

Multi-Academy Trust Frequently Asked Questions



What is a MAT?

A MAT is a Multi-Academy Trust. It is a legal entity that governs a family of schools through a single set of directors. It is set up by a group of schools, usually a local collaboration, that share a common ethos and vision.

What are the different types of academies?

There are three types of academies:

- Converter academies are successful schools that have chosen to convert to academies in order to benefit from the increased autonomy academy status brings, having decided that becoming an academy is the best route for the school. This is the case with both Lutton St Nicholas and Gedney Church End.
- New schools automatically become academies when they open and can join a MAT.
- Sponsored academies are those normally falling into the Ofsted 'inadequate' category or deemed to be 'coasting'. They require the maximum support within the MAT family and conversion to an academy can be the most appropriate solution as part of a range of measurements to improve educational standards. This does not apply to either school in the Federation.

Why are schools joining MATs both locally and nationally?

Schools can use the strong collaboration and accountability afforded by the MAT to drive up standards and share best practice and services across the trust, replacing aspects of former local authority support.

Across the country Local Education Authorities are being eroded in terms of size and power. The Government, both incumbent and alternative, has indicated that this is their preferred structure. Schools that have converted to Academy status can now procure Services from within a competitive and open marketplace potentially offering both better quality and value for money.

Why join the Keystone Academy Trust?

We have worked closely with Keystone Academy over the last three years with support from Specialist Leaders in Education (SLEs) and maths improvement projects. We have been supported through the MAT with local and national networks in areas of English/ maths /science/ SEND /DSL which has seen significant improvements in strategic school improvement objectives.

With Keystone Academy, we feel we will be joining a Trust with a track record of school improvement. All schools in the trust have strong records of improvement in Ofsted ratings due to strong leadership driving up standards across the curriculum.

As a small school, we find the challenges of leading in the foundation subjects to be a significant hurdle as capacity is very limited. We want our children's knowledge and understanding of the wider curriculum to be improved. Teaching and Learning consultants will be deployed across the Trust in addition to school to school support which we feel will improve our senior and middle leadership within the school. We believe that Keystone's curriculum teams and performance advisors will fundamentally support improvements across the whole curriculum.

The Trust's CEO is a National Leader of Education (NLE) and was previously the principal advisor at Lincolnshire City Council School Improvement Service for 10 years. She has led Bourne Westfield from Requires Improvement to Outstanding. The Trust's Director of Teaching School has also formed an affiliation with the Minster Maths Hub and leads a local Maths Cluster attended by over 30 schools in order to develop the mastery approach to the teaching of Mathematics.

From our work alongside Keystone over the last three years, it's clear to see that the Trust is developing strong expertise in mixed age classes with the schools they have within the MAT. We feel that this would benefit our school significantly as each class within the school is mixed age.

The MAT's vision is to inculcate the expectation of high performance and academic achievement through offering a rich and exciting curriculum, affording the children to shine and ignite their passion for learning. By joining Keystone Academy we believe that we will secure excellent outcomes, so that children are better equipped to face the challenges the future will bring.

You can find information about the Keystone Academy Trust on their website at www.keystoneacademytrust.org.uk

Why would a LA school want to join a MAT? There are a number of reasons why a school may want to join a MAT:

- Common teaching and learning practices across schools;
- A common professional development programme (CPD) that adds real value to the education of the young people;
- Efficiencies in administrative functions and joint procurement; this will help in these more austere times to advantage the students;
- Improved and different ways of governance with a clear focus on strategic development, teaching and learning, and accountability;
- Enhanced reputation for excellence, due to other schools in the Trust;
- Improved leadership, management and governance that impacts directly upon the students;
- Recruitment, retention and growth of staff;
- Improve overall academic standards;
- Ensure that decisions about the school are influenced at a local level;
- Secure the long term future of the school.

Will the ethos and values of the schools change on becoming an Academy?

No. The ethos and values of the schools will continue as they always have done. The vision may alter as it will be a more collaborative shared vision taking into account each partner school.

Will the schools' names change if we became an Academy?

No. The only change made will to use 'Academy' rather than 'School' in its name.

Will the schools' uniforms change?

Each school will have slight changes to their uniforms. We are currently looking at redesigning our school logos and in the case of Gedney Church End changing the shade of blue from 'sky blue' to 'navy'. We will provide further details in due course.

Will there be changes to the term times?

There is no intention to make any changes to the term times at present or for the foreseeable future as these would conflict with the opening times of other schools and cause difficulties for parents. No change will be made without fully consulting parents and only then if such change was deemed to be in the best interests of the learners in each school.

Will there be changes to the length of the school day?

There are no plans to change the length of the school day. Changes could be made but these would only be done after full consultation with parents and staff and even then would only be made if it were in the best interests of the learners in each school.

Under the Local Authority you have to employ qualified teachers, can you confirm that this is the case under the academy?

All schools whether Local Authorities or Academies are able to employ the person they see is best placed to deliver a high level quality of education. This is most usually a qualified teacher

Are you looking to share staff between schools in the academy?

There will be some staff that work across the trust such as the central team of adviser or central finance staff. However, our Teachers or Teaching Assistants will not be asked to work at other schools.

What happens if the academy cannot fund things going forward, i.e the government cuts the funding what happens then?

