

Frequently asked questions/ questions and comments from consultation/ responses:

General Structural Questions:

1. What is an Academy?

An academy is a state school that is run by an Academy Trust. The Academy Trust enters into an agreement with the Secretary of State for Education that sets out its responsibilities and accountabilities for the effective running of the Academy. The Academy is funded directly by the Government and is no longer run by the Local Authority. The Trust is charitable, which means it will operate as a charity and not for the profit of individuals or businesses.

2. What is a Multi-Academy Trust?

A Multi-Academy Trust is when 2 or more Academies come together in partnership. In our case we are looking initially to form a MAT with the three High Schools, Bungay, Farlingaye and Kesgrave and have a number of Primary Schools interested in joining in due course. The MAT would work towards becoming cross phase, covering children and young people, aged 3 -18 years. Each school will keep its own name and the MAT will probably be known as the East Anglian Schools' Trust (EAST). This is a working name and will be further debated. It will be possible for other schools to join the MAT in the future but the aim would be to keep the MAT local and relatively small and manageable in size. One of the academies would become the legal entity.

3. Who will be the Members and trustees and are they voluntary roles?

Members will be sought, they do not necessarily need to be current governors and they should have some independence. Likewise for trustees. Members and Trustees are voluntary roles. The CEO (still to be confirmed) will sit on the Board of Trustees.

4. Why become a MAT? Why these particular schools?

- The three named High Schools are similar in ethos and vision, have current and long standing connections and therefore represent natural partners. Over time it is hoped that primaries connected to the schools will be able to join.
- Those involved in the proposal believe that development of a 3 – 19 curriculum that builds over time will help with traditional transition dips when students move from one key stage to another. The MAT will allow opportunities to work more closely with primaries to deepen staff understanding across the age range and make the transitions seamless.
- Pooled resources will allow the MAT to access good specialist support for students with complex needs more easily. The MAT could potentially employ its own specialist support to work across the MAT.
- The MAT could create new recruitment opportunities across the MAT.
- The MAT could allow for development of an 'In House' Teacher Training programme (SCITT). This would allow us to train and develop our own future staff.
- Current funding difficulties mean that the curriculum is coming under threat. All the schools want to maintain as broad a curriculum as possible. The ability to share resources makes this more sustainable. Schools could share students in minority subjects helping to make them more viable.
- Across the MAT shared Extra Curricular opportunities (trips and clubs etc) could widen the variety and access available for students across the MAT.
- Comments from the consultation included the assertion that collaboration with other schools could provide welcome opportunities to improve the quality and content of

teaching. Increased opportunities to work with the primary schools was felt to be particularly beneficial.

- Comments from the consultation included the need to keep things relatively small and local and to ensure all schools involved buy in to the vision and ethos.
- Those involved in discussions are well aware of the need for careful planning and to take account of others MAT experiences both positive and negative and to learn from hindsight.

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5. Is the Martlesham Adastral (now also known as Brightwell Lakes) school development a consideration?

Yes, a bid to run the new free school could be considered by the new MAT at the appropriate time.

6. Have the Primary Schools been involved in the meetings?

The Primary Schools have been kept informed of proceedings and have been invited to attend the steering group meetings. There are a number of primaries who may be interested but would need to seek Academy status as a first step.

7. Who will be responsible for running our school? Where do Headteachers sit in the hierarchy?

- The MAT will have an overarching Board of Trustees which may include some individuals drawn from the current schools' Governing Bodies. The Trust Board will ensure that each school has a Local Governing Board (LGB) and propose to delegate many powers to them. The Local Governing Board will continue to work as part of the Leadership and Management of the school.
- The role of the Headteachers is to be confirmed but the proposed structure and the draft Scheme of Delegation would suggest a good deal of autonomy. We are very conscious of retaining the current capacity in each school so that quality for students can continue to be at the heart of what we all aim to achieve.
- Some concerns were expressed about the changing dynamics of relationships and how the knitting together of schools of various sizes and unique contexts can be managed, along with the distances between sites. The schools are all aware of the need to mitigate potential challenge and to guard against creating a distant management model. It needs to work well for all. There is trust in leadership across the MAT to maintain the clearly defined best intentions for the students, parents and staff without compromising for individual schools. Each of the schools involved has a proven track record of innovation and strengths to share.

8. What is involved in becoming a Multi Academy Trust?

The Governing Board is considering forming a MAT. We have registered our interest with the Department of Education. Each school has completed a period of consultation with parents, pupils, staff and the wider community which the Governors will take into consideration in reaching their final decision.

