



The Diocesan Academisation Strategy for London

This is the published LDBS Diocesan Strategy. It summarises the LDBS Church school context. It also explains the way that LDBS exercises its responsibilities and the direction of travel for the family of LDBS Church schools.

1. Background information and definitions

Four reference documents set out the wider parameters within which we operate:

- 2023 Memorandum of Understanding (“the MOU”) between DfE and National Society
- 2021 Diocesan Boards of Education Measure (“the Measure”)
- 2023 Church Academy Articles (“the Articles”)
- LDBS 2030 Vision for every young Londoner to encounter the love of God in Christ in schools which:
 - Offer transformational futures
 - Enable pupils and adults to flourish
 - Are ‘*deeply Christian, serving the common good*’



The MOU explains the status and purpose of this Strategy:

*(2) The Secretary of State remains committed to securing the religious character of every Church School and to preserving diocesan families of schools. The Secretary of State recognises the responsibility of DBEs to all the Church Schools within their diocese and the children in those schools whether these are local-authority maintained schools or academies...
...it is for DBEs to plan strategically for the exercise of this responsibility, adhering to the Diocesan Strategy of the diocese and working closely with the Regional Director including in relation to school improvement.*

LDBS is the religious authority for every school situated in the London Diocese with a designated Church of England religious character (“LDBS Church school”)

LDBS is the Appropriate Diocesan Authority for every Academy situated in the London Diocese with a designated Church of England religious character.

LDBS is the Diocesan Corporate Member for Academy Trusts with Church of England schools, and LDBS reserves the right to delegate some or all of these functions to another corporate body or person.

2. Strategic aims

The Measure sets the LDBS Charitable Objects:

- (a) promote or assist in the promotion of education in the diocese that is consistent with the faith and practice of the Church of England;*
- (b) promote or assist in the promotion of religious education and religious worship in schools in the diocese;*
- (c) promote or assist in the promotion of church schools in the diocese;*
- (d) promote co-operation between itself and other persons concerned with education in the diocese.*

The aim of this strategy is to make sure that decisions about the structures and organisation of LDBS Church schools secure the long-term sustainability and thriving of the diocesan family of schools, contribute to a strong education system with Church schools at its heart, and preserve and promote Church schools in the diocese. The parameters that we set out are designed to ensure long-term coherence, ongoing school improvement, and to reflect the interests of the whole community of LDBS Church schools.

The strategy puts students at its heart. We want the next generation of young Londoners to benefit from education which is transformative, deeply Christian and serving the common good; and we recognise that individual students and schools flourish when the whole education system flourishes.

The strategy is proactive. By setting out how we will make sound, consistent decisions, and support governors to do the same, we enable the wider aim of building a sustainable, effective community of Church schools.