Government funding is allocated to academies in exactly the same way as to Local Authorities. Therefore, any Government cuts will impact on all schools in exactly the same way.

What's to stop the academy merging all three schools in the local area?

Under the funding agreement that Secretary of State issues when a school converts to become an academy you are not allowed to merge or close that school. It is only the Secretary of State that can grant permission for this.

If the school becomes an Academy and part of a Multi-Academy Trust when is this likely to take place?

September 2021 is most likely, though both applications have to be approved by the Regional School Commissioner after taking advice from a Local Head Teacher Board.

What about the Local Authority?

Each school within the Federation currently works closely with the Local Authority, and will continue to work with the Local Authority even after conversion to Academy status.

Do we need to get permission to convert to an academy and join a MAT?

Yes. Existing schools looking to convert to an academy and join a Multi Academy Trust will need to apply to the Department for Education (DfE) and gain the approval of the Regional Schools Commissioner.

Do we need to consult?

There is no requirement for the MAT or the single academy to consult generally with stakeholders. However, it is considered good practice for academy trusts to inform parents, staff and other key stakeholders about the proposals and give them the opportunity to respond. Staff will need to be formally informed/consulted about the transfer of their employment under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 ('TUPE').

Is there a set model for how a MAT has to operate?

No. There are rules regarding how a MAT is funded, but the way in which a MAT operates, its governance structure and vision/ethos are defined by the academy or academies that set up the MAT.

What changes do we need to make to become an Academy?

There are three main changes which need to be undertaken by the existing academy trust:

- You will enter into a supplemental funding agreement which will be agreed by the DfE
- Your Governing body will become a local Governing Board and will primarily be responsible for the quality of educational provision at both schools
- All staff will be employed by Keystone Academy Trust

What will happen to our land and buildings?

This will be negotiated at time of transfer, but it is likely that all land and buildings will be held on a 125 year lease by the multi academy trust.

My child has special educational needs. Will the change to academy status mean any changes for her/him?

No. The Local Authority will continue to have overall responsibility for Special Educational Needs budgets. There will be no difference in the support given for individual pupils whether schools remain under Local Authority control or are part of a Multi Academy Trust.

How is funding organised within the MAT?

Funding for schools within a MAT is allocated on an individual academy basis. It is governed through a master funding agreement between the Secretary of State and the MAT and supplemental agreements between the Secretary of State and each school within the MAT. Previously the LEA 'top sliced' centrally delivered funding to provide a raft of services such as payroll and admissions. Although a figure has never been officially revealed (and it differs between LEAs) the suggestion is in the region of 20%.

The MAT can decide what % of funding to top slice in order to operate the MAT and provide desired support. This is negotiated and agreed before entry. Schools that have converted to Academy status have found that generally they can procure the centralised services from the open market much cheaper than buying them back from the LEA.

Will the school lose its financial independence and its ability to manage its own finances?

There would be a common financial procedures manual to be shared between schools but each school will be expected to maintain their own books. However, there is will be some centralisation of finances where these make sense and result in possible economies of scale.

MAT Structures

MAT's are generally governed by one set of Members and Board of Trustees who delegate certain responsibilities to individual Local Governing Boards and Senior leadership teams.

When the academy converts to a MAT, there will be three tiers of governance rather than two.

These three tiers will be:

- Members of the MAT - responsible for fundamental decisions such as constitution of the academy trust – most strategic decisions delegated to the Trustees.
- Board of Trustees of the MAT ('the board'). These are the individuals who run the MAT on a day to day basis and will decide on what and where support is offered. They will also potentially offer centralised services such as HR, IT, Finance etc. The role of the board is likely to be more strategic than a board of a single school and the trustees will be ultimately responsible for all of the academies it runs.
- Local Governing Bodies ('LGBs') for each academy school. In multi academy trusts, each academy will usually have its own LGB. These have a similar status to committees of a maintained governing body and the only powers they have are those that are delegated to them by the board. This is normally formalised into a scheme of delegation. Individuals serving on a LGB may or may not be trustees of the academy trust. It is common for them to be referred to as 'governors'.

How will becoming an Academy affect the curriculum?

There is no intention to make major changes to the current curriculum as it supports our pupils extremely well. Academies do have greater freedom over determining the curriculum but still need to have regard to any proposed changes by Government.

The MAT will co-ordinate and promote its academies to work together more closely to encourage curriculum innovation and sharing of good practise.

Will working with other schools mean lowering our own standards or possibly detracting resources from our own school?

No! by working closely with others we will be raising our own standards and increasing accessibility to a greater range of resources.

What else will change?

We do not intend to change anything else about the day to day operation of either school as a result of converting to join KAT (Keystone Academy Trust). For most pupils and parents there will be very little that will obviously change. Over

time, the sharing of best practice and resources will help to secure continued improvement in student achievement, high quality teaching and learning and good use of resources. Looking further into the future of England's education system, it is increasingly likely that cooperative working between schools and academies will become "normal".

The shape of educational provision is rapidly changing and the governors want to be sure that Luton St Nicholas and Gedney Church End will continue to flourish and thrive, and to offer excellent education to its pupils well beyond our own lifetimes.

We hope that you have found this information useful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Scott Pearson', written in a cursive style.

Scott Pearson,
Executive Head Teacher