaller schools to be considered to convert into the trust at the same time. This will ensure a good balance of schools across all trusts, providing a rich and diverse mix of schools within trusts and a more sustainable academisation landscape.

Multi-academy trust options for Church schools in the Diocese of Hereford

The HDBE will continue to work with existing trusts to develop a strategic and coherent plan for trust growth determined in partnership with the HDBE. The HDBE carefully consider all schools applying for conditional

consent to join an identified trust within this strategy. Consideration is given to, but not limited to; the context of each school, its geographical location in relation to the trust, the trust's growth strategy and the stability of the trust in relation to the rate of its growth, proven impact on academies already within the trust, central trust capacity and the financial stability and reserve position of both the converting school and preferred trust.

The HDBE are confident that the three current trust options within this strategy have capacity to secure the successful academisation of the remaining maintained Church schools within the Diocese of Hereford. The following are statements prepared by the trusts:

The Diocese of Hereford Multi-Academy Trust (DHMAT)

Families have always been important in the Diocese of Hereford. Isolation and rurality can be a risky combination. In the field of education within our rural region, the Diocese of Hereford Multi-Academy Trust has a vocational mission of Grace and Service, which helps to support families through education for life in all its fulness. As the challenges within our system have grown, so has our confidence that working in deep collaboration is the key to finding ways to respond to these challenges. A strong, mutually supportive, trust-family of schools has huge benefits compared with working alone.

As our first diocesan trust, DHMAT is intentionally very closely aligned to the vision and mission of the Hereford Diocese within education. DHMAT has a track record of effective school improvement. DHMAT schools work together well to build a strong education offering, overcoming barriers for all children. Our schools do not lose their distinctive local identity but are aligned where there are advantages available and to allow deep collaboration and reduced workload (84% positive staff job satisfaction survey result, 12% above the Edurio national benchmark).

As a growing trust with 3500 pupils in 20 schools, including two secondary schools, we now have the central capacity to provide strong support for the day-to-day work of running a school, anywhere in the Diocese of Hereford. We have a comprehensive and mature school support offer, including with inclusion, SEND, safeguarding, curriculum & teaching, achievement, governance, estates, finance, inspection support, digital strategy, legal advice, human resources, health and safety and all aspects of school leadership. Because we are over 3000 pupils we have an annual capital allocation from the DfE, so no CIF or SCA bidding processes to worry about!

As DHMAT continues to grow, we are developing organisational clusters around different geographical areas within the diocese. We hope to welcome more schools soon because, the more schools we have, the stronger our family of schools will become. Our growing regional and national profile is helping as we work with system partners such as Worcester University, OfSTED, the Department for Education and the CE Education Office.

DHMAT operates in support of the education system for all schools in the diocese and exists to realise the core strategic aim of ensuring that every child receives a good education that enables life-long flourishing.

The Shropshire Church of England Academies Trust

Shropshire Church of England Academies Trust (SCEAT) is a joint partnership between Hereford Diocese and Lichfield Diocese. Incorporated in 2024, with the founding group of eight primary schools joining in the Spring term 2025, the Trust's vision is to provide high quality, fully inclusive learning opportunities to children across the early years and primary age ranges. Rooted in our Christian foundation, SCEAT is committed to serving local communities and enabling every child to flourish academically, socially and spiritually.

At the heart of our school improvement strategy is a commitment to achieving a school-led system in order to promote and secure outstanding levels of achievement for all children. Trust leaders possess a proven track record of effective school improvement, underpinned by deep professional expertise, strong leadership capacity and a clear understanding of what makes schools successful and sustainable over time. This expertise enables the Trust to provide both robust challenge and high-quality support, tailored to the individual context of each school.

SCEAT is proud to be a supporting organisation for the Department for Education's RISE Programme, reflecting the Trust's commitment to sector-led improvement and its capacity to support schools through periods of change and development.

The Trust has created three geographical hubs of schools across Shropshire which are built upon a successful model of collaborative working and affords schools an opportunity to enjoy all the benefits of working closely with colleagues in other neighbouring schools who are part of the Trust. This collaborative approach is particularly effective in supporting small rural schools, where shared expertise, joint planning and collective problem-solving help to secure long-term viability while protecting each school's distinctive character.