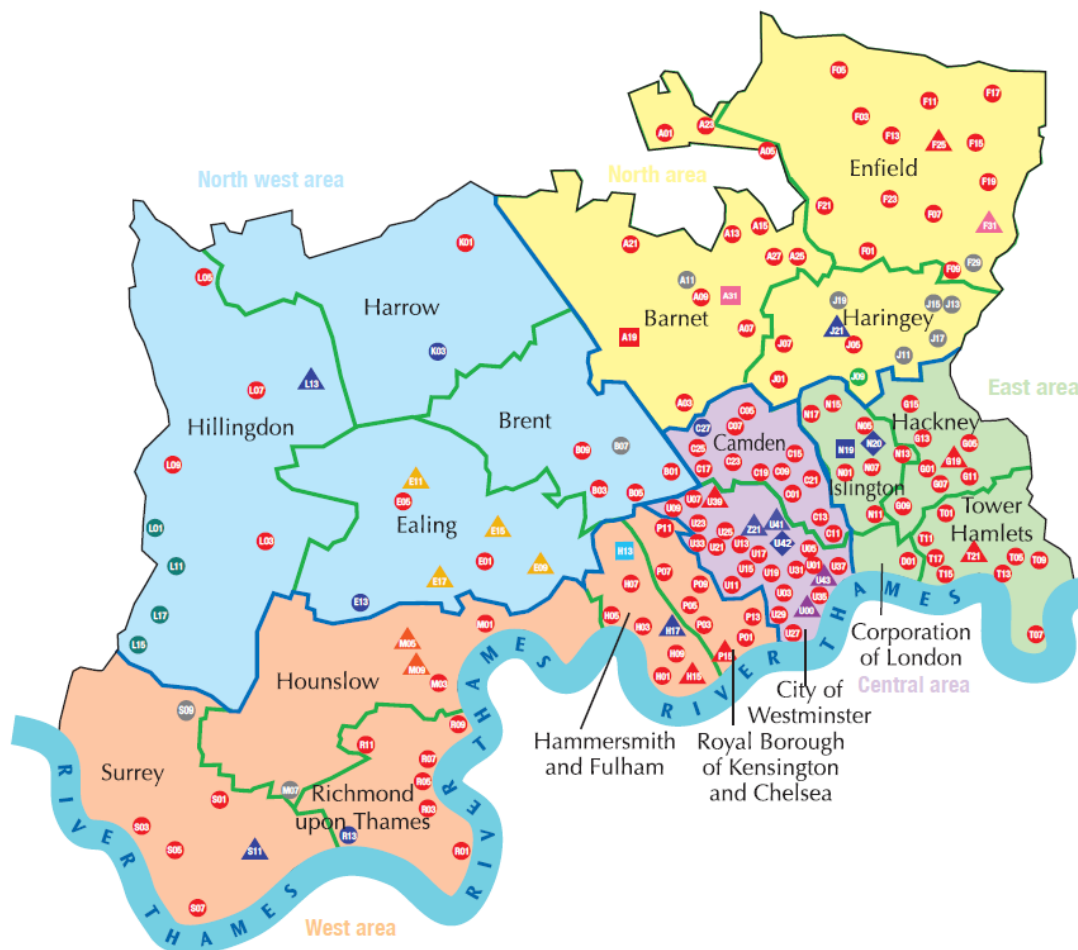
The strategy recognises the diverse contexts in which LDBS Church schools operate and thrive. It provides space for a range of informal and formal collaborations (Partnerships, Federations, and MATs). It allows for decisions that benefit local groups of schools as well as the overall diocesan family of schools.

3. LDBS Church school context

3.1. LDBS Church schools are a successful, diverse, inclusive community

There are 155 LDBS Church schools educating 58,000 students; a diverse, inclusive and successful community of schools. Most serve urban communities; some serve suburban communities. They span 18 Local Authorities with varying attitudes towards academies and varying approaches to school improvement. Many LDBS Church schools are facing challenges around finances and pupil numbers. They collaborate in a range of informal and formal ways, for the benefit of students.

This [video clip](#) says more about the LDBS Church school context.



3.2. LDBS Church schools face a challenging climate

A London Councils [report](#) published in January 2023 stated that the birth rate in London has been falling since 2012. Demand for Reception places in London has been falling since 2017. On average, London boroughs are likely to see a further 7% decrease in Reception pupil numbers in the next five years. *“Primary schools with small rolls... will find that the only option for the school is to merge the school with another school or close it altogether... (p6)”*

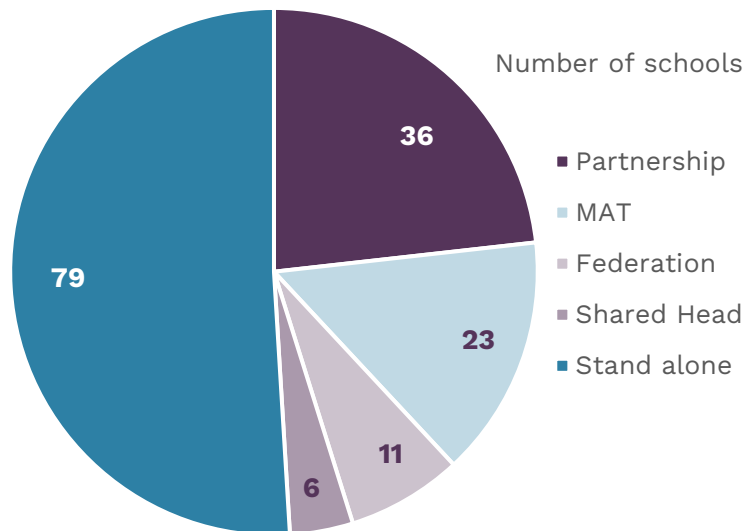
Falling pupil rolls make it difficult to balance the school budget. Schools are funded on a per-pupil basis, so even a small fall in pupil numbers can create budget challenges. Any maintained school with a financial deficit relies on the Local Authority to approve a deficit budget and recovery plan which makes the school vulnerable to closure.

