

Edith Stein Catholic Academy Trust

Conversion Information

For Schools

Introduction

Bishop Philip has made it clear that he expects all schools, including single Academy Trusts, under the Trusteeship of the Diocese of Portsmouth to transition to one of the two Academy Trust companies established within the Diocese. These are the Edith Stein Catholic Multi-Academy Trust (ESCAT), located in the southern area, and the Mother Teresa Catholic Multi-Academy Trust (MTCAT), situated in the north. The conversion to academy status marks a pivotal moment in the evolution of a school, ushering in a range of new opportunities that include increased autonomy, innovative practices, and enhanced collaboration. However, this transition also entails significant responsibilities related to governance, financial management, and accountability. For school leaders, governors, staff, parents, and the broader community, navigating the complexities of academy conversion can be daunting and, at times, overwhelming.

Academisation across England and Wales

Across England and Wales, Catholic dioceses are increasingly advocating for schools to join academy Trusts as part of a unified strategy aimed at bolstering Catholic education. This movement has gained momentum, with a number of dioceses now reporting that more than 80% of their schools have successfully transitioned to academy status. Such a shift not only reflects a commitment to securing Catholic education but also fosters a collaborative environment where schools can share resources and best practices. As the landscape of education continues to evolve, the Diocese of Portsmouth is positioning itself to ensure that its schools are well-equipped to meet the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

Practical implications of change

Concerns frequently emerge regarding the practical implications of changes, particularly how they will influence daily operations and ensure the protection of the school's ethos, staff, and students during the transition. Catholic Multi Academy Trusts (CMATs) approach academisation from a unique perspective, distinguishing themselves from larger academy chains. This distinction is not merely about size or organisational structure; it is fundamentally rooted in purpose. Catholic Trusts are dedicated to advancing the Church's mission, focusing on the holistic development of individuals—academically, spiritually, morally, and socially—This core objective informs every facet of Catholic Trusts' operations, governance, and growth.

At the heart of a Catholic Multi Academy Trust lies a collective identity rooted in Gospel values and the teachings of the Catholic church. The schools within a CMAT are bonded by a shared faith, sacramental life, and a dedication to Catholic social principles.

Dual accountability

ESCAT and MTCAT are accountable not only to the DfE but also to Bishop Philip. This dual accountability adds a moral and spiritual dimension to governance and leadership, ensuring that decisions are made not just based on performance outcomes or financial results, but also in alignment with Catholic values and the long-term welfare of students, staff, and communities. Education is viewed as a vocation and a ministry, transcending the notion of a mere service to be provided at scale.

Over the last two years ESCAT has been working with schools, listening to Heads and LGBs to understand their position so that schools can convert in a timely manner.

Every school's context is unique but there are common themes

This document has been developed in response to many of the questions raised by schools over this period. We hope it will provide clear, practical guidance to schools, as well as answer some of the frequently asked questions as they navigate the journey from a VA school to an academy. While every school's context is unique, there are common themes, requirements, and concerns that arise during conversion, and this guidance aims to address these in a structured and accessible way.

Frequently asked questions

Central to this document is a commitment to answering the questions that are most frequently asked (FAQ) by schools considering or preparing for academy status. In addition, the ESCAT website also contains a section related to FAQs. These questions often relate to governance arrangements, financial management, staffing and employment matters, land and buildings, accountability, and the relationship with ESCAT and external partners. By bringing these questions together in one place, the document seeks to provide reassurance, promote informed decision-making, and reduce uncertainty for all parties involved. That said, not all questions about conversion can be answered in one document as some are specific to each school.

Introduction Continued

Change is not only unavoidable but also crucial

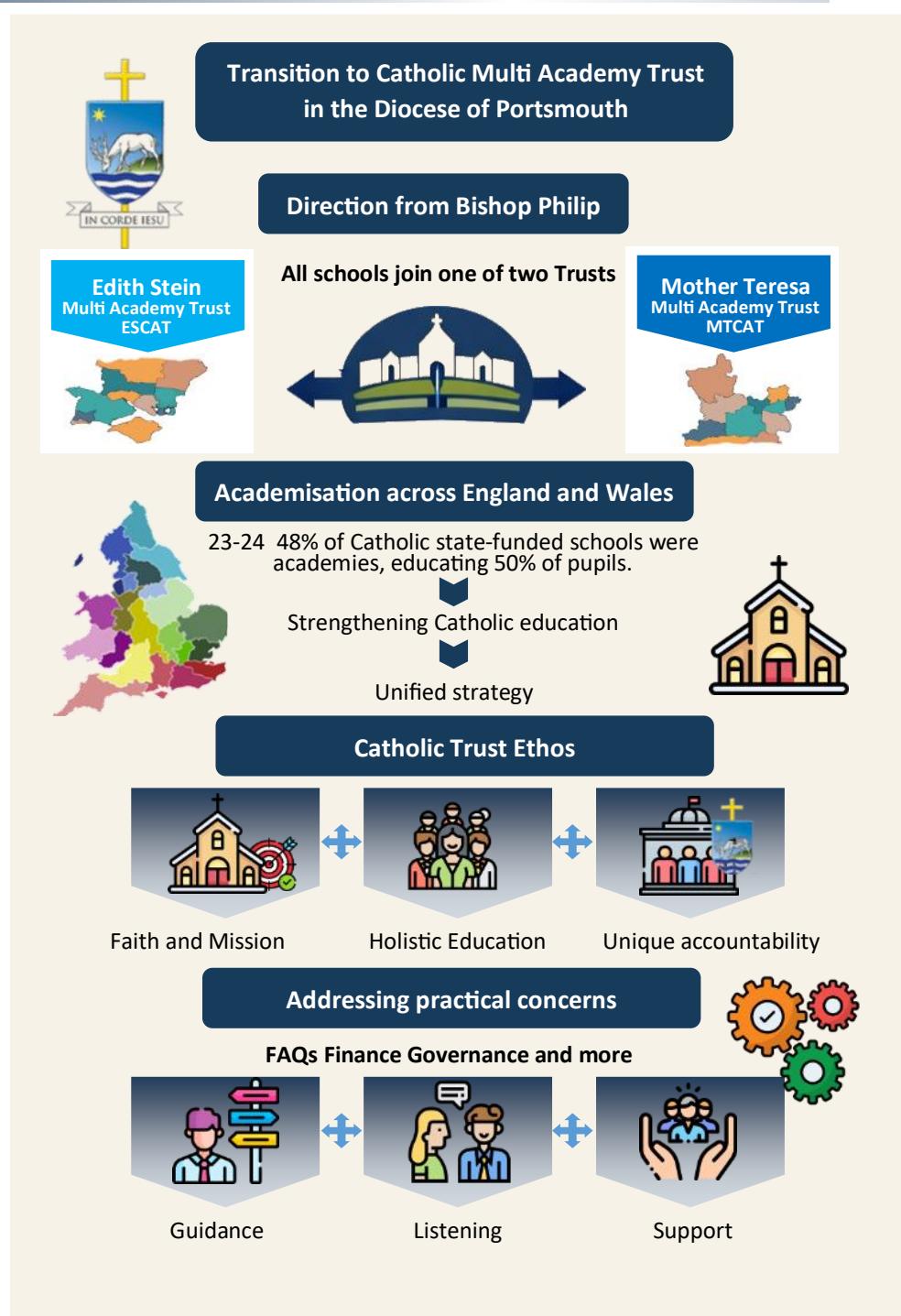
The ESCAT Directors acknowledge that as the Trust expands, change is not only unavoidable but also crucial. The services and offer will evolve as more schools become part of the Trust. This growth introduces greater complexity, new responsibilities, and shifting expectations between the Trust and member schools. Structures that were effective for a small, cohesive team may no longer suffice as ESCAT increases in size. Consequently Trust systems, processes, leadership models, and operational methods will need to adapt to ensure that ESCAT remains sustainable, compliant, and capable of functioning on a larger scale. Schools that are already with us are shaping this journey, a contribution the Directors appreciate.