While each of the schools in the Trust is unique, and retains its own identity within its community, we understand that the mutual challenge, support and partnership that we offer each other as a Trust working together will enable our schools to flourish. Sharing our Christian values, being warm and welcoming to all, knowing our children and their families well, and placing a strong emphasis on pastoral care are at the heart of our Trust's ethos.

Subject to Trust due diligence, SCEAT is open to all Church of England primary schools, community schools, or single academy trusts across Hereford Diocese or Lichfield Diocese.

Orchard Multi-Academy Trust

Orchard Multi Academy Trust is a values led Trust committed to enabling all schools to Plant, Grow, and Flourish together. Within this shared vision, our Church of England academies are supported to help pupils explore the Christian promise of "life in all its fullness" (John 10:10). These schools nurture spiritual development and encourage pupils to grow in wisdom, hope, dignity, and community, while developing the Fruits of the Spirit as part of daily life. For both Church and Community schools, Orchard holds a firm belief that every child should be recognised as a unique individual who is known, valued, and supported to thrive. The Trust empowers each academy to develop its own identity while contributing to a collaborative community that strengthens practice across all schools. This partnership enables schools to retain their

distinctive character while benefiting from shared expertise, professional generosity, and a commitment to excellence. Through this approach, every pupil gains access to enriching experiences that inspire curiosity, creativity, and a deep sense of belonging.

A positive culture of wellbeing underpins all aspects of Orchard's work. We prioritise the health and happiness of children, staff, and families, promoting relationships built on respect, kindness, and a genuine belief in the potential of every individual. Enrichment opportunities are woven through the curriculum to bring learning to life and broaden horizons. In Church schools, this includes moments of reflection, opportunities for prayer, and encounters that encourage pupils to think deeply about spirituality. In Community schools, this is reflected in thoughtfully designed experiences that promote character, ethical understanding, and living well together.

High quality professional development, coaching, and reflective dialogue drive improvement across the Trust. Staff are encouraged to share strengths, grow their expertise, and contribute to a culture of continuous learning. Strong stewardship ensures that resources are used wisely and ethically, always with the aim of supporting the whole child and ensuring long term sustainability.

Orchard is committed to providing safe, secure, and uplifting environments where children can learn and flourish. With a clear plan for sustainable and values led growth, the Trust seeks to welcome new academies where doing so serves children and communities well. In all we do, Orchard aims to develop confident, capable, and compassionate individuals who surpass their potential academically, personally, and, where appropriate, spiritually, regardless of their background or circumstances.

Stand Alone or Single-Academy Trusts (SATs)

It is the view of the HDBE that schools and our education system are best served by being in collaborative arrangements and that multi-academy trusts will provide these opportunities for any Church of England Academy. However, we also recognise that we have some very strong single-academy trusts which deliver a very high quality of education for their communities.

Any newly converting school will need to become part of a multi-academy trust as the DfE will no longer approve the creation of single-academy trusts.

Existing SATs will need to discuss their future plans with the diocese, and it is our hope that eventually all will be working collaboratively within multi-academy trust families.

Maintained Schools within Existing Federations

The academisation of maintained schools within existing federations can be challenging to navigate especially where systems and services are heavily integrated across the schools. This can be complicated further when the schools within the federation are a combination of both church and community schools. The HDBE will take a pragmatic approach to understanding the relationships and shared services in these schools when considering arrangements for academisation within the published strategy.

Where the long-term sustainability and viability of the church school would be detrimentally impacted by leaving the federation upon academisation, the HDBE may look to make allowances to the preferred academisation structures.

Any provisional consent agreed by the HDBE may come with formal caveats regarding the safeguards to the church school, trust structures, local school governance arrangements and limitations to additional church schools joining the trust in the future.

Approval for academy conversion

Written consent from the HDBE is required for a school to convert to become an academy (see academisation route map). The Diocese of Hereford will hear requests from schools, under the Academies Act 2010 Section 3 iv, for consent to apply for an Academy Order. The diocese will only hear such a request following a resolution of the members, governing body (trustees) and the consent to apply from any other foundations/site trustees.

