

Chelmsford Diocesan Board of Education

Promoting life in all its fullness through education across Essex and East London



Chelmsford Diocesan Board of Education Academisation Strategy 2026

Diocesan Board of Education

Diocese of Chelmsford

To promote life in all its fullness through education across Essex and East London'

1. Introduction

The Chelmsford Diocesan Board of Education (CDBE) Academisation Strategy is dedicated to fostering an environment in which every child and young person can experience an excellent education rooted in Christian distinctiveness and the love of God. Guided by John 10:10, "I have come that they may have life and have it to the full," the CDBE is committed to supporting its family of schools through strong relationships, collaboration and shared responsibility for their flourishing.

This strategy has been refreshed in response to the evolving national education policy landscape and the continued development of a trust-led school system. It reflects the current diocesan landscape, including MAT capacity, and provides greater clarity on expectations, decision-making and system planning.

In this context, the CDBE will exercise its statutory responsibilities to provide advice, require consent and support informed decision-making, working with governing boards and MATs to secure the long-term sustainability and coherence of Church of England education across the Diocese.

2. The Chelmsford Diocesan Board of Education (CDBE)

The CDBE has a statutory responsibility to:

- Promote or assist in the promotion of education in the Diocese that is consistent with the faith and practice of the Church of England.
- Promote or assist in the promotion of religious education and religious worship in schools in the Diocese.
- Promote or assist in the promotion of church schools in the Diocese.
- Promote co-operation between itself and other persons concerned with education in the Diocese.

The CDBE is the religious authority for 139 church schools in the Diocese of Chelmsford. Its work is governed by the Diocesan Board of Education Measure 2021, which provides the legal framework within which the CDBE operates. Under this measure, the CDBE has a range of functions and powers including:

- Providing advice on matters affecting church schools.
- Identifying circumstances in which the governing board, and the site trustees of a school site must obtain the CDBE's advice.
- Requiring consent for certain actions, including school organisation and academisation.
- Requiring those receiving advice from the CDBE to have 'due regard' to that advice.

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- Setting out when a church school must obtain prior written consent from the CDBE (for example, before seeking an academy order.)
- Setting out when and how the CDBE may issue directions to governing boards, academy trusts and site trustees and requiring compliance with those directions.

3. Guiding Principles

The CDBE strategy aims to:

- Maintain a cohesive Diocesan family of schools that effectively delivers the vision to promote life in all its fullness for children and young people across Essex and East London.
- Preserve the Christian ethos and distinctiveness of Church Schools.
- Enable all pupils in Church of England schools to achieve their full potential.
- Promote inclusivity and commitment to serving local communities.
- Encourage collaboration between schools to strengthen networks and capacity.
- Provide a clear and consistent framework to support schools in considering their future.
- Secure strong and effective governance for all schools, reflecting their status as Church of England schools.
- Respond thoughtfully to national policy development relating to academies.
- Support governing boards to make informed and sound strategic decisions that secure financial sustainability, accountability and long-term viability.
- Encourage governing boards to engage proactively in strategic planning for their future structure, including consideration of academisation where appropriate.
- Fulfil its statutory responsibilities under the DBE Measure 2021.

In line with the Diocesan Board of Education Measure 2021, the CDBE acts as the Diocesan Authority for its church schools and must be consulted on all school organisation matters. Church of England schools are required to obtain the CDBEs consent before converting to academy status or transferring between Multi Academy Trusts. Early engagement with the Diocese is expected to ensure that advice is provided in a timely and informed way.

4. CDBE Academisation Strategy Approach

The CDBE Strategy provides a framework to support schools in considering the options available for academisation. It does not prescribe any individual MAT. The CDBE respects the decision-making responsibilities of governing boards and supports them to make informed decisions, in the best

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interests of their pupils, whether to remain as a maintained school, explore partnership arrangements such as federation where appropriate, or become an academy, and which MAT to join.

Federations may provide short to medium term support in particular circumstances but are not considered a long-term structural solution. They are expected to be time limited and should support, rather than replace, strategic planning for academisation.

The CDBE will also seek to support a coherent and sustainable system across the Diocese by taking account of MAT capacity, geographical context and long-term viability of schools.

The CDBE will develop a framework for understanding school readiness for academisation. This will include engagement with governing boards and the use of data to support strategic planning, align school preferences with MAT capacity and ensure that decisions are proactive rather than reactive.

Decisions will consider geographical context, promote meaningful collaboration, and avoid concentrating schools facing challenge within individual trusts. The CDBE recognises that MAT growth capacity is currently limited and will manage growth carefully to support sustainability across the system.

The following criteria form the basis of the CDBE's approval in principle (conditional consent – as set out in Appendix 1), Final consent will be granted once the CDBE is satisfied that all the required legal documentation is in place, and the Church Supplemental Agreement (CSA) has been executed with the Department of Education (DfE).