9. Would the school change its name, logo, school day structure or uniform?

The individual schools are not required, and have no plans to change their names, logo or uniform, there are no plans for changes to the school day. The overarching Multi Academy Trust would have a single name.

10. Can the RSC force a MAT to take on a failing school?

Our MAT would not be a sponsoring MAT, so no, the RSC would not be able to force the MAT to take on a failing school. A MAT can change with agreement over time to become a sponsoring MAT.

How will the people within our communities be affected:

11. How will being in a Multi Academy Trust affect staff?

- Currently, the employer is their respective individual Academy, Bungay, Farlingaye or Kesgrave. After conversion all staff will transfer to be employed by the Multi Academy Trust. Current staff are legally protected to transfer under the same employment terms and conditions, including pensions. Their continuity of service is protected and all staff will be consulted in accordance with the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations.
- Comments from feedback included the hope that the deeper collaboration between the schools would allow a more natural process of sharing of knowledge and expertise and lead to a greater capacity to recruit, train and provide attainable career paths.
- A question was asked whether staff would be asked to move around or to teach off specialism. There are no current plans to do so and it would not be imposed, but if it was advantageous and staff wanted to do so then it could be considered.

12. How are the pupils affected?

- The pupils will not notice any immediate differences. They will be in the same uniform, in the same classrooms, with the same teachers. We will continue to strive for outstanding education for all our pupils. Over time the pupils may notice some changes and improvements in the way that they learn, resulting from greater training opportunities for staff and innovative learning opportunities.
- Comments from feedback suggest the view that a MAT will help to provide the best educational experience for children in the local area as there will be deeper collaboration between the schools.

Questions of finance:

13. Will we get more money as part of a MAT?

- The school will receive the same amount of per-pupil funding as part of a MAT as they would have previously as a sole converter academy. All funding comes directly from Government to the MAT which controls the overall budget and then distributes the money to each of the schools within the MAT. Each school does not have more money but, as a group of schools can enhance the economies of scale and choose services that benefit all the pupils within the MAT schools.
- Comments from feedback included appreciation that cost savings can be made for services and by a wider sharing of expertise for Professional Development, ideas and resources across subject areas and in marketing and enrichment opportunities. Savings can then be diverted to benefit the children across the trust. The combined power and opportunities gained from the funding of three large schools and hopefully feeders in future will be of benefit across the MAT.

14. Will there be more money for initiatives such as mental health and vocational education?

Pooling of resources and economies of scale could provide the MAT with opportunities to consider funding for such initiatives.

15. Who funds the MAT level roles such as CEO and CFO?

Funding for the CEO and CFO would come from central MAT funds.

16. Do all MATs have shared bank accounts?

There is some flexibility and the model for setting up how the MAT manages its finances etc is evolving. However, research would suggest that pooling funds centrally in a shared bank account represents the most efficient way to manage finances. Individual schools will however still set their own budgets and will have fixed staffing costs according to need and these would be signed off by the MAT Trust Board to allow them to operate.

17. When will a Business Plan be available?

Due Diligence is currently being undertaken by all the schools involved. A Business Plan is being produced based on findings and current MAT structural planning. Local Governing Bodies will base their decisions on the findings from these documents and steering group recommendations. It is likely that such decisions will be taken in the spring term.

18. Would there be a financial pull on individual schools within the MAT to support other schools who are struggling?

The schools are completing detailed Due Diligence investigations on each other to ensure there are no surprises regarding their partners' financial viability. Schools will continue to set their own budgets and there will be certain fixed costs for each school. Money left over in the central pot will be used for identified priorities across the MAT which could include help for schools to fulfil projects otherwise unattainable on their own.

Risks and Pitfalls:

19. What are the risks of becoming a MAT?

- It is difficult to quantify the risks involved in conversion to a MAT, as every conversion process is different. Some stakeholders involved in any conversion situation may be concerned about the financial arrangements which will be put in place in case these adversely affect their own school, about the degree of independence their school will have in managing and recruiting staff and in setting a curriculum, and about the way that leadership and governance will function within the MAT. The way to ensure that these possible concerns do not place any of the schools involved at risk is to set up the MAT in a mutually beneficial way with a strong and positive ethos in place, and to ensure that it is well-run. There has been a great amount of collaborative groundwork done by representatives of all the schools involved in this proposed MAT to ensure that all of the schools agree with the proposed structure for the MAT and its proposed Scheme of Delegation, which defines how the leadership and Governance of the MAT will operate. From the beginning it has been clear that all of the representatives have been determined to preserve the independence and unique character and context of their schools, and to make sure that key decisions on staffing, curriculum and the use of resources will be made so as to benefit the students and families of each individual school, as well as the local community as a whole.
- It should also be noted that there are risks in not becoming a MAT. In the future, any school could be influenced to become part of a broader Academy chain. Creating a local MAT, under local direction, offers the best opportunity to sustain vibrant, successful local schools.

