

Possible formation of a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) with the Knights Templar School, Baldock (KTS)

Frequently Asked Questions

Please read the letter from the Chair of Governors and Headteacher before reading this FAQ.

Introduction: Academies, SATs and MATs

1. What is an Academy?

An academy is a state school that is run by an Academy Trust. The Academy Trust enters into an agreement with the Secretary of State for Education that sets out its responsibilities and accountabilities for the effective running of the school. The Academy Trust is funded directly by the Government and is no longer run by the Local Authority but by its own Trustee Board. The Trust is formed as a limited company and is also charitable, which means it will operate for the benefit of the community as a charity and not for the profit of individuals or businesses. Hitchin Girls' School became an Academy Trust in 2011.

2. What is a Multi-Academy Trust?

A Multi-Academy Trust is when 2 or more Schools come together in partnership. It is a single legal entity with one set of Trustees under which schools operate collaboratively, but with considerable freedom to maintain their own character and ethos. All schools within the Trust work together to improve the educational experience and outcomes for all their students. A MAT has a single legal and moral purpose: To advance education for public benefit.

The Advantages and Disadvantages of a MAT

3. Why is HGS considering creating a MAT?

The Governors, including the Headteacher, of HGS have been considering the option of establishing a MAT for some time and recently agreed that this is likely to be the best course of action for the future of our school. Our aim is for us to maintain control of our future direction and we want to join with schools who we know would make good partners. We are aware of moves by some of the very large academy trusts to acquire schools in Hertfordshire. KTS and HGS are both keen to preserve their identities as high performing schools without being absorbed into a large academy chain, yet recognise the benefits of working together in a MAT with other local schools with similar values and aims

4. What are the advantages of becoming a MAT?

Three things are essential for continuing school improvement: accountability, additional support and additional challenge. This proposal would help provide all three as there are quantifiable advantages of being in a MAT, including:

- sharing best practice, expertise and resources to improve and maintain high educational standards in all key stages across the Trust;
- maintaining and developing a shared vision to help our local communities thrive by giving children the best opportunities to learn inside and outside the classroom;
- opportunities for students to share enrichment activities. For example, the schools together in the MAT might be able to offer vocational trips that would not be possible for either alone;
- opportunities for staff to benefit from working in a larger organisation with access to high quality training, personal development and increased career opportunities;
- succession planning and retaining and developing staff, including at leadership level;
- efficiencies, cost savings and economies of scale through procurement and the provision or commissioning of services across the Trust.

5. What are the risks of becoming a MAT?

Some stakeholders may be concerned about the financial arrangements which will be put in place in case these adversely affect their own school, about the degree of independence their school will have in

managing and recruiting staff, in setting a curriculum and about the way that leadership and governance will function within the MAT.

Both HGS and KTS have a good track record in managing these risks in their respective schools with experienced and knowledgeable staff both at senior leadership and governance levels. The management teams of the respective schools will not change in the short term and the combined governance from HGS/KTS representatives will deepen the strategic expertise and risk management available with the MAT.

There are also risks relating to the uncertainty of government education policy which means the future for academisation and formation of MATs is unclear. No political party has, however, indicated that they would abolish existing academies or MATs.

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

The Governing Board has agreed to commence the process to create the MAT, undertake consultation and due diligence and seek the necessary consents from the Department of Education. Each school will complete a period of consultation with parents, pupils, staff and the wider community which the Governors will take into consideration in reaching their final decision. The final decision to form the MAT will only be taken once this process is complete.

The due diligence process for HGS involves conducting a thorough analysis of KTS to ensure that HGS' Governing Board is satisfied that KTS is an appropriate partner for this project. This analysis will include checks on school strategy and ethos, curriculum, student attainment, safeguarding, premises and financial profile. Similarly, KTS will be conducting their own analysis of HGS to satisfy their Governing Board that HGS is the right partner for them.

7. How large could the MAT become?

The intention is that the MAT remains a local MAT, supporting schools in our area. Any growth of the MAT will be carefully managed.