The CDBE's strategy is to prioritise the growth and development of strong Church MATs, with Articles of Association that secure a church majority at member and director level. This ensures that pupils are served by resilient organisations with a clear Christian ethos and vision. Church of England Voluntary Aided schools can only join such MATs with church majority membership. Documents agreed between the National Society and the DfE can be found here [Church academies: model documents – GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

Church of England Voluntary Controlled (VC) schools may in exceptional circumstances be given consent to join a Church Minority MAT. Such proposals must demonstrate that:

- The Christian character of the school will be effectively protected.
- There is a strong and established partnership between school and parish.
- Engagement with the CDBE will be sustained.

Consent will only be considered where there is no suitable Church Majority MAT available to meet the needs of the school, and where the proposal demonstrably offers the best long-term outcome for the school's Christian character and sustainability.

Church of England schools will not be given consent to join any MAT unless there is Diocesan Corporate Member (Chelmsford Diocese Educational Trust -CDET) representation at member level.

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Expectations for Multi Academy Trusts

The CDBE has established a diocesan Memorandum of Understanding with church Multi- Academy Trusts. This sets out clear expectations for governance, engagement and partnership, and all MATS serving Church schools are expected to operate within this framework.

The MOU is supported by Trust Readiness Criteria, which are used to identify those MATs with the capacity and capability to grow. This provides a transparent framework for accountability and informs CDBE decision-making in relation to MAT growth and the admission of Church schools.

A MAT seeking to admit a Church School will be expected to:

- Adopt, or be prepared to adopt, Articles of Association based on a Church majority at member and director level. The Diocesan Corporate Member will appoint the majority of the members on behalf of the CDBE. The CDBE empowers the Chelmsford Diocese Educational Trust (CDET) to undertake this function.
- Adopt the agreed form of the Church Supplemental Agreement (CSA) setting out responsibilities for safeguarding the Church of England character of the school and the use of Church land.
- Provide for appropriate local foundation governance arrangements that reflect the school's previous VA or VC status.
- Commit to a strong working relationship with the Diocesan Corporate Member (CDET), including adherence to agreed processes for the appointing members, directors and local governing committee members.

The CDBE recognises that some Church MATs are small and may not currently have the capacity, capability or strategic intention to grow. The CDBE will encourage these MATs to engage in wider strategic conversations about their future sustainability, contribution to the diocesan family of schools, and potential role in supporting the wider system. This may include consideration of collaboration, shared support, partnership with other trusts, or future structural options where appropriate.

Safeguarding the Church School Character

Together with the DfE's funding agreement these arrangements ensure that:

- The objects of the MAT protect the Church of England character of each Church School.
- Governance structures secure that character through the majority model Articles of Association.

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- Key leadership appointments, including the CEO and senior school leaders, involve the Diocesan Corporate Member and/or the CDBE as required. Religious Education and Collective Worship remain subject to the advice and directives of the CDBE.

The occupation of school sites, held by the site trustees, is dependent on the MAT maintaining and developing it's the school's Christian Character. The SIAMs inspection framework provides an external measure of how effectively this is being fulfilled.

5. MAT Expectations

Commitment to the Church of England's Vision for Education

The CDBE expects any MAT seeking to admit Church Schools to demonstrate a clear commitment to the Church of England's Vision for Education. This may be through a theologically rooted Christian vision, or through a MAT wide vision, values, and culture that are demonstrably aligned with that vision.

MATs must demonstrate their commitment to developing and enhancing the Christian distinctiveness of each church school. This should include evidence that:

- The principles of the Church of England's Vision for Education are reflected in the school's vision and values.
- The school development plan includes clear priorities for developing Christian distinctiveness informed by the SIAMS framework.
- Monitoring and evaluation processes include regular review of Christian distinctiveness.
- MAT leaders engage proactively with the SIAMS inspection process across the trust.
- The MAT is actively working towards the Church of England's and Diocesan Carbon Net Zero commitments.

School Improvement Capacity

The CDBE expects MATs to demonstrate a clear track record of improving outcomes for pupils across their schools and to provide evidence of sufficient school improvement capacity to support and develop Church Schools effectively.

In considering proposals, the CDBE will also take into account the views of the Department for Education's Regional Director regarding the MATs school improvement model and its capacity to deliver sustained improvement.

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Sustainability – Operations & Finance

MATs must demonstrate robust strategic planning and the capacity to deliver its stated objectives. This includes providing assurance that:

- Schools joining the MAT are supported to remain financially sustainable, with due regard to pupil numbers, staffing costs and wider financial pressures.
- The MATs annual report and accounts evidence its ability to operate on a financially sustainable basis
- The MAT complies with the requirements of the Academy Trust Handbook.