This document also outlines future structures, policies, and services, providing a glimpse into what is ahead. ESCAT is also collaborating closely with MTCAT, with the expectation of aligning many policies and procedures across both Trusts as we both grow.

Engagement with staff, parents, pupils, and the wider community remains a vital part of the process

It is important to recognise that academy conversion is not simply an administrative or legal exercise; it is a strategic change that can shape the future direction of a school. As such, this guidance encourages schools to reflect on the process.

Schools may find it helpful to return to different sections of this document at various points in the conversion process, particularly as new questions emerge or circumstances evolve. While it does not replace professional or legal advice, it provides a strong foundation of knowledge to support schools in approaching academy conversion with confidence, clarity, and a shared understanding of what lies ahead.



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The conversion process



The process to convert a Catholic school to an academy is both rigorous and collaborative, designed to preserve the school's Catholic character while ensuring strong oversight, due diligence, and alignment with Diocesan Education Strategy. Bishop Philip has made his intention clear: all schools in the Dioceses Trusteeship will join one of two Trusts. This is not simply a structural change; it is a shift into a deeper partnership with other Catholic schools, strengthening governance, teaching, mission, and long-term sustainability.

Catholic Dioceses across England increasingly encourage schools to join Academy Trusts as part of a coordinated strategy for strengthening Catholic education. In 23-24, 48% of Catholic state-funded schools were academies, educating 50% of pupils. Nationally, 54% of state educated children are now in academies. Since 2021, academies account for the majority of Catholic secondary schools. By the end of 2026 the CES is anticipating that the majority of state funded Catholic schools will have converted to academies.

Collaboration within a CMAT allows schools to share resources, expertise, leadership capacity, and strengthen Catholic identity collectively. Research undertaken by East Anglia Diocese confirms that CMATs protect Catholic governance structures and ensure future stability for Catholic schools.

Additionally, joining a Trust provides financial advantages: academies gain direct control over their budgets, avoid the 10% capital contribution required of voluntary-aided schools, and receive a guaranteed capital building allowance once the Trust is large enough.

PROCESS OF CONVERSION



Formal Consultation

Schools must conduct a full consultation with key stakeholders before moving ahead. This includes: parents and carers; pupils; staff (including TUPE-related matters); clergy and parish communities; local schools and the Local Authority.

The purpose of consultation is to gather wide-ranging feedback and ensure transparency. Consultation responses are then formally reviewed by the governing body, which decides how to respond.



Due Diligence

Both the school and ESCAT undertake detailed due diligence, assessing risks and readiness across several domains, including: finance; human resources; safeguarding; health & safety; estates and land; IT infrastructure; educational standards; Legal Matters and security of numbers on role.

The purpose is to identify risks and ensure the ESCAT can effectively support and integrate the school.



Application to the DfE

The school applies to the DfE for academy status with the consent of the Diocese. The application is reviewed and if approved an Academy Order authorising conversion is issued.



Legal Conversion Process

The legal phase involves collaboration between the school, Diocese, solicitors, Local Authority, and ESCAT. Key documents include: funding agreement between ESCAT and the Secretary of State; Church Supplemental Agreement securing the school's Catholic character, Commercial Transfer Agreement transferring staff, assets, and contracts.

This step also formalises land and property agreements.

The conversion process

PROCESS OF CONVERSION CONTINUED



TUPE Consultation and Staff Transfer

Under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE), employees transfer from the governing body to ESCAT.

Staff must be consulted about the change of employer as they move from the LGB to ESCAT, and their terms and conditions legally protected. Unions are informed and consulted on at this stage. TUPE is often one of the most sensitive and time-intensive parts of the process.



Onboarding and Integration into the CMAT

Once legal processes are finalised, the school undergoes an onboarding phase that includes: adoption of Trust-wide systems (finance, HR, audits, safeguarding); induction and training for leaders, governors, and staff and integration into educational improvement networks.

This stage ensures the school enters ESCAT in a stable and supported manner before operating fully as an academy.



Opening as a Catholic Academy within the CMAT

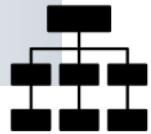
On the agreed conversion date—often aligned with the start of the financial year—the school officially opens as a Catholic Academy within ESCAT. Final approvals by both the Diocese and Secretary of State must be in place.

From that point, the regulation of the school moves from the Local Authority to ESCAT steered by:

- The Trust's Articles of Association
- Diocesan expectations
- The Funding Agreement with the DfE
- Catholic Education Service governance models policies and contract (e.g., Scheme of Delegation)

Key Questions	Answers
1. How long does the process take?	<i>Typically around 6 months. It could be longer if there are legal issues related to land or other complications.</i>
2. Who is responsible for finally agreeing the conversion?	<i>Governors and the dioceses are critical to the decision making process. However it is the Directors who are legally responsible for the security of the company and they have the final authority.</i>
3. Who pays for the conversion?	<i>Some schools have access to a conversion grant. Others will have to use restricted or unrestricted funds.</i>
4. Will there be any immediate difference to the school after conversion?	<i>No - however, over time as schools work together they should see the benefits of the partnership.</i>
5. What support will be provided to schools to manage new systems, for example, finance?	<i>The provider will facilitate training, support will also be provided from within ESCAT.</i>

ESCAT Structure



ESCAT is the charitable company that oversees a schools under a single legal and governance structure.

Members: At the top of a MAT's organisational structure are the Members. They are similar to shareholders in a company, but they do not receive dividends. Their primary role is to safeguard the Trust's charitable purpose and ensure it remains aligned with the founding vision. Members are appointed by the Bishop. Members are not involved in day-to-day management but act as the Trust's constitutional guardians.