20. Can schools back out if risks are identified?

- During the consultation period and Due Diligence investigations schools can back out at any time. This could be due to concerns articulated during the consultation period or as a result of “killer concerns” identified as part of Due Diligence. Practically, this means being able to back out at any time between now and Easter 2019.
- There were some concerns raised during consultation that once in a MAT a school is “locked” in. This is true, but each school will do very careful Due Diligence before making a decision whether to enter into a MAT. All the Governing Boards, will make their decisions in the best interest of their individual schools.

Miscellaneous questions raised through consultation:

21. How will admissions to the school be affected?

Each school in the MAT will become its own admissions authority but will be required to adopt clear and fair admission arrangements in line with the admissions law and school admissions code. The LA will continue to be responsible for making sure there are enough places locally and will coordinate the admissions for all schools. Parents will continue to complete one application per child for each school place. The proposed MAT has no intentions to change the current admissions arrangements for our schools.

22. Does becoming part of a MAT change the relationship with other schools?

No. Each Academy within the MAT will continue to collaborate and share best practise and expertise with all other local schools and the wider community.

23. Will Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) responsibilities change?

No. Responsibilities as part of a MAT in relation to SEND will be the same as they are now. A child with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) can still nominate an Academy as their school of choice.

24. How will policies be affected?

There can be rationalisation of policies over time where appropriate, but there are no plans to introduce less effective policies than those currently in operation in the individual schools. Over time, best policy practice will be identified and shared, where appropriate, across the MAT. For financial, staffing, employment and HR policies there would be a need to standardise policies across the MAT for legal reasons. Any changes would be subject to appropriate consultation.

25. How will the curriculum be affected? Will the formation of a MAT affect A level provision?

No changes are currently planned and any future changes would be subject to the best interests of individual schools within the MAT and would involve appropriate consultation and agreement with those affected. Some positive differences will remain across the MAT and these will be encouraged if they are working well. They can provide real and sustainable breadth in the curriculum across the MAT. The formation of a MAT could open up opportunities to ensure greater breadth of curriculum at A level.

26. How will the MAT structure ensure that all stakeholders have a voice?

The proposed structure of the MAT aims to ensure that all stakeholders; students, their families, staff, staff trade unions and the wider community will have appropriate opportunities for representation to ensure views are considered. The detail of how this will

work in practice is still to be confirmed but we are committed to working closely with stakeholders on a local level.

27. Will we share facilities and students?

This could be considered if it was advantageous to do so and may be one of the opportunities to be considered but there are no plans to do so at present.

28. How will schools ensure that they retain their unique characters – will unique values get lost and diluted?

Whilst concerns were voiced, other comments during the consultation suggested that the existing relationships between the schools was reassuring in this respect. The schools are like minded partners already, have a closely shared and complementary ethos and values and have no desire to eliminate uniqueness.

29. Could the MAT become too big?

There is a danger in becoming too big which might negate the benefits of economies of scale because of difficulties in managing a very large organisation effectively. The MAT proposals recognise this danger and will aim to keep the MAT local and relatively small scale.

30. Is doing nothing and remaining a SAT an option?

Technically yes, but the wait and see policy is becoming less tenable if the school wants to have a choice over who it collaborates with in a MAT setting. MATs are becoming the norm both nationally and locally, it is the direction of travel within education. Most local schools are either in a MAT already or are actively considering a MAT. If we want to have input into the way a MAT is set up and be able to choose our own partners then we need to act now and create our own, rather than wait and only have the option to join an existing MAT.

31. Would the Heads still think it was a good idea even if there wasn't some national pressure to convert to a MAT? Is "protection" a valid reason for joining and is the MAT the best way to ensure the best opportunities for all our students?

Yes, more formalised collaboration would bring more sustainable opportunities to each of the schools and give us more secure finances. It would support school improvement. The opportunity for more vertical collaboration with primaries would also be beneficial.