8. If you set up or join a MAT, can you subsequently leave?

It is not currently possible to leave a MAT and revert back to being a single academy trust. Schools wishing to make a change have to apply to move to another MAT. Forming or joining a MAT is a one-way process, which is one reason why the Governing Boards have not been willing to go ahead with a proposal before now, until a suitable partner was found. However the Governing Body has agreed that this opportunity to form a MAT with KTS is worth detailed exploration and a formal consultation.

The benefits of the proposed MAT with KTS

9. Why is HGS considering creating a MAT with KTS?

There is already a long and strong relationship between KTS and HGS through the North Herts Consortium group and the North Herts Teaching Alliance (NHTA). The formation of this MAT would strengthen the relationship between the two schools and provide a more formal collaborative structure for Continuing Professional Development, greater opportunities for staff career progression and future financial efficiencies. Like HGS, KTS has been exploring MAT opportunities locally. Initial meetings between senior staff and governors of both schools revealed very similar ambitions for the formation of a MAT.

10. Why not form a MAT with another local school?

Over the past three years, initial discussions regarding academisation and the formation of a MAT have been held with a number of other local primary and secondary schools but until now, there have not been any who either wished to proceed or were appropriate to work with to establish a new MAT.

Once the MAT is established, other schools may wish to join. Any application to do so will be considered by the Trustees and be subject to the relevant process and due diligence.

How it would affect students, parents and carers

11. Would the school lose its individuality or ethos?

No. All schools in the MAT would maintain their individual ethos and distinctive features and traditions.

By working with KTS to set up the MAT in a mutually beneficial way, we can ensure the individuality of each school is retained. There has been a great amount of collaborative groundwork already done by representatives of both schools and this will continue throughout the planning stage. This will ensure that both schools agree with the proposed structure for the MAT and its proposed Scheme of Delegation, which defines how the leadership and Governance of the MAT will operate.

From the outset of our discussions with KTS, both parties have made it absolutely clear that we wish to preserve the independence and unique character of our schools. Key decisions on staffing, curriculum and the use of resources will be made so as to benefit the students and families of each individual school, as well as the local community as a whole.

12. Would the school change its name, logo or uniform?

There will be no change to the school name, logo or uniform at either school. Each school will keep its own name whilst the MAT will have another name, as yet to be decided.

13. How will students be affected?

Students will not notice any differences to their daily routine. They will be in the same uniform, in the same classrooms, with the same staff. However, through greater opportunities for collaboration, sharing of ideas and resources, we expect that the MAT will allow us to further develop and provide an exceptional educational experience for students.

14. Will students be expected to attend lessons at the other school?

No, students will continue to be taught at their own school.

15. How will admissions to the school be affected?

Each school in the MAT remains its own admissions authority in line with the admissions law and school admissions code. The Local Authority will continue to be responsible for making sure there are enough places locally and will coordinate the admissions for all schools. There are no plans to change the current admissions arrangements or priority areas if we become a MAT.

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

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

How it would affect staff

17. How will being a MAT affect staff and will there be redundancies?

Staff at HGS will continue to be employed by the Trust as they are now with no change to employment terms and conditions, including pensions. There are no plans for staff redundancies as part of the MAT process.

18. Would staff be expected to work in both schools?

No. Whilst staff would not be required to move around the MAT, there may be opportunities for staff to work at other schools within the MAT or for staff to seek a more challenging role across more than one school, as part of their career development. There may also be occasions when one of the schools in the MAT urgently needs a member of staff for a short period of time. This would have to be agreed upon by all parties.

There would also be opportunities for staff to cross-fertilise ideas and share good practice. There is no intent to alter staff contracts or to force them to work at other sites. It is more about sharing and developing expertise.

How would membership of a MAT affect our community and governance

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

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

20. Who will be responsible for running our school?

The Board of Trustees will set the strategic direction of the schools within the MAT and delegate the day-to-day activities of the school to a Local Governing Body (LGB). The LGB will have Governors from a range of backgrounds and would continue to have elected parent/carer and staff Governors. It is envisaged that the Board of Trustees will be largely made up from existing HGS and KTS governors and some new trustees with appropriate skills and experience.