Members responsibilities include:

- Appointing and removing Directors
- Amending the Trust's Articles of Association
- Ensuring good governance and accountability

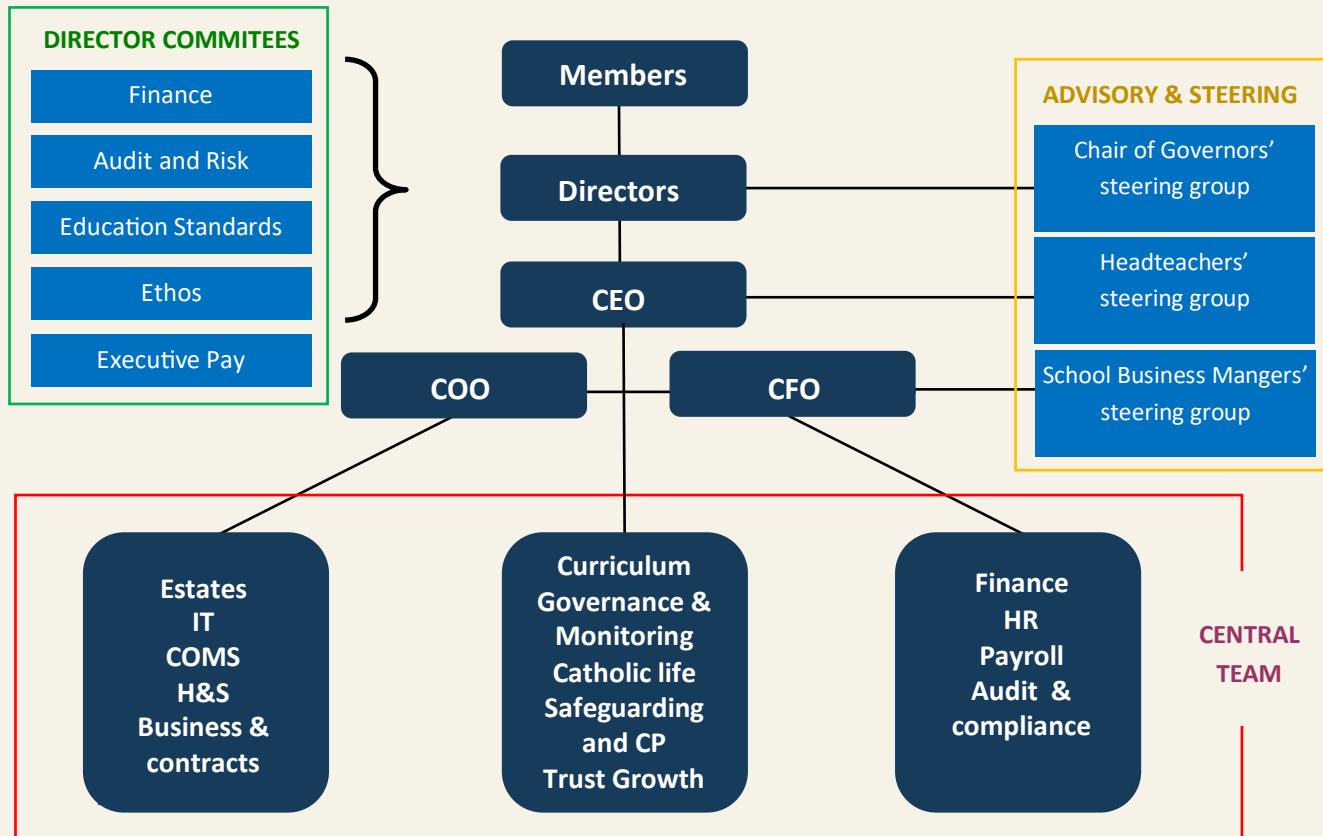
Board of Directors: Strategic Leadership and Accountability

Below the Members sits the Board of Directors. The Board is legally responsible for ESCAT and accountable to the DfE and Bishop, they are also bound by company and charity law.

The Board's core responsibilities include:

- Setting the Trust's strategic direction and vision and aligning this with the tenants of the Catholic church
- Ensuring financial probity and effective use of public funds
- Overseeing educational performance and safeguarding
- Appointing and holding executive leaders to account

ESCAT ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE



ESCAT Structure

Directors bring a range of expertise, such as education, finance, law, HR, and estates management. While they do not manage schools directly, they are responsible for the overall success of ESCAT.

The Executive Leadership Team bridges strategy and practice. This team is led by a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and supported by the Chief Financial Officer (CFO). Currently ESCAT does not have a COO, this position will be filled once the Trust grows to a suitable size.

Executive leaders are responsible for:

- Implementing the Board's strategic decisions
- Reporting to the Board the work of schools and LGBs
- Monitoring the Catholicity and ethos of schools
- Ensuring schools continue to improve
- Managing staff, budgets, and central service
- Ensuring compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements
- Monitoring accountability systems across schools

This centralised leadership model allows MATs to achieve consistency, efficiency, and shared improvement across schools.

ESCAT operates a central team that provides shared core services to all schools. These currently include:

- Finance
- Payroll
- Human resources
- Estates

A degree of centralisation reduces duplication, ensures compliance, and allows schools to focus more directly on teaching and learning. There are a range of other non-centralised services provided by ESCAT that schools can currently opt into. As ESCAT grows other services will be made available as the core offer.

To preserve local accountability, ESCAT continues to support LGBs for individual schools or clusters of schools. LGBs operate under delegated authority from the ESCAT Board. At school level, Headteachers, Executive Heads and Heads of School and their leadership teams manage the daily running of each school. They are accountable to the LGB.

Key Questions	Answer
1. Who appoints the Directors?	<i>Directors, similar to governors, are voluntary roles. Directors are appointed by the Bishop in accordance with the Articles of Association. Foundation Directors have to be in the majority.</i>
2. Who appoints the executive?	<i>Directors appoint the executive. When permanent positions are gapped they will be advertised nationally.</i>
3. Will Headteachers and CoGs be able to sit as non executive members of the Directors Board	<i>No, as this is not permitted by the Articles. However, Heads and CoGs may be asked to present information related to a school to the Board or the subcommittees.</i>
4. Will staff be forced to work across multiple schools?	<i>No, however there will be opportunities for staff to take a lead in areas of improvement and professional development with other schools.</i>
5. Who is responsible for the Heads performance review?	<i>This responsibility remains with the LGB.</i>

School Governance in ESCAT



ESCAT Directors firmly believe that the strength and success of our schools are found in the shared commitment to educational excellence, rooted in the distinct ethos of each individual school.

LGBs have a pivotal role

Directors understand that LGBs play a pivotal role in ensuring that every school remains true to its unique community and Catholic mission, while also meeting the broader expectations and aspirations of ESCAT. Central to this belief is our unwavering respect for the autonomy of LGBs within each school, acknowledging that local governance is essential to both school improvement and the effective delivery of our collective vision.

The educational needs and priorities of each school vary, shaped by the demographics, ethos, and context of the community it serves; this can differ significantly particularly across secondary and primary phases. The Directors recognise that no two schools are the same, and as such, their leadership and governance structures must be flexible and responsive to these needs. LGBs are uniquely positioned to provide the nuanced insights required to make decisions that best serve their students, staff, and families.

