

Joining a multi-academy trust: Frequently asked questions (stakeholders)

These questions have been created from discussion in conjunction with the partners seeking to form a new Multi Academy Trust and discussions with other Multi Academy Trust convertors alongside best practice and legal guidelines. We hope they will answer many of your queries, but if not, please don't hesitate to ask. These FAQs will be maintained and updated during the consultation period.

What is a Multi-Academy Trust?

A Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) is an education charity, limited by guarantee and has member academy schools within it. The MAT is governed by Members and Trustees (sometimes known as Directors) with local governance included in its structure.

The Members and Board of Trustees comprise of individuals who have been specifically recruited for their skillset, ranging from those with education, finance and business experience to human resources, communications and legal.

Academies are still part of the community and serve children, young people and families in a particular area and retain the same responsibilities as any maintained school as part of the learning community. They continue to work in partnerships with other schools and organisations for the benefit of local communities.

The Trust is accountable for all the schools that are a part of it and is responsible for ensuring all children and young people are successful.

In this instance a new MAT is proposed.

The MAT application has been submitted by the following three schools to create a new Multi Academy Trust to be known as Industrious Education Trust (IET).

- Birkby Junior School
- Dalton School
- Moldgreen Community Primary School

Beyond our school there are currently two more schools considering exploring academy status and joining Industrious Education Trust which would take the total to six schools. The remaining two schools are:

1. North Huddersfield Trust School
2. Ashbrow Primary School

Why are we considering joining a newly forming a Multi-Academy Trust?

The current direction of the Department for Education policy is for all schools to become academies and be part of a multi-academy trust.

Over recent years, many schools have looked to form MATs as a way of providing financial and educational support for groups of schools. The current position is that approximately 80% of schools have now become academies across England.

Rather than join an existing Trust and potentially losing some of the unique character of our school we want to be instrumental in developing the partnership and creating our own MAT. By creating

our own MAT now, we would get to lead the way and keep our characteristics and the huge success that we have had. This is the opportunity to shape, control and future-proof our school.

As we have learned through our partnerships, collaborative working with other schools and partners can provide an improved educational experience for our own learners through various areas including:

- teaching and learning,
- an enhanced and engaging curriculum,
- staff development and progression opportunities,
- finance and human resources,
- education improvement structures and governance arrangements.

In addition, as part of a multi academy trust we would have greater control of our school budgets and greater autonomy over our curriculum. Over the next few years there is going to be a tightening of budgets and we need to be prepared. By being in a MAT, we could secure greater opportunities for financial savings and resilience.

Through our existing relationships and networks, we have come together with other local schools to explore the opportunity outlined above as we believe we have a shared vision that not only benefits our individual school but will also benefit education and learners across Kirklees now and for many years to come.

What are the reasons schools consider converting to academy status?

- To shape the provision to meet the future needs of children, young people, families and communities based on a local and collaborative proposal of working together and building on existing good practice
- To remain in charge of their own destiny as the government has a goal to encourage all schools to be academies or working towards academy status
- The Local Authority (LA) capacity is reducing and, in some cases, disappearing. Pooling the resources (where appropriate) of several settings means a Trust can re-create some of the services once received from the LA in a way that is much more responsive
- To develop the expertise of all staff to further improve effectiveness and outcomes for young people
- To generate financial efficiencies to invest back into the classroom for the benefit of all learners

What would the group of schools (the Trust) be called?

The Trust will have a new name as it is a new organisation. The Trust will be known as 'Industrious Education Trust'.

The Trust vision would build on our shared, core ethos and values – we would maintain and strengthen our focus on each student enjoying their learning and achieving their academic best in a stimulating, nurturing environment, maintaining our high expectations and approach to inclusion.

Who makes the final decision on whether each school converts to an academy?

The Governing Body

The Governing Body will make the final decision to apply to the Department for Education (DfE), based on the outcomes of a due diligence process which includes consultation with all stakeholders.

The DfE will then approve any application to convert.

Would other schools join us and who would make the decision on if additional schools join us?

Once the MAT is formed, any decision on additional schools joining our group would be made by the IET Board of Trustees. As time goes on, we would expect other schools to join and any who join the MAT would be expected to support the MAT's vision & ethos and governance structure as well as fully contribute to and learn from the other schools.

Who is the Trust accountable to?