Strong leadership across the curriculum can be difficult to provide in a stand-alone small school where every teacher leads one or two curriculum subjects. Specialist SENDCO positions can be difficult to sustain in small schools, however rising numbers of pupils with special educational needs makes this a vital appointment for most schools. Small schools attract lower headteacher salaries than large schools, which can make it difficult for governors of small schools to recruit experienced headteachers.

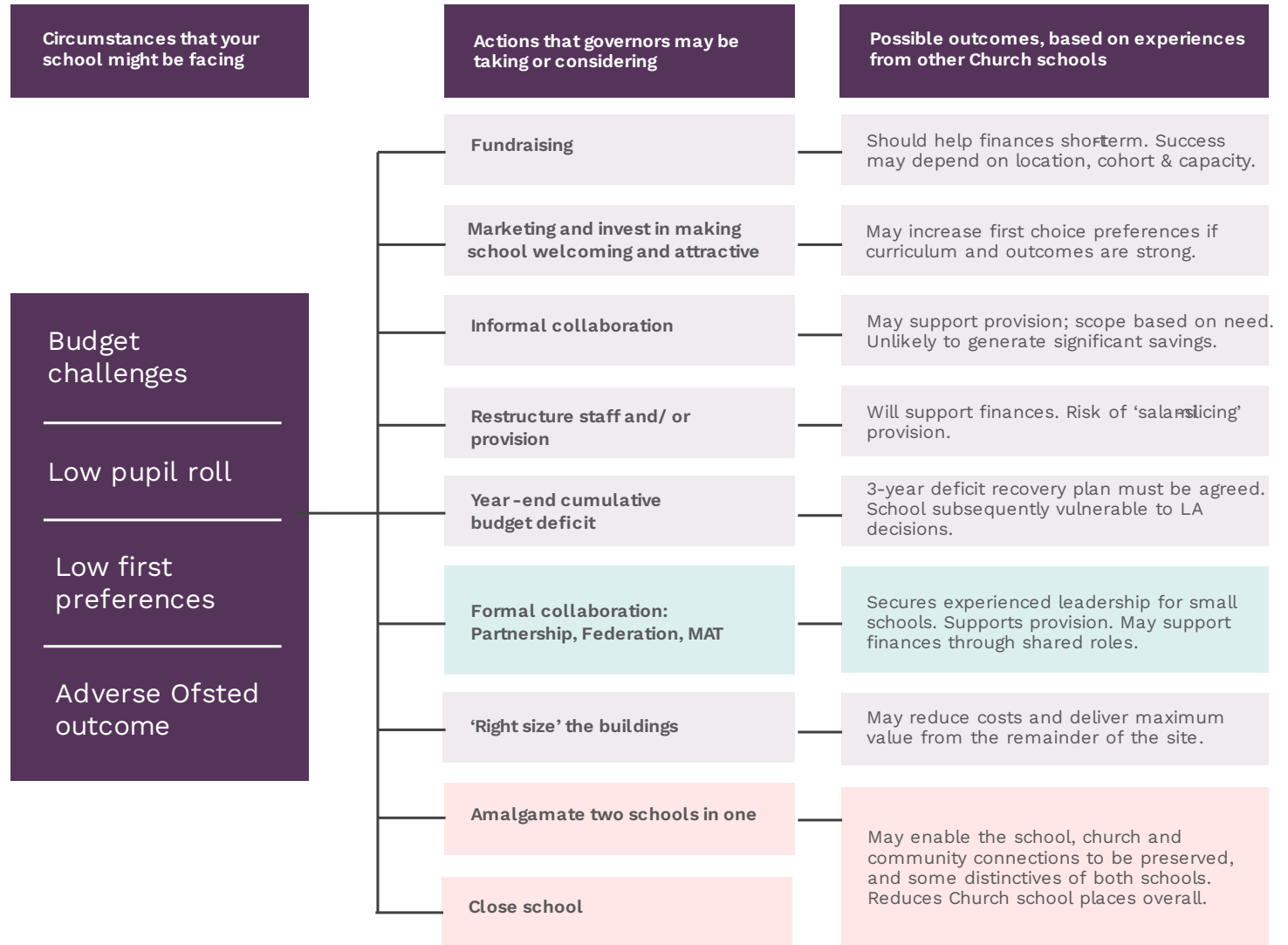
The diagram on Page 4 sets out the strategic actions that Church school governors will consider if their school is in this challenging position.