LGBs make the decisions that reflect the need of their community.

ESCAT is committed to providing support to our schools, but Directors also recognise the importance of empowering each LGB to make decisions that reflect the needs and values of its specific school community. Directors recognise the judgment of LGBs and encourage them to take an active role in shaping their school's ethos, policies, and development plans. While ESCAT provides the overarching framework, strategic objectives, the essential compliance requirements for the Trust

and a number of policies, each LGB is best placed to implement those objectives in ways that align with the character and context of their school.

ESCAT's role is not to impose a rigid set of standards or procedures, although there are some things we have to do together and centrally, but to facilitate and support the governance structures that allow schools to thrive independently while benefiting from the collective strength of being part of a broader MAT.

With autonomy comes responsibility

The Directors acknowledge that with LGB autonomy comes a significant degree of responsibility. While we appreciate the independence of our LGBs, it is equally crucial to ensure that each LGB is accountable for its decisions in terms of Catholic ethos, educational outcomes, school financial management and business related activities. This accountability is not intended to hinder

the decision-making process or obstruct effective local governance; instead, it functions as a framework to guarantee that the high standards ESCAT and others have established are consistently and transparently upheld.

The Directors play a crucial role in overseeing and supporting LGBs. ESCAT relies on reports from OFSTED, CSI and external audits to assess the work of LGBs. ESCAT will also review documents, processes, and procedures that governing bodies implement at a local level, for example, the governing bodies' own Development Plan.

ESCAT schools use GovernorHub as the central repository for minutes and other governance documents, ensuring that these records are accessible to the ESCAT team. This transparency fosters accountability and allows for a more informed oversight of the governance practices within the schools.

FAQs	Answer
1. Will ESCAT impose a committee structure on a LGB?	No, on the understandings the key functions of school governance are covered.
2. How are responsibilities divided between ESCAT and Local Governing Bodies?	These are set out in the schemes of delegation. ESACT adopts CES model.
3. How will the voice of LGBs be heard in any Trust-centric decision making?	The Chair of Directors will meet with CoGs on a regular basis. LGBs will also be asked to review the effectiveness of services and Trust-wide policies.
4. Who is responsible for the appointment of staff?	LGBs remain responsible for staff appointments. Certain positions, for example Headteacher, have to be ratified by the Board. Staff are employed by the Trust and not the LGB. Staff continue to be appointed on CES contracts.
5. How will ESCAT evaluate the performance of LGBs and their impact?	LGBs should have their own monitoring systems, in addition to external audit. ESCAT will use all of these as well as asking LGBs to evaluate themselves.
6. Who is responsible for finding governors?	As now that will rest with the LGB and school. The Diocese will still be the appointing authority for Foundation Governors.

Policy Setting



One of the most critical functions of ESCAT is setting policies that guide the operation of the schools. This process involves navigating the delicate balance between consistency across the Trust and the individual autonomy of each school. Be it an academy or VA school, policies within a CMAT provide a foundation for legal compliance, operational consistency, and strategic alignment. Within ESCAT policy delineation is determined within the scheme of delegation. There are a number of policies produced by the CES that Diocesan Protocols mandate schools should adopt, again irrespective of status. ESCAT also issues policy statements so that schools can write their own policies, reflecting the context of their school and community.

Policies fall into 4 categories

Executive pay policy; Reserves and Financial Prudence; Risk Management Strategy; Trust scheme of delegation

1. Policies approved by Directors.

*Environmental and Sustainability; Finance (including Bad Debt and Charges and Remissions); Freedom of Information; General Data Protection Regulations; Health & Safety Policy Statement; Home working; Lone Working; Management of Allegations of abuse against staff; Menopause Pay Policy Support Staff * Performance Management/Appraisal*; Prayer and Liturgy*; Redundancy; Safeguarding Policy Statement*; School Employment Equality Policy; Sexual Harassment; Staff Attendance and Absence ; Staff Capability CES; Staff Grievance CES; Staffing; Whistleblowing *Policies or statements approved by the Board. Where the policy has been approved in template form schools must add context specific information*

2. Policies or policy statements approved by Directors. LGBs will be consulted.

*Admissions all stages; Child Protection ** Health & Safety ** Emergency Response Plan (including Critical Incident Recovery) Safeguarding***

***The Trust will issue guidance statements*

3. Policies or policy statements will be approved by Local Governing Bodies and ratified by Directors.

4.

Asbestos management ; Behaviour and anti bullying ; Children Looked After (Children in Care) ; Curriculum including Physical Activity ; Curriculum/Assessment/Marking; Drugs Education; Equality Information and Objectives; Exams and controlled assessment; Fire safety Management; First Aid ; Gifts and Hospitality; Headteacher's Discretionary Fund; Inclusion and Special Educational Needs; Legionella Management; Low level concerns; Medical Conditions and Administration of Medicines; Pupil Premium Statement; RSE; School Employment Equality Policy; SEND/ inclusion; Uniform Policy

Key Questions	Answers
1. Will LGBs be able to write their own policies to cover issues that are specific to their context?	Yes
2. If the Trust identifies other policies that could become central policies will schools be consulted?	Yes. Schools will also be asked to contribute to the process.
3. How will Trust-wide policies be monitored?	A number are subject to external scrutiny, for example through Audit. The Trust already asks schools for feedback, this will continue.
4. Will LGBs have the autonomy to align safeguarding policies with Local Authority guidance?	Yes
5. Will ESCAT set a policy for schools on name Brand and uniform?	No
6. Will ESCAT continue to use the suite of policies developed by the CES?	Yes



Trusts, including single-academy Trusts, must set a policy for holding reserves. This is set out in the Academy Handbook and guidance from the Charity Commission.

A clear reserves policy not only helps ESCAT make sure it has appropriate levels of reserves to support financial stability, but also provides accountability for the use of public funds and confidence for stakeholders. The Trust Board is responsible for approval and oversight of this policy. A copy of the policy can be found on the ESCAT website.

Trust contingency

Currently ESCAT is asking schools to make a 1% contribution to the Central Trust contingency from their General Annual Grant (GAG). This position will remain in place whilst the Trust is in its infancy. Heads will have an opportunity to contribute to the protocol related to the use of this fund. This reserve fund is designed as an additional layer of financial support to schools who may run into difficulty as ESCAT grows.

School reserves ensure autonomy

ESCAT believes that schools should be as autonomous as possible. For this reason, schools should aim to hold reserves equivalent to 4% of their GAG income. It is considered good budgetary practice for schools to maintain a level of financial reserves to effectively manage unexpected situations that may arise throughout the academic year. Such reserves offer a crucial safety net, allowing schools to respond promptly to unforeseen challenges, whether they stem from unexpected repairs, changes in funding, or emergencies that disrupt normal school operation.