Governance and accountability

MATs are expected to demonstrate effective governance practice, including:

- Maintaining accurate and up to date governance records
- Ensuring appropriate governance professional support
- Managing conflicts of interest transparently and effectively.

Governance arrangements must support strong accountability and reflect the expectations of Church of England schools.

Serving the Diocesan family of schools

Relationships are central to the Diocesan family of Church Schools. MATs that include Church schools are therefore expected to:

- Protect local foundation governance arrangements through their Articles of Association.
- Engage constructively and consistently with the CDBE and CDET.
- Work collaboratively with other Church MATs where this benefits pupils and strengthens the system.
- Support and develop strong, sustainable relationships between schools and their local churches.
- Be outward facing, working with a range of partners where this benefits the pupils.
- Ensure that each Church School within the MAT signs up to the Partnership Agreement, allowing for strong relationships between the CDBE, its officers and the school.
- Ensure regular and effective engagement between MAT leaders, including the CEO and the CDBE.



MATs are expected to demonstrate active engagement with the Diocese, including participation in training, governance processes, admissions arrangements and strategic dialogue. The CDBE will define and monitor expectations for engagement as part of its partnership working.

6. Church of England Schools

The CDBE will provide support and guidance to all Church Schools as they consider and review their future sustainability and organisational structures. This includes consideration of whether to remain as a maintained school, to explore partnership arrangements such as federation where appropriate, or to join a MAT.

The CDBE will provide bespoke advice to schools as required. Schools are expected to engage with the Diocese at an early stage in their deliberations to ensure that advice is timely, well informed and supports effective decision making.

Upholding Christian Distinctiveness

Central to this strategy is an unwavering commitment to maintaining the Christian ethos that defines Church schools. Any school joining a MAT is expected to continue to integrate theologically rooted Christian principles into its vision and practice, ensuring that the spiritual development of pupils remains a priority. Schools must continue to provide high quality Religious Education and daily opportunities for Collective Worship that reflect Anglican traditions and teachings.

Governance Structures

To safeguard the religious characters of our schools, appropriate governance arrangements are required. Church Schools can only join MATs with a Church majority at both member and director level. This ensures that decision making structures are aligned with the values and expectations of the Church of England. MATS must adopt Articles of Association that enshrine the Church's role in governance, including provision for the appointment of foundation governors or trustees by the CDBE/CDET.

Due-Diligence

In considering academisation, schools are expected to undertake a thorough due diligence process, including engaging with identified CDBE approved MATs. The CDBE provides information on approved MATS via its website <https://www.cdbe.org.uk/schools/becoming-an-academy>. An academisation toolkit is available here to support Governors and School Leaders in this process.

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Legal and Statutory Compliance

Schools must obtain written consent from the CDBE before initiating conversion to academy status or when transferring between MATs. Early engagement with the Diocese is essential to support this process.

As part of the application for in principle consent (see appendix 1) the Chair of Governors and Headteacher, together with the MAT CEO, will be invited to present to the CDBE. This will include the rationale for the proposed MAT and the due diligence undertaken. The CDBE will confirm its decision in writing following this process.

The CDBE will expect evidence that the governing board has formally considered the proposal and reached a properly minuted decision. While governing boards should seek broad consensus wherever possible, the CDBE will not normally require unanimity. Where there is significant disagreement within the governing board, the CDBE will expect this to be disclosed, together with an explanation of how concerns have been considered and addressed.

Sustainability and context

The CDBE recognises the specific challenges facing some Church schools, particularly small and rural schools, in relation to financial pressures, pupil numbers, leadership capacity, governance and long-term sustainability. The Diocese values the distinctive contribution these schools make to their communities and will work with schools, governing boards, MATs, Local Authorities and other partners to explore sustainable solutions.

Where issues of sustainability are identified, governing boards will be expected to engage proactively with the CDBE in considering how those issues may be addressed. This may include strengthened collaboration, formal partnership arrangements, consideration of academisation, or other appropriate structural solutions. The aim will be to support early, strategic decision-making and avoid issues becoming crisis-driven.

Strategic Planning

Governing Boards are expected to engage proactively in considering their school's future structure. This includes undertaking regular strategic review, engaging with CDBE guidance, and ensuring that decisions are informed both by local context and the long-term sustainability of the school.

7. Intervention in Underperforming Schools

The CDBE will maintain oversight of the performance and sustainability of Church Schools, using a range of indicators including educational outcomes, financial performance, governance, inspection evidence, leadership capacity and professional knowledge from school advisers. Where concerns are

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identified, the CDBE will offer appropriate support and guidance. Schools are expected to engage with the CDBE at an early stage where concerns arise, so that appropriate support can be offered.

Where concerns persist or a school's performance continues to decline, the CDBE may escalate its involvement. This may include working in partnership with the Local Authority, engaging with the Department for Education, or contributing to discussions with Ofsted or relevant improvement partners.