Despite these structural changes to governance, there is no intention to change the way HGS operates from a day-to-day perspective as a high performing school and the school will retain its own Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team.

21. Who decides the composition of the Local Governing Body

The Local Governing Body will continue to have Governors elected by parents/carers and staff, as well as Community Governors appointed by the Trustees.

22. What difference would it make to our Post-16 Consortium arrangements?

The governors have kept both Hitchin Boys' and The Priory Schools informed about this process. The Hitchin Sixth Form Consortium is one of the most successful in the County and the creation of the MAT would not alter the way in which we work closely together. KTS also have a strong and well established Sixth Form. Governors believe that the MAT would help both schools in maintaining and strengthening our post 16 curriculum and provision, particularly for smaller subjects. It also offers potential for introducing additional courses post-16 as well as providing potential opportunities for collaboration and expansion of subjects at Key Stage 4.

23. Are other schools forming or joining a MAT?

Within Hertfordshire, as at May 2019, there are 19 secondary schools that have converted to a MAT and 10 sponsored schools in MATS. There is also the Herts for Learning (HfL) MAT which now has 9 primary schools and is in discussion with several other primary and secondary schools. There are two large, national MATs sponsoring 5 secondary schools in Herts. There are 15 Maintained secondary schools remaining in Hertfordshire, of which 4 are actively seeking a move into a MAT. There are also 32 Single Academy Trusts (SATs) of which 5 are actively seeking to become or join a MAT.

Next steps

24. What happens if HGS does not become a MAT?

There will be no change to our Governance structure and the school will remain a single academy trust. As MATs in the locality continue to develop over time, HGS may have fewer opportunities to find a suitable partner to create one and be involved in its development from the outset.

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

There is no additional funding available for the creation of a MAT. The school will receive the same amount of per-pupil funding as part of a MAT as they would have previously as a single academy trust. All funding comes directly from Government to the MAT which controls the overall budget and then

distributes the money to each of the schools within the MAT. Each school would still have its own budget and make its own decisions on how to use this.

Each school does not have more money but, in the longer term, we expect to see cost savings associated with more effective procurement of goods and services and centralisation of some services such as finance, payroll and HR systems, legal services, ground maintenance. This will allow us to maximise the money available to support and develop teaching and learning.

26. How soon could the MAT be established?

Governors will consider the responses received during the consultation process at the start of next term. This, along with information from the due diligence process, will be taken into account before any final decision is made to establish the MAT. If it goes ahead, and subject to the relevant approval from the Department for Education, the earliest we would expect to create the MAT is 1 April 2020. The MAT can be established during term time as it has no impact on the day to day operation of the school.

27. Will OFSTED inspect the MAT or each school?

Currently, Ofsted can only carry out summary evaluations of the quality of education provided by a MAT by inspecting a sample of their schools. It cannot inspect the trust itself.

28. Would the MAT take on schools that are in challenging circumstances or which have financial issues?

For any school who wishes to join the MAT, we would conduct a detailed evaluation which would identify any weaknesses in the educational performance, financial position and conditions of buildings etc., to ensure that there are no significant liabilities which would be a drain on the resources of the MAT. If the Trustees feel that a school could be an appropriate partner, a plan would be developed to address any problems which are identified. We would only move forward with the school provided there is a robust and sustainable plan to support the school to address these issues. The final decision on whether a school can join our MAT is taken by the Regional Schools Commissioner on behalf of the Department for Education. They will only allow a school to join a MAT if they are confident that the MAT can provide the required support to address a school in challenging circumstances or one with financial issues or liabilities.

The consultation

29. As well as Parents and Carers, who else is being consulted about this possible change?

We are consulting with our staff about this potential change. Information about the possible creation of the MAT is also being sent to local schools and other stakeholders for their views.

30. How can I find out more?

There is more information about MATs and academies on the DfE website:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/academies>

31. When will there be a final decision?

Following completion of the consultation and due diligence the Governing Body will meet next term to consider all responses, and only at that point will a final decision on whether or not to go ahead be taken.