ESCAT advocates for the principle of subsidiarity, which emphasises that decisions should be made at the most

local level possible. This approach not only empowers Headteachers and governors to make timely decisions that best suits their unique circumstances, but it also fosters an environment where schools can plan for the future with more confidence.

Ultimately, a sound financial strategy that includes maintaining reserves reflects a commitment to responsible stewardship of resources, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness and resilience of the school.

School will be permitted to join ESCAT if for budgetary reasons they cannot yet budget for a school based contingency, provided they can demonstrate that they are working towards this and there are no other significant financial risks.

Schools will not be able to join ESCAT if they cannot commit to contributing to the Trust reserves or the central charge. ESCAT lacks the necessary reserves to

sustain a school unable to meet the commitments nor is it fair on the other schools already in the Trust.

Other reserves

Other reserves above the 4% held by individual schools or self-generated income are retained by the school.

The future

Both ESCAT and Mother Teresa Catholic Academy TRUST (MTCAT) in the north of the Portsmouth Diocese are looking to align their reserves policy. However, the principle of schools maintaining their own contingency and keeping other income will remain.

Key Questions	Answer
1. <i>What happens to the 1% Trust contingency currently paid by schools?</i>	<i>Administered by the Trust.</i>
2. <i>What happens to surpluses above the 4% school based contingency?</i>	<i>Kept by the school.</i>
3. <i>What happens to all other funding not related to the GAG, for example, SEND, Pupil premium, Sports premium?</i>	<i>Kept by the school.</i>
4. <i>What happens to funds generated by the school for example parents' association funds?</i>	<i>Kept by the school.</i>
5. <i>What happens to self generate income, for example lettings?</i>	<i>Kept by the school.</i>
6. <i>What happens to surpluses from unrestricted funds?</i>	<i>Kept by the school.</i>
7. <i>If the school has a separate charity what happens to these funds?</i>	<i>Kept by the school.</i>
8. <i>What happens to donations to the school?</i>	<i>Kept by the school.</i>
9. <i>What happens to any surplus from traded services?</i>	<i>Kept by the school.</i>



CORE SERVICES

Central Support



- CEO, CFO, COO Salary Costs
- Admin Support to above
- Governance Clerk Costs to Board of Trustees
- Head of Trust HR and payroll
- Trust Finance Manager

HR Support



- Employment Law advice and independent support (Mentor)
- HR Processes and Procedures
- 1st line support and advice
- Support with Occ Health Issues
- DBS Check Co-ordination
- Social Media Checks
- Access to Apprenticeship Levy Scheme

Payroll



- Co-ordination of outsourced managed payroll provision (Data Plan)
- Payroll Processes and Procedures
- 1st line support and advice
- TPS EOYC Assurance Report
- LGPS

Finance



- IRIS Financial Licences
- IRIS Financial Helpdesk
- IRIS Financial Planner (Budgeting)
- Financial Reporting - Consolidation
- Finance Processes and Procedures
- External Auditing services
- Internal Verification services
- VAT returns and distribution of refunds
- VAT Inspection Protection Service

Core services cost existing schools approximately 2% of their General Annual Grant.

OPTIONAL SERVICES

Insurance



- Negotiation/co-ordination of commercial provision where RPA is not used or fully suffices

Energy



- Negotiation of Kw/h charges
- Provision of regular cost & consumption reporting

Term Contractor - Mechanical and Engineering



- Negotiation of contact including tendering
- Common standard of servicing and testing
- Bespoke scope for each school

Facilities Management



- Coordination of Long Term Maintenance plans
- Coordination of Capital Improvement Fund grants
- Access to professional building services

IT Support



- Audit of IT provision
- Provision of 1st and 2nd Line Support
- IT Project Management

Health Safety and legal



- Provision of H&S Advice
- Provision of H&S Auditing
- Common approach to H&S policy & standards
- Legal support

Optional services charged back to schools based on actual cost of the service and provision.

Services FAQS

Key Questions	Answer
1. Why is ESCAT not offering a Trust-wide school improvement service at this stage?	ESCAT is not sufficiently large to offer a Trust-wide improvement service. It is currently up to LGBs to ensure that they have sufficient external support to monitor the quality of education and ensure compliance. The Trust monitors the school LGB in this respect.
2. Do schools entering ESCAT have to use the core services?	Where core services are run by the LA, as a school becomes an academy it is normal for the LA to end the service, for example payroll. All schools in the Trust have to use the same finance package to ensure co-ordination and consolidation of accounts. There maybe some services provided by an LA that can continue until the termination of the contract.
3. Do schools have to take all of the optional services?	No.
4. Is it envisaged that there will be an ESCAT wide IT provider?	This is unlikely to occur in the short-to-medium term.
5. Can LGBs procure services currently offered as optional by the Trust?	Yes, but as of now they have to demonstrate value for money.
6. How co-ordinated and aligned do systems have to be across schools in ESCAT?	Some of the alignment is determined by external providers, for example, the payroll provider has a date each month after which no further changes to salaries can be made. The Trust has systems in place to ensure that employment procedures are followed correctly. The Trust has to provide monthly management accounts, schools are expected to ensure their systems are up to date so that financial reporting is accurate.
7. How is the work of the central team monitored?	The Directors monitor the work of the central team through the Board meeting and sub committee groups. In addition to this, similar to schools, a performance management system exists where targets are set related to Trust development.
8. How does ESCAT measure the impact and effectiveness of each central function?	Many elements of the work of the central team are external verified, for example HR and finance are scrutinised at audit. Headteacher groups will also be able to provide feedback. LGBs will be asked about the impact of core policies.
9. What benchmarking is used to compare costs with other Trusts?	Our auditors provide benchmarking data for similar Trusts.
10. How are workload, wellbeing and absence managed across ESCAT being assessed?	Schools are required to implement wellbeing policies that are tailored to their specific contexts and circumstances, with LGBs responsible for overseeing this process maintaining autonomy. Additionally, the Trust has established a policy regarding the management of both general and discretionary absences, ensuring that there are clear guidelines in place. One significant benefit of operating within a Trust is the opportunity for schools to collaborate by sharing curricula and resources when appropriate. This collaborative approach not only fosters a sense of community among schools but also optimises the use of available resources, ultimately benefiting the students.