3.3. LDBS Church schools thrive in varied structures

Faced with challenging circumstances, many schools have found that collaborations are an effective proactive choice for sustaining and developing excellent practice and positive outcomes. Consultation with schools highlighted that this flexibility is appreciated, and in fact around half of LDBS Church schools collaborate with at least one other school. The Chart on Page 5 sets out the main features of Partnership, Federation and Multi-Academy Trusts. As of December 2023, the number of LDBS Church schools in a formal collaborative relationship was as follows:



The context: school sustainability challenges



Key Features of Formal Collaborations

Partnership	Federation	Multi-Academy Trust
Each school has a Governing Board (GB) and retains its URN.	One GB for the Federation; each school can have a Local Governing Body (LGB) and retains its URN.	One Trust Board for the Muti-Academy Trust (MAT); each school has an LGB and its own URN.
One Executive Head (EHT) leading two or more schools	One EHT leading two or more schools	CEO provides overall leadership; each school has either an EHT or HT
EHT employed by the GB of the 'home' school and seconded to the other school(s) in the Partnership for part of the week	EHT likely to be employed by the GB of the Federation	CEO employed by the Trust; EHT likely to be employed by the Trust
Time-limited; for up to two years initially	Long-term; often follows an initial partnership	Permanent
If the EHT leaves, the Partnership comes to an end and each GB considers its next steps	If the EHT leaves, the GB appoints a new EHT	If the CEO or an EHT leaves, the Trust appoints a new CEO or EHT
When the Partnership ends, the EHT returns to the substantive HT position and salary	It is possible to dissolve the Federation; each school needs to re-establish its own GB	It is not possible to become a maintained school again after joining a MAT
Individual school budget allocations; pooling funds is not an option	Individual school budget allocations; received by individual schools or by the Federation, pooling is an option	Individual school budget allocations received by the Trust; pooling funds is an option
A Partnership can include maintained and academy schools	All the schools in a Federation are and remain as maintained schools	All the schools in a MAT are academies
Possible to make strategic plans and share staff and curriculum leadership across the Partnership by negotiation with each GB	EHT accountable to the GB for strategic leadership across the Federation	CEO accountable to the Trust for strategic leadership across the MAT
Locally negotiated between LDBS and governors	Locally negotiated between LDBS and governors; formal process - Secretary of State informed	May be locally negotiated between LDBS and school/ trust or may be directed by Regional Director following 2xRI or Inadequate Ofsted



4. Principles for strategic decisions

This section sets out how LDBS makes decisions about Partnerships, Federations and Academy Conversions. Our LDBS approach is:

4.1. Aligned with legislation and guidance

We make decisions within the requirements of statute and guidance from DfE and the National Society. In particular, the [2021 Diocesan Boards of Education Measure](#), the [2023 Memorandum of Understanding](#) and the [2023 Church Academy Articles](#).

4.2. Motivated by a spirit of service and collegiality

Our mission is to 'support and serve'. We try to exercise our responsibilities with an attitude of service. We use the language of 'family' and 'community' to describe the relationships between Church schools and with LDBS.

In the Old Testament, the prophet Micah explains God's desires for the attitudes and actions of his people. These words motivate our own attitude.

"And what does the Lord require of you?"

To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

Micah 6:8

We note the tensions inherent in the legislative and guidance framework. School governors and academy trustees are required to act in the best interests of their school or trust, and LDBS supports and serves individual schools in their context. LDBS also holds a wider responsibility to set strategy and make decisions that are in the long-term interests of the whole LDBS Church school community.

Our understanding of community is rooted in the New Testament concept of Christian community, *Koinonia*, fellowship.

"If we walk in the light, as [God] is in the light, we have fellowship with one another..."

1 John 1:7

We encourage all governing bodies and trust boards to consider future structures in a proactive way. Consent is needed from LDBS and each governing board before schools join in Partnership or Federation, and additionally from the Regional Director before schools join a MAT. Early dialogue and collaboration is essential.

LDBS provides structured support for boards that are working through these issues, including for MATs developing a long-term strategy which is aligned to that of the Diocese and Regional Director.

We serve best when we work relationally and with collegiality, but we do not pretend that this is always straightforward.

4.3. Pragmatic, transparent and consistent

We carried out a major consultation exercise with schools and other stakeholders in 2022, as well as a review of existing collaborative practice between schools. It was clear that schools and students benefit from a range of collaborative arrangements; therefore, LDBS takes a pragmatic approach. We encourage governors to consider all informal and formal collaboration options in the decision-making process to secure the sustainability and thriving of each school in its individual context.