No school should embark on consideration of becoming an academy without having had a conversation with the HDBE through HDBE officers. Applications will be considered by the HDBE at their scheduled business meetings throughout the year. Discussions with schools and governing bodies can be had at any time.

School must complete the following application form - [Appendix 1 for application form](#).

The trust must also be in agreement that they have capacity for the school to join them and should complete the following application form to be submitted for consideration at the same HDBE meeting - [Appendix 2 application form](#).

Continuing to discuss options

The HDBE will keep an open approach to the development of the academy programme as the education landscape continues to develop and evolve. Opportunities to discuss specific and unique contexts for individual schools will be maintained. Being creative, within the clear parameters of the HDBE Academisation Strategy will be key to a successful future.

The HDBE will work proactively with the Regional Department for Education (DfE) Director and their office in strategic planning and determining academy proposals and arrangements within the Diocese.

HDBE Consent

HDBE consent will be required in respect of converter academies i.e. those not forced to become academies by the DfE, and this is not a formality. The HDBE will normally grant provisional and conditional consent to conversion to academy status, providing certain conditions are met: -

- ✓ the school consults the HDBE as soon as governors begin to discuss the process of academisation
- ✓ the Memorandum/Articles of Association of the Trust must be approved by the DBE
- ✓ the DBE, through DHET (Diocese of Hereford Educational Trust), becomes a corporate member of the Academy Trust and appoints the majority of members with the ability to appoint an appropriate number of directors
- ✓ the Academy Trust and the HDBE/ Site Trustees must enter into a Church Supplemental Agreement in relation to each school site (excluding any playing field land, if owned by the local authority, for which

there will be a 125 year lease with the LA) in a form approved by all parties, based on the form included in the Model Documents issued by the DfE

- ✓ the Academy Trust must enter into a Commercial Transfer Agreement for each school with the local authority and the governors in the form included in the Model Documents
- ✓ the Academy Trust must enter into a Master Funding Agreement with the Secretary of State in a form approved by the HDBE, and a Supplemental Funding Agreement for each academy based on the forms included in the Model Documents
- ✓ the school pays HDBE's/ Site Trustee legal fees and a fee for work carried out by DBE officers. The academisation conversion grant can be used for this purpose
- ✓ where appropriate, a Members' Agreement applies (this commits the Members (i.e. legal owners of the Trust) to ensure the implementation of the Church of England objects of any Church of England school in the Trust)
- ✓ the HDBE are confident about the long-term sustainability or capacity of any proposed Trust
- ✓ the school and trust accept an agreed timeline to support either the stabilising of the trust or school finances and/or staffing structures, or where the HDBE require more time to consider the impact the MAT is having on standards and provision in the existing schools within the trust.

Due Diligence

The HDBE will carry out its own due diligence in respect of requests from Church of England schools to convert to academy status. The HDBE will consider all documentation provided by the school and trust as well as asking officers from the Education Team and the HDBE board to use their local knowledge and publicly available data and documentation. The HDBE may also seek a meeting with governors and or the Headteacher and the Academy Trust in addition to the Application for Conditional Consent to Convert documentation being completed (Appendix 1). This document is the undertaking that governors give to the diocese that its conditions will be met.

Under Performance & Sponsors

Where a Church of England school is underperforming and the DfE issue a Directive Academy Order, the HDBE will work with DfE colleagues to ensure that the school is placed in one of the three trusts agreed in this strategy. This process is outlined in the [Memorandum of Understanding](#) between the National Society (Church of England) and the DfE.

Disagreement

If there is a disagreement about the basis of the HDBE consent to an academy proposal, or if a Church of England school wishes to convert into an arrangement outside the HDBE policy (or outside arrangements envisaged by the Memorandum of Understanding between the National Society and DfE), then the governors proposing this can make an approach to the Hereford Diocesan Board of Education to discuss this. The HDBE may request that a written case is produced, and that the governors meet with representatives of the HDBE before a decision is made.

This policy was approved by the Diocese of Hereford Educational Trust and the Diocesan Board of Education on 2nd February 2026.

This policy is due for review by the Diocese of Hereford Educational Trust and the Diocesan Board of Education in January 2027.