CORE SERVICES 5% of general annual grant (includes 1% contribution to Trust central reserves)

Central Support



CEO, CFO, COO Salary Costs
Admin Support to above
Governance Clerk Costs to Board of Trustees
Head of Trust HR and payroll
Trust Finance Manager

HR Support



Employment Law advice and independent support (Mentor)
HR Processes and Procedures
1st line support and advice
Support with Occ Health Issues
DBS Check Co-ordination
Social Media Checks
Access to Apprenticeship Levy Scheme

Payroll



Co-ordination of outsourced managed payroll provision (Data Plan)
Payroll Processes and Procedures
1st line support and advice
TPS EOYC Assurance Report
LGPS

Finance



IRIS Financial Licences
IRIS Financial Helpdesk
IRIS Financial Planner (Budgeting)
Financial Reporting - Consolidation
Finance Processes and Procedures
External Auditing services
Internal Verification services
VAT returns and distribution of refunds
VAT Inspection Protection Service

Insurance



Negotiation/co-ordination of commercial provision where RPA is not used or fully suffices

Health Safety, legal and compliance



Provision of H&S Advice
Provision of H&S Auditing
Common approach to H&S policy and standards
Legal support
Data Protection
Annual safeguarding Audit

Education and curriculum support



Primary support
Safeguarding co-ordinator
SEND co-ordinator
Primary assessment
RE advisor 2 visits
Governance professional coordinator
3 SIP Visits

School systems



MIS (Arbor or SIMS)
GovernorHub
Safeguarding (CPOMS or Safeguard My School)
Support with Occ Health Issues
DBS Check Co-ordination
Social Media Checks
Access to Apprenticeship Levy Scheme

Other



Estate management and coordination
Diocese SLA
Educational psychology support
2 governor training sessions
Advisory support meetings

Budget Setting



ESCAT, similar to other Trusts, operates under the rubric of the Academy Trust Handbook and regulations set by the Charity Commission. ESCAT writes a number of policies to ensure budgetary compliance.

The Trust Board holds ultimate responsibility for setting and approving the annual budget for each school. However each individual school is responsible for setting its own individual budget.

Budget setting must follow a clear governance structure:

Board of Trustees: Approves the consolidated Trust budget and ensures alignment with the Trust's strategy.

Audit and Finance Committee: Reviews draft budgets, identifies financial risks, and monitors financial performance throughout the year.

School Headteachers, Business Managers, and LGBs:

Determine school-level needs and expenditure plans, ensuring their budget supports school improvement and student outcomes.

Planning and Budgeting Cycle

Trusts operate on a financial year that runs from 1st September to 31st August. The budget setting process typically begins early in the spring term and is finalised before the end of the summer term to allow for submission to the DfE by the statutory deadline.

Key stages in the budgeting cycle:

The financial planning cycle for academies closely resembles that of maintained schools. Initially, Headteachers and LGBs are tasked with modelling anticipated income and evaluating expenditures for the upcoming year. Schools typically engage in scenario modelling to prepare for potential financial uncertainties or shifts in policy, this process continues as a Trust school.

Uniform assumptions

It is essential for all schools to operate under uniform assumptions, particularly regarding factors such as inflation and associated pay awards. ESCAT will advise on these. Consistent with current practices, LGBs will be required to endorse a three-year budget.

Transparency and Compliance:

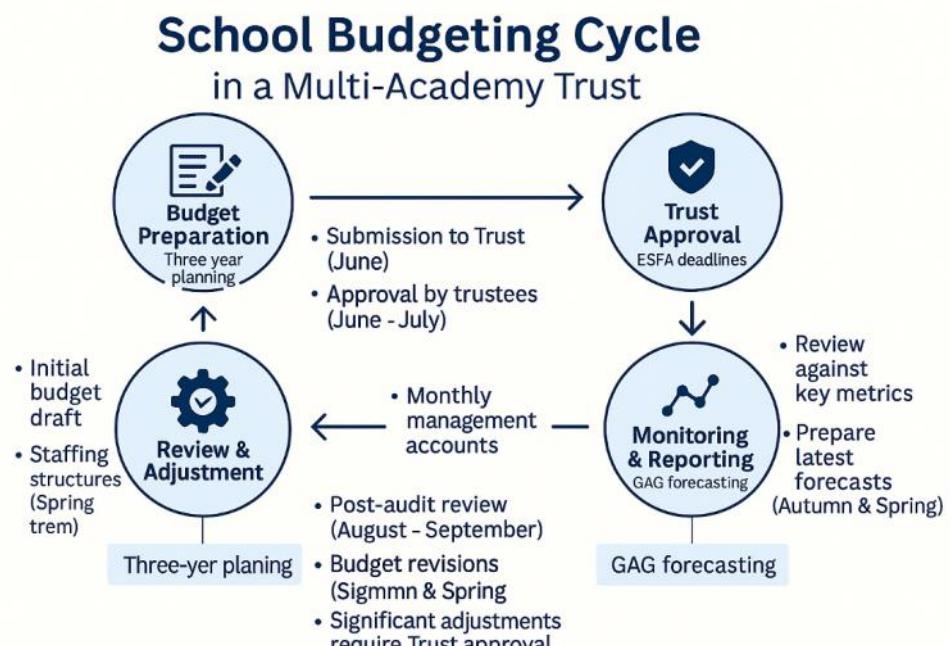
Both school and Trust budgeting must comply with the

Academy Trust Handbook, ensure regularity and propriety, and be subject to internal and external audit.

Monitoring and Review

Once the school budget is approved, regular in-year monitoring by LGBs is essential. Headteachers and LGBs are accountable for their school's expenditure and must report variances against planned spend as they do now. Trust finance teams produce monthly management accounts, which are shared with the Board as mandated in the Academy Handbook.

Budget setting in academy Trusts is a strategic process that balances educational aims with sound financial stewardship. It requires robust planning, clear governance, and ongoing monitoring with Headteachers and LGBs being at the heart of this process. Most schools will be familiar with this process.



Budget Setting FAQS

Key Questions	Answer
1. How are funds allocated within the Trust?	<i>Each month, schools receive their budget share less the agreed proportion of the central service charge and the Trust contingency.</i>
2. How does banking function across the Trust?	<i>DfE Funds for all schools are deposited in a central account then moved to individual school accounts. Fund originating from LAs is paid to schools. Trust schools use the same bank.</i>
3. When a school joins the Trust what happens to the funds held by the LA?	<i>These funds transfer to the balance sheet of the school.</i>
4. What autonomy will the school and LGB have over-spending decisions?	<i>As now, spending decisions should be made to pursue the best outcomes for students, particularly those that are disadvantaged.</i>
5. Can LGBs set an in-year deficit budget?	<i>If a school is in the unavoidable position that it needs to set an in-year deficit budget this will be permitted provided it can be supported by the school's own contingency and there is a robust plan to bring the school back into surplus in following years.</i>
6. What role does the LGB play in financial oversight ?	<i>LGBs will continue to monitor the schools financial health, supporting and challenging school leaders.</i>
7. What happens to the school site post conversion?	<i>For most schools, the land and buildings are owned by the Diocese. This remains the case with an agreement in place for ESCAT to use the asset.</i>
8. What happens to existing liabilities for example pensions or leases?	<i>Generally, contracts novate to the Trust, but the service remains with the school. Pension liability is consolidated across schools and passes to the Trust. The TPS and LGPS schemes remain in place.</i>
9. Can we keep services provided by existing suppliers if contracts novate?	<i>Yes. The LGB will have to continue to demonstrate best value for money.</i>
10. Can schools buy into ESCAT negotiated contracts, for example Energy or INTERNET?	<i>Yes. Many of these are charged to the school as used or by rate of consumption.</i>
11. Who sets approves school-level budgets?	<i>LGB and Headteachers have the responsibility to set a budget and recommend it to the Trust.</i>
12. What level of autonomy will the school have over staffing and curriculum expenditure?	<i>This is delegated to the school and the LGB, as now LGBs will have to demonstrate VFM for any expenditure.</i>
13. What authority will schools have over capital expenditure?	<i>Similar to now all capital expenditure on school property owned by the Diocese has to be approved by the Diocese. Trust schools no longer have to contribute to the Dioceses building fund and will have access to either CIF funding or SCA Funding. Similar to VASCA funding, SCA will be centrally managed.</i>
14. How does the Trust manage financial risk?	<i>All schools will continue to have their own risk registers which should be updated regularly. Schools should aim to carry a 4% contingency which can be used by the school to help mitigate risk. In addition, in exceptional circumstances schools can draw on the 1% central reserves.</i>
15. What will it cost my school?	<i>Once a Partnership Agreement is signed we can work with you to establish an accurate picture of the costs and savings for your school.</i>