We aim to be transparent and consistent in the way we make decisions because this is in the best interests of students and schools. It is why we have published [advice](#) for governors about Partnerships and Federations, and detailed criteria that we apply before consenting to an academy order (see Section

5, below). The Partnership and Federation Advice and the Academy Criteria both form part of the Published Diocesan Strategy.

4.4. Proportional

LDBS Church schools are successful and effective, and relationships are warm and collaborative, so LDBS avoids issuing directions to schools wherever possible. However, LDBS will issue a direction under the 2021 DBE Measure if in the reasonable opinion of LDBS a school or Trust is underperforming, the religious character of a school is at risk, or a Trust is not acting in the best interests of Church schools. This could be pro-active (e.g., if a school is deemed to be significantly at risk) or reactive (e.g., if a school receives an adverse Ofsted or SIAMs judgement).

If a school receives an Inadequate or a second Requires Improvement Ofsted judgement the decision to join a MAT is made by the Regional Director. In this situation LDBS will work closely with the Regional Director to identify a suitable Church School MAT, bearing in mind the need for rapid school improvement and for long-term coherence in the diocesan family of schools. This process will necessarily include an assessment of viability.

4.5. Responsive

Where the 2021 Measure says that LDBS must be consulted on a matter, where LDBS consent is required, or where a school is seeking advice or guidance, LDBS will respond in writing within 28 days in school term time. If a comprehensive response is not possible within this timeframe, we will explain this to the school or trust with an indication of the likely timescale.

4.6. Cognisant of long-term stewardship responsibilities

The oldest Church of England school in London is more than 500 years old; as old as the Church of England itself. Structural decisions are by nature long-term decisions. Church schools are at the heart of education in London today because of the decisions made by previous generations. Decisions that we make will determine the extent to which the diocesan family of schools remains at the heart of a strong education system in London. Decisions must lead to long-term coherence for the benefit of the whole family of LDBS Church schools.

Our review of collaborative practice highlighted that schools work most closely and most effectively with other local schools, and often report that these local arrangements contribute to the strength of the school.

For these reasons, LDBS supports strategic formal collaborations within clearly defined geographical areas shown on the map on Page 2.

Exceptions are considered only if there is a compelling case for a school located close to a boundary, or an urgent need for short-term support for a vulnerable school and no immediate capacity for support within the area. If a school receives an Inadequate or a second Requires Improvement Ofsted judgement and there is no suitable MAT in the area for the school to join, LDBS will work closely with the Regional Director to identify a suitable MAT including in adjacent areas within London and other Dioceses.

4.7. Ambitious for the communities we serve

LDBS has a strong track record for opening new schools in line with local need and demand. At the moment in London there are too many, not too few, school places so there are few opportunities to open new mainstream schools. Many schools have the capacity to open new schools that will raise standards in a community. LDBS will work with any Trust or school that identifies local need and demand and wishes to explore expansion or the opportunity to open a new mainstream, SEND or Alternative Provision school under the Free School or any successor programme. Schools and Trusts should contact their LDBS adviser if they have identified an opportunity that they wish to explore.

4.8. Collaborative

LDBS commits to termly meetings with officials from the Regions Groups (the London Region and the South-East Region). Meetings will include discussion about the delivery of this strategy, the sharing of data, information, opportunities and concerns; they will ensure a single point of contact between LDBS and ESFA; and they will provide an opportunity to triage issues that arise from time-to-time. Church schools should not hesitate to raise questions and issues with their LDBS adviser if they wish for LDBS to advocate for the school in this forum.

5. LDBS Expectations for Growing MATs

Trusts seeking LDBS consent prior to requesting or acting upon an Academy Order must meet the criteria set out below, which is formalised in a Memorandum of Understanding between the MAT and LDBS and on which the Trust reports to LDBS each year.

5.1. Governance

5.1.1 Articles of Association

- The Trust adopts the [Academy Articles of Association](#) for use by multi-academy trusts with Church of England schools, published by DfE in September 2023.
- No alteration or addition shall be made to or in the provisions of the Articles which might, in the reasonable opinion of LDBS, weaken the ethos of the Academies.

5.1.2. Members

- LDBS acts as or appoints the Diocesan Corporate Member for the Academy Trust.
- LDBS appoints two further Members to the Academy Trust, at least one of whom is usually appointed by virtue of their office e.g., Area Bishop, Archdeacon, or Area Dean.
- LDBS appoints a majority of Members of the Trust.