The Trust would be accountable directly to the Department for Education and Secretary of State for Education and the MAT's accounts are externally audited and reported to / scrutinised by DfE's Education Skills Funding Agency.

We would be overseen by our Regional Department for Education (DfE) Director, as well as continue to be subject to Ofsted inspections.

Each school would still have their own separate Ofsted inspections.

Who runs a MAT?

Daily the MAT is overseen by the CEO and central team on behalf of the Board of Trustees. The CEO will be appointed by the Trustees later in the process, but it is envisaged that Susan Davis, current Headteacher at Birkby Junior School, will assume the role, with the support of the Headteachers from the other schools.

In the school on a daily basis, our existing Headteacher and senior leadership team will continue to lead and manage their school as they are currently doing. The Headteachers of the first group of schools to join will continue to work in collaboration with each other and drive their establishment forward.

The most noticeable change for them, however, will be that instead of being accountable to their own Governing Bodies as they are currently, they will all be accountable to the IET Trust Board, CEO and Members. The proposed MAT structure has been published; a copy of the proposed MAT structure is available at www.industriouseducation.org.uk. There will be more talk about this at the consultation meetings.

The Trust would be a registered charity and therefore requires a Members group (equivalent of Shareholders). The Members are volunteers who would function as founders and shareholders of the Trust. The Members would create the charitable trust because they believe in the vision and values and methods of this organisation and are responsible for appointing the Trustees and

ensuring the success of the Trust at an annual general meeting. The Members receive no remuneration for their role.

The Trust Board who are known as Trustees would be the main decision-making group within the structure, and they are accountable for all schools in the Trust. The Trust would consist of up to eleven Trustees, specifically selected for their skills and commitment to ensure the excellence of all schools within the Trust, acting in the best interests of all children and young people. As with the Governors, Trustees receive no remuneration for their function and serve as volunteers for our charitable endeavour. It is hoped that some Trustees may come from the current Governing Bodies, but as there are positions unfilled, the recruitment process continues to remain open to secure a wide range of key skills on the IET Trust board.

A unique feature of this MAT would be the additional Local Governing Body which would sit under the IET Trust Board. Each school would continue to have its own Local Governing Body (LGB).

As a partnership of schools will you have increased purchasing power?

Yes, due to the economies of scale, a group of schools will be more likely able to obtain better value when negotiating contracts for services essential for running a school such as educational visits, safeguarding and inclusion, insurance, accountancy, HR, Payroll, broadband and other IT services.

A lot of news reports I've seen are about failing schools being forced to be taken over as academies. What does this have to do with us?

A school that is failing, can be taken over by a sponsor and turned into an academy with the aim of the sponsor driving improvement in the school. What does not make for dramatic news is that strong schools are able to start their own Multi-Academy Trusts and lead on organisation improvement in their group. We want to make this move because we believe that by working together with other successful organisations, we will be able to further develop the inclusive, inspirational and innovative education that we currently provide, and we want to continue to build on this.

By joining a new Trust, we would be able to keep everything great about our institutions and continue to make improvements that work for our schools without another Trust taking over in the future. Like local authority schools, academies can also perform poorly, however like any type of education provider, the success depends on the Leadership & Management in charge.

What process have the Governing Body gone through in deciding to begin this process and will we definitely join a Multi Academy Trust?

The decision to consult is not a decision the school has come to quickly; this is the result of the research and evaluation of all options available to us and understanding the local and national context and assessment of current partnerships. The leaders and Governors have all undertaken a vast amount of research as we strive to make the right decisions for this school.

At the end of the consultation period, which includes a rigorous process of due diligence, the Governors will further consider their decision considering all evidence and then decide whether to formally apply to become an academy and join a MAT and we will update you with the outcome.

Can you withdraw from the conversion process?

Yes, you can withdraw right up to the point the Funding Agreement is signed (approximately one month before the conversion date). Once this is signed there is a legally binding agreement between the Secretary of State and the academy, and the termination process would require a long notice period.

What is the timescale for conversion?

Once a decision is made to convert and approval given, the entire process from start to finish generally takes 4-9 months, with conversions being official on the 1st of the month. It would be a smooth transition in which students, staff and parents are unlikely to perceive any change, and no disruption to the normal running of the school. If we convert, the date would be determined with the Department for Education in consultation with the Trust and school and we would let you know when it is confirmed.