Capital improvement work—such as building extensions, roof replacements, safeguarding upgrades, or major mechanical and electrical works—is essential to keep school estates safe, compliant, and fit for purpose. Currently the primary source of funding for improvement work comes directly from the DfE through a bidding process. Academy Trust schools do not have to find the 10% contribution nor do they pay into the Diocese Building Fund.

ESCAT working with consultant has been extremely successful in receiving over £10m for conditional improvements. In addition working with consultants they have secured a school rebuild for Corpus Christi in Portsmouth. Academies can still attract Local Authority funding, there are national examples where Local Authorities and academies have worked together on expansion projects to meet basic need.

ESCAT currently access capital funding through the Condition Improvement Fund (CIF).

Key features:

- A competitive bidding process run annually by the DfE.
- Funding is project-specific and usually time-limited.
- Prioritises health and safety, compliance, and serious condition issues.
- Not all bids are successful, so funding is less predictable than SCA.

Last year, to be eligible for CIF, MATs had to have fewer than five schools or fewer than 3,000 pupils as counted in the Spring 2025 census. If these criteria remain unchanged, ESCAT schools will still be eligible to apply for funding in December 2026, 2027 and potential 2028 depending on the Census in the spring of that year.

Once ESCAT grows above the CIF Criteria funding moves to School Condition Allocations (SCA)

Key features:

- Allocated annually by the Department for Education (DfE).
- Provided directly to eligible Trusts that manage a significant number of schools.
- Intended to address condition needs such as structural repairs, compliance works, and lifecycle replacement.
- Trusts have discretion to prioritise projects across their estate.
- Funds can be pooled and used strategically rather than being tied to individual schools.

The DfE calculates the allocation based on a funding rate multiplied by a pupil weighting, a condition band and a location factor. Without any adjustments a Trust of 5,000 student in 2025 would receive approximately £795,000 for capital improvements (Base rate for 2025 =£159.25/pupil)

Some consideration has already been given to how SCA allocations might be used. It seems reasonable for the Trust to keep a small proportion centrally to support strategic estate planning, emergency works and professional fees. By maintaining a central allocation, the Trust can ensure that critical needs are met across the board while also allowing for targeted support where it is most necessary.

The distribution of the remaining allocations will be delegated to individual schools based on an agreed methodology. Central to this process will be the results of individual school condition surveys, which assesses the physical state of the facilities, as well as the compliance and safeguarding requirements that each school must meet. It is essential to recognise that it would be inequitable for a newly constructed school to receive the same level of funding as one that is grappling with outdated and deteriorating infrastructure. This approach ensures that resources are allocated in a manner that reflects the specific needs and conditions of each school.

Any funds allocated must be strictly used for the designated projects and will not be included in the reserves held by the schools. To address situations where the costs of urgent projects exceed the funding available to a particular school, a mechanism will need to be established to allow for the reallocation of funds among schools, ensuring that urgent needs can be met without delay. The policy for distribution of SCA will be mirrored in both ESCAT and MCAT.



The curriculum in our schools is defined by what is taught, how it is taught, and when and why. These are then divided across the formal and informal experiences.

As the Trust grows, curriculum planning can develop strategically across schools. What this does not mean is that all schools will have the same curriculum diet.

Curriculum grounded in Catholic principles

One of the fundamental strengths of our curriculum is it is grounding in a shared vision and ethos that sets Catholic education aside from our secular partners. The curriculum in a Catholic school is unique because it blends academic excellence with faith-based education, aiming to develop the whole person intellectually, morally, spiritually, and socially.

Being part of a Trust creates an opportunity for curriculum leaders across various educational phases to collaboratively and creatively engage in curriculum design, allowing for the exchange of best practices. There are many examples across Catholic Academy Trusts where innovative approaches to the curriculum have resulted in a more enriching and inclusive educational experience for students.

It is important to clarify that there will be no top-down mandates dictating specific specifications, examination boards, schemes of work, learning platforms, pedagogical styles, thematic texts, or core units. Instead, our focus lies in identifying effective strategies and sharing these insights in a coherent and strategic manner.

All schools have to follow the RE curriculum mandated by the Catholic bishops of England and Wales.

The curriculum has to respond to the specific context of the school community. Individual schools will be encouraged to ensure the curriculum reflects their local context, community needs, and pupil demographics. For instance, a school serving a diverse EAL population might place greater emphasis on oracy and language acquisition, while another might emphasise in-depth local history into their humanities curriculum.

Headteachers responsible for development

Over time, if Headteachers, along with subject leaders, recognise the benefits of aligning the curriculum based on evidence informed practice, the Trust would support this.

We hope that our approach will result in appropriate ambitious curriculum for all

students where staff are supported with up-to-date pedagogical research and subject knowledge. This approach not only enhances curriculum quality but also promotes professional development and high standards across ESCAT.

FAQs	Answer
1. Will the Trust impose a particular curriculum	No.
2. Will the schools have the autonomy to develop	Yes.
3. How will schools work in collaboration to ensure the best curriculum?	<i>This will be lead by the Trust but given to Headteachers and subject leads to formulate.</i>
4. Will schools have the autonomy to customise their own curriculum in the best interests of their students?	Yes.
5. How will the quality of curriculum delivery be monitored across schools?	<i>This responsibility as now will rest with the LGB. The Trust will monitor the level of support and challenge.</i>
6. Will schools be able to determine what activities contribute to developing students' cultural capital and life skills?	Yes.
7. Will schools have the autonomy to determine the curriculum content that prepares students for the next of their education, or life beyond school?	Yes.

School Improvement

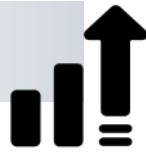
As ESCAT grows in size, complexity and ambition, the role of a strong, well-designed school improvement service becomes increasingly central to sustained success. As ESCAT grows it faces a dual challenge: maintaining high standards in established schools while developing provision to sustain further improvement. An effective school improvement offer provides the structure, expertise and coherence needed to meet these challenges, ensuring that growth enhances quality rather than diluting it. Several Trust and partnership schools in the South of the Diocese are already exploring the shape of the improvement service to be offered by ESCAT.