5.1.3. Directors

- In consultation with other Members, and considering the local context, LDBS determines an appropriate balance of Directors appointed by Members under Article 50, Directors appointed by LDBS under Article 50a, and ex-officio Directors appointed under Article 46b. The number of Directors appointed in this way outnumber all other Directors by at least two.
- The balance of Directors will usually be appointed by co-option by the Board under Article 58. This ensures the Directors have flexibility to secure a balance of skills and expertise among Directors.
- All Directors, howsoever they are appointed, give a written undertaking to LDBS that they will uphold the Object of the Company.
- LDBS considers all requests from Directors who wish to propose rules or bye laws under Article 137 and responds in writing within 28 days.
- LDBS makes appointments in line with its Governor/ Director Appointment Policy.

5.1.4. Local Governing Bodies

- The Directors must establish a Scheme of Delegation with LDBS involvement and consent.
- The Scheme of Delegation establishes a Local Governing Body for each Academy which includes a Foundation majority. Local connection is secured through representation from the Parish or Parishes on the Local Governing Body and in the appointment process of the Headteacher or Executive Leader of the school.
- The Scheme of Delegation ensures that each Academy sets an individual theologically-rooted Christian vision that reflects the local context.
- If Directors wish to delegate authority to a Committee or Local Governing Body for any function of a church academy, prior written consent from LDBS is required for the Terms of Reference for the committee.
- All members of a Local Governing Body of a Church Academy, howsoever they are appointed, shall give a written undertaking to LDBS that they will uphold the Object of the Company.

5.2. Leadership – Appointment of CEO and Headteachers

- Directors appoint the Trust CEO with LDBS involvement and consent.
- For each Church Academy in the Trust, Directors appoint the Headteacher or Principal with LDBS involvement and consent.

5.3. Christian Vision

- The Trust has a theologically-rooted Christian vision that promotes and protects education that is consistent with the faith and practice of the Church.

- The Christian vision has a positive effect on the distinctiveness of the MAT and on each individual Academy and is reviewed regularly through the MAT’s monitoring and evaluation frameworks.
- The Directors have due regard to LDBS advice and follow LDBS directives in relation to the ethos, religious education and collective worship provided at each Church Academy within the Trust.
- The Trust is committed to the wellbeing of the whole school community and to serving the wider community including disadvantaged and marginalised groups.

5.4. MAT quality and strength

- The Trust development plan addresses the way the trust will meet the five pillars of quality for MATs as set out by DfE in its [Trust Quality Descriptions](#) and applied by the Regional Director in making commissioning decisions:
 - High-quality and inclusive education
 - School improvement
 - Workforce
 - Finance and Operations
 - Governance and leadership
- The Trust pays a living wage to all its staff and ensures its contractors do the same.
- The Trust offers beneficial terms and conditions to recruit and retain teaching staff.
- The Trust demonstrates school improvement capacity.
- The Trust is a member of the Risk Protection Arrangement for schools, or a similar scheme.

5.5. Commitment to the LDBS Church school community

- The Trust engages with LDBS through the Core Service and shares information when requested.
- The Trust engages with Church MATs, VA and VC schools in the Area.
- The Trust cooperates with LDBS and others to support vulnerable Church schools and to ensure that there is a home in a Trust in the Area for every sustainable Church school, so that LDBS can fulfil its responsibility to sustain the diocesan family of schools in a fully academised system.
- Any group of schools wishing to establish a new Trust must demonstrate that there is a need for a new Trust with no other suitable Church Trust in the Area, and that this new Trust has the potential to grow to a sustainable size.
- The Trust is outward looking, working with others whenever it benefits children.
- There may be exceptional circumstances when it is appropriate for a school which is not a Church school to join the Trust. LDBS will provide further guidance and training to Directors. When such an application is being considered, the Trust provides transparent information to LDBS and prospective schools in relation to its:
 - Commitment to ensuring more than half the Trust Academies have a Church of England designation, and that more than half the students educated by the Trust are educated in a Church Academy, and to maintaining this balance.
 - Plans to preserve the distinctive Christian character of the Trust.
 - Plans to protect the non-denominational status of the community schools, should they wish to maintain such status.

5.6. Trust growth

- The Trust shall not establish, maintain or carry on a Church Academy without LDBS consent.
- These criteria apply equally to Trusts wishing to amalgamate as to those wishing to grow.

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