In cases where performance is significantly compromised, and previous support has not secured sufficient improvement, the CDBE will work with the DfE and other partners to consider appropriate next steps, which may include academisation.

Where the DfE issues an academy order to a maintained school, decisions about sponsorship will be made in partnership with the DfE and the Local Authority. The CDBE will contribute to this process, including advising on the suitability of potential sponsors within the Church MAT System.

Similarly, where a decision is made to transfer a school between MATs, the CDBE will work with the DfE and relevant partners to help identify a MAT that is well placed to support sustained improvement and the preservation of the Christian character.

The CDBE Academisation Strategy 2026, as well as the Memorandum of Understanding between the National Society for Education & the DfE, will inform this work and support decision making that reflects the needs of the school and the wider diocesan system.

8. CDBE Partnership Working

DfE Regional Directors

The CDBE works in partnership with the Regional Director for the East of England and London. The Diocese is committed to maintaining strong and effective relationships with Regional Directors and their teams. This includes an agreed framework for engagement, incorporating regular points of contact scheduled meetings and shared priorities.

The CDBE will review and update the CDBE Academisation strategy on an annual basis and will use this, alongside the Memorandum of Understanding, to inform local partnership working and expectations for engagement across the Diocesan system.

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National Society for Education

The Church of England's National Society of Education (NSE) is a key partner in the Diocese's academisation strategy. This partnership supports the development and sustainability of Church Schools and ensures that academisation arrangements remain aligned with the Church of England's Vision for Education.

Local Authorities

The CDBE is committed to working in partnership with the eight Local Authorities within the Diocese – Essex, Thurrock, Southend, Newham, Barking & Dagenham, Redbridge, Havering and Waltham Forest.

This includes ongoing communication regarding the statutory processes associated with academisation, including the transfer of school sites. The CDBE will also take account of Local Authority place planning information, including pupil forecasts, sufficiency planning and local strategic priorities.

The CDBE will work with Local Authorities, where appropriate, to ensure that MAT growth and development is considered within the wider educational landscape. This may include identifying opportunities for collaboration, including geographical hubs and areas of strategic priority.

Multi-Academy Trusts

The CDBE is committed to developing strong and constructive relationships with all MAT partners. This includes regular engagement with MAT leaders and opportunities for shared dialogue. This will include regular strategic dialogue with Church MAT CEOs to inform MAT capacity, growth planning, support for small schools and the ongoing development of a coherent and sustainable diocesan system.

Strategic decisions relating to Church Schools will take account of MAT capacity, growth plans and the wider Diocesan context. The CDBE expects MATs to engage actively in diocesan processes and networks, contributing to the development of a coherent and sustainable system of Church schools.

CDET, on behalf of the CDBE, will work with MAT boards to support the development of effective governance, including ensuring that members and trustees appointed by CDET are able to uphold the Christian ethos of the Church of England schools within the trust.

Diocese of Brentwood

The CDBE works in close partnership with the Catholic Diocese of Brentwood. The Diocesan Directors of Education maintain regular communication and work collaboratively to support shared provision, including the joint Catholic and Anglican school within the Dioceses.



Cross-Diocesan Working

The CDBE is open to developing cross-diocesan partnerships where these support the long-term flourishing of Church Schools and ensure the protection and development of their Christian character.

Communication and engagement

The CDBE will provide clear and accessible information to support schools in understanding academisation. This will include updates on MAT capacity and growth status, helping schools to understand which MATs are currently able to expand, alongside guidance materials and opportunities for engagement such as regional meetings, briefings and other forums.

Schools and MATs will be expected to engage with these opportunities to support informed and timely decision making.

9. New School Openings & School Closure Strategy

Commitment to exploring new school opportunities

As part of its commitment to education, the CDBE seeks to promote opportunities for children, young people and families across the Diocese to access high-quality Church of England education. This includes supporting the development of new Church schools where this contributes to the long-term sustainability and coherence of the diocesan system.

The CDBE will identify and respond to emerging opportunities through Local Authority place planning processes, including pupil forecasts, sufficiency planning and local strategic priorities. The CDBE will support MATs in developing proposals for new schools where appropriate and agreed. Church MATs must obtain the CDBEs consent before establishing a new school with a religious designation.

School Closure Strategy

As part of this diocesan strategy, there may be occasions where school closure is considered. This will always be a last resort and will follow a thorough exploration of all alternative options, alongside appropriate consultation.

The CDBE would work in partnership with the Department for Education and Local Authorities and other relevant partners, in line with statutory guidance and processes. In all cases, decisions will be guided by the long-term flourishing of Church of England education, taking account of both the needs of individual schools and the wider diocesan system.



10. Review

DBE Date of Approval: July 2026

Annual Review due: July 2027