Directors are keen to balance strong central direction with school-level ownership driven by Heads, monitored by LGBs that adapt as the Trust grows.

Given the Trust's educational provision stretches from Early Years through to A-Level, it is not feasible to directly employ specialist experts across every discipline. However, many of our schools already demonstrate significant strength and depth, and we intend to draw on this best practice for a substantial proportion of our improvement work. In addition, we anticipate commissioning third party support where appropriate, as this will bring valuable external perspectives to the Trust.

It is equally important that schools continue to nurture the supportive developmental relationships they already have within their local areas.

The role of the Trust will be to coordinate improvement activity and monitor its effectiveness. Several schools have already begun discussions with us the contributions they may be able to make to our wider improvement work. At its best, a school improvement service within a growing Trust is not a bolt-on or



CORE PILLARS FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Our focus for school improvement already follows national priorities which include raising attainment, closing the gap, enhancing leadership, building collaboration and strengthening our unique ethos.

SUPPORT AND TRAINING

- CPD workshops
- Coaching and mentoring
- Leadership development



CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

- Curriculum planning
- Resource development
- Assessment strategies



TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Classroom support
- Pedagogy enhancement
- Best practice sharing



DATA AND ASSESSMENT

- Data analysis
- Tracking progress
- Reviewing pupil outcomes



INCLUSION AND WELLBEING

- SEND support
- Pastoral care
- Mental health initiatives



CATHOLIC LIFE AND MISSION

- Responding to key documents and directives
- Faith formation
- Justice and equality



compliance mechanism, but a core engine of improvement. It aligns vision with practice, supports leaders at all levels, and builds collective capacity so that improvement is both scalable and sustainable.

Driven by national and local priorities

Our focus for school improvement already follows national priorities which include raising attainment, closing the gap, enhancing leadership, building collaboration and strengthening our unique ethos. The foundation of any successful school improvement service is

clarity of purpose. Within a growing Trust, we believe the service should be explicitly rooted in the Trust's vision and purpose. This shared purpose becomes particularly important as new schools join the Trust, often bringing different cultures, practices and performance profiles.

The school improvement service must articulate what "great" looks like across ESCAT. This does not mean enforcing uniformity, but rather establishing a clear framework for high-quality teaching, leadership, curriculum and

School Improvement

inclusion. Directors also recognise that in addition to improving outcomes, school improvement also has to focus on developing provision as the nature of a school community changes and evolves.

A Tiered and Proportionate Model of Support

In a growing Trust, schools will be at different stages of development and require different levels of support. A one-size-fits-all approach is neither efficient nor effective. Instead, a tiered model of school improvement allows resources and expertise to be deployed proportionately. High-performing and stable schools, of which there are many, may benefit from light-touch challenge, peer review and opportunities to lead improvement across the Trust. Schools requiring improvement, or those new to ESCAT may need more support, including regular visits, targeted action planning and direct intervention in leadership or

teaching.

This differentiated approach helps the Trust to balance accountability with support. It also reassures strong schools that growth will not distract from their success, while ensuring that vulnerable schools receive the focused attention they need.

Adapting as the Trust Evolves

Finally, the ESCAT improvement offer must be dynamic. What works for a small or medium-sized Trust may not be sufficient as ESCAT grows further. Regular review of structures, roles and impact is essential. This includes the Trust being honest about capacity and school reciprocating this detailing the support they need. We need to ensure that improvement leads are not overstretched, and adapt the model as the number and diversity of schools increases.

APPROACH TO SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Given the Trust's provision from Early Years through to A-Level, it is not feasible to directly employ specialist experts across every discipline.



Draw on best practice in our schools



Commission third-party support



It is equally important that schools continue to nurture the supportive relationships they already have within their local areas.



Now that the Bishop has made his intention clear in terms of the organisation of schools, schools are encouraged to sign a Partnership Agreement. This sets out in a formal manner how the Trust and the school can work with each other, sharing information to enable the school to join the Trust.

Within the agreement there is a schedule that sets out the level of collaboration this could include but not limited to:

1. *Working with the school to model the financial impact of conversion*
2. *Providing support to the Headteacher to undertake high level due diligence work*
3. *Working with the LGB on accountability*
4. *School sharing financial information with the Trust and progress to reduce deficit*
5. *Sharing improvement models between school and Trust and Trust and school*
6. *Taking part in Trust forums and steering groups*
7. *Contribution from the school to Trust wide improvements.*
8. *Access to shared services.*

The Partnership Agreement is based upon model documents developed by the DfE. A draft copy of the Partnership Agreement can be downloaded from the ESCAT website.

Why sign an agreement?

Clear statement of intent

It is a clear statement of intent that your LGB and school align with the Bishop's vision of an acadamised Catholic school system within the Diocese of Portsmouth.

Sense of commitment

When both parties agree to formalise their partnership, it fosters a sense of trust and commitment. The agreement makes both sides accountable for their actions and promises, ensuring that they are invested in the success of the partnership and ultimately conversion of the school to an academy.

Roles and responsibilities

A partnership agreement outlines the specific roles and responsibilities of each party as the school works towards a position where it will be able to convert to an academy. The school can agree to share information so together, both school and ESCAT, can carry out the necessary high level due diligence work therefore identifying a potential date for conversion.

Sets clear expectations

The agreement can set out clear goals and timelines, particularly around sharing information so both parties have a mutual understanding of what success looks like.

Access to procurement and services

Partnership schools will have access to the good and service offered by ESCAT in advance of conversion. For example, a school may wish to move its payroll provider over to ESCAT in advance of conversion.

Opportunity to shape ESCAT

Headteachers and Chairs of LGBs convene to collaboratively influence the strategic direction of ESCAT. Currently, a dedicated group of Headteachers is actively engaged in evaluating the school improvement services available throughout ESCAT. This initiative aims to enhance educational outcomes and ensure that best practices are shared across all schools involved.

Formal agreement to prepare financially to cover the cost of conversion

Partnership schools are normally required to formally commit to financing the costs associated with their conversion. This financial obligation can be fulfilled through various means, including use of a historic conversion grant, using funds that are either restricted or unrestricted, or establishing a yearly savings plan specifically aimed at accumulating the necessary resources for conversion expenses. Where a school is in deficit to the Local Authority, a Partnership agreement can still be signed provided it references the plan for deficit reduction.

FAQs	Answer
1. <i>Is there a cost to a Partnership Agreement?</i>	No
2. <i>Can the school decide on the level of collaboration in the schedule?</i>	Yes
3. <i>Can a school sign an agreement if it is in significant deficit?</i>	Yes
4. <i>If a school cannot yet formally agree to funding the conversion costs can it sign the agreement</i>	Yes

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