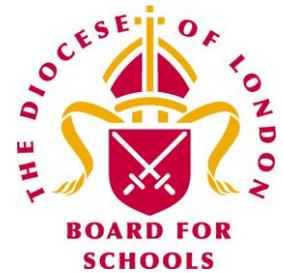


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Dear Headteachers and Chairs of Governors,

Last week the Secretary of State for Education gave a speech to the annual conference of the Confederation of School Trusts in which he confirmed his commitment to the academies programme. In the same speech he said that one of the most valuable lessons from the pandemic is the benefit of schools working together. Our own research about LDBS schools confirms the benefits of schools working together, but not his conclusion about academisation.

With regard to school improvement, what LDBS schools do is more important than their legal structure. This year we have seen the benefits of local networks of Church of England school leaders working together to solve problems. For some Voluntary Aided schools, or VA and Academy schools together, a formal partnership or federation has been significant. As I wrote only last week, LDBS primary schools outperform other schools in London and England. Our first priority is to support your schools to be sustainable and your pupils. None of these initiatives needs a school to become an Academy and changing the legal status from VA to Academy does not directly affect a school's sustainability.

For those of you who have been in post for some time, I wrote in 2015 about the need to take a cautious approach on converting to academy status. LDBS advice has been consistent, and I have not read anything this past week that leads me to re-think that advice. The Secretary of State does not mention that there are some weak academy trusts or that strong trusts can become weak trusts either through over expansion or from falling pupil numbers. The academy structure can bring increased bureaucracy and responsibilities which for small primary schools can be a distraction. It, also, leaves trustees with the full responsibility for pension liabilities.

The Secretary of State is not proposing any new legislation so at the moment there is no need for any Church of England school to consider academisation unless there are good reasons for it being in the best interest of your pupils.

I can reassure you that although my advice has not changed since 2015, LDBS will be ready to respond if the government brings forward a White Paper with a proposal to legislate on this matter, or if circumstances change such that I can recommend academisation as in the best interests of VA schools. The LDBS will always base policy on what is best for pupils.

Yours faithfully,

Inigo Woolf, Chief Executive