

Sutton Benger Primary School – Proposed Conversion to Diocese of Bristol Academy Trust – Summary

What is an Academy?

- Academies are schools funded directly by the government, independent of the Local Authority.
- Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) are groups of Academies with a CEO, Finance Director and a Central Board of Trustees; schools move from having a Governing Body to having a Local Governing Board
- In the South West 45% of primary schools and 80% of secondary schools are academies. Some LAs across the country have encouraged schools to find a MAT to join due to their reduced capacity to provide services

Why become an academy and why DBAT?

- Joining a MAT has been considered carefully by the Governing Body over the last 4 years.
- The main advantages of joining a MAT are that it provides more school improvement, governance, finance and professional development support; and increased security as LA services reduce due to financial cuts, and the number of academies increase reducing LA funding further
- The governors have explored a number of MATs and believe that DBAT offers the best fit for our school. This is because of DBAT's record of providing support and challenge around school improvement, its emphasis on collaborative working and its strong Christian ethos (as a VA school DBAT's governance structure aligns with ours)
- Teachers have visited DBAT schools and have provided positive feedback.
- DBAT has already provided the school with support in a variety of ways, including recruiting an Executive HT
- School improvement support is needed at SB especially after our recent OFSTED and SIAMs inspections.
- The Regional Schools Commissioners Office; DBAT & Diocese of Bristol have approved our application to proceed

A list of the current schools in DBAT:

Academy Name	Joined/Opened	Type	Ofsted
Fishponds	09/2012	Sponsored	SM - Good – RI
Christian Malford	12/2013	Converter	SM – Good
Easton	09/2014	Sponsored	SM - R.I (Good)
St Peter's	09/2014	Converter	Good – Good
Tadpole Farm	09/2014	New	Good
Seagry	09/2015	Converter	Good – Good
Somerfords' Walter Powell	09/2015	Converter	Good – Good
Lydiard Millicent	12/2015	Converter	Good – Good
Ridgeway Farm	09/2016	New	Good
South Marston	11/2016	Converter	Good (Good)
St Mary Redcliffe	07/2017	Sponsored	SM (RI/Good)
The Deanery	09/2019	New	

How can DBAT help on our school improvement journey?

- DBAT have an experienced central team which SB can draw on. This includes school improvement officers (including SIAMs), finance directors and other specialist experts who can support the business function of the school such as business management, HR & finance.
- DBAT's experienced trustees can provide support, guidance and challenge in governance (They are carrying out an external review of governance in October)
- In joining DBAT SB will have access to formal, sustainable, professional collaborations with all Trust schools. SB will benefit from operational economies of scale and collective purchasing; have access to collective expertise and best practice in monitoring pupil attainment and progress: have hands on experienced support in devising and delivering appropriate teaching solutions.
- DBAT has a track record of supporting schools on their school improvement journey as well as improving and maintaining Ofsted judgements (see above).
- SB will benefit from a close and professional relationship with the central team at DBAT being 1 of only 13 schools. (246 primary schools in Wiltshire - 55% LA schools = approx. 135 schools)
- Over the past year DBAT has shown huge support for SB – they are in a position to support us in the following areas:
 1. Christian distinctiveness – Improve our SIAMs rating

2. Creative curriculum in line with new OFSTED framework – access opportunities in Sport & STEM through DBAT
3. Increased, formal collaboration with other Trust schools
4. Improved school management in respect to structure and policies
5. Joint bidding/Economies of scale

Implications for Children/Staff

- There are enhanced learning opportunities for children. Leaders and governors will get the opportunity to meet peers regularly which creates learning and development opportunities for the children. Pupils will be able to visit other schools and SB will be able to create sustainable collaborations with different schools in the Trust (including benefitting from a variety of school contexts and cohorts in Bristol and Swindon). Collaboration in this way is a very important part of the future of education that we need to continue to embrace.
- School leaders will be able to focus on what really matters – the children, teaching, learning, outcomes and safeguarding, with the Trust taking on / supporting more of the business and admin aspects of running the school.
- Teachers will be able to access a range of professional development opportunities and support – the quality of teaching and learning will further develop
- Subject and middle leaders will be able to share best practice and expertise across the Trust, and working with Teaching Schools in the area; the Trust will provide support for SB in developing its curriculum in line with new OFSTED and SIAMs framework
- DBAT will have more of a presence in the school and our strong working relationship will develop further. DBAT have a vested interest in SB that is built on sound Christian values, moral purpose, integrity and care.

Financial implications of joining DBAT

- As you know we are currently working on a recovery plan to address a deficit budget agreed in line with our growth plans to increase the school to a financially secure 7 class school – we have a 5 year plan to address this, which is being closely monitored by the Executive HT, Finance Officer and Governors.
- DBAT have the skills and expertise in school financial management to support us to address our deficit, however we recognise that joining DBAT will incur additional ‘central contribution’ costs of £16,666 (compared to central costs we currently pay to the LA) – these costs pay towards DBAT’s central team and enable them to provide the school improvement, financial, professional development, collaborative and governance support they are able to offer
- Whilst these costs seem high, and add to our budget recovery challenge, in addition to support on offer from the central DBAT team the charges also cover a range of value added services:
 - Eteach recruitment website subscriptions
 - DBAT’s staff benefits platform subscriptions
 - EduCare training platform for Governors and staff, covering topics such as safeguarding, GDPR and Health & Safety
 - Internal audit, replacing any previous Local Authority internal audits
 - Access to a Quickcall telephone service provided by DBAT’s legal advisers, which covers an unlimited number of 30 minute legal consultations
 - Property Condition Surveys a minimum of once every three years
 - Data Protection Officer and GDPR consultancy services provided by One-West
 - Regular school improvement visits
 - SIAMs development support
 - Governance training
(these included services mean we do not have to reactively find money for these things if required throughout the year)
- After conversion SB will no longer be obliged to contribute 10% of its own reserves to capital improvement projects run through either LCVAP or DFC. Up to now, significant amounts of FOSBS fund-raising has been consumed in paying this 10% so moving forwards all fund raising carried out by FOSBS will therefore be able to be spent on children, resources and equipment.
- SB will have the opportunity to bid directly to the ESFA for Condition Improvement Funding (CIF) for such projects, with no effect on school reserves (albeit that schools can offer a contribution from reserves if they wish to support bids). DBAT schools successfully bid for a combined £1.3m of funding in 2019-20 and have been successful in securing CIF funding without making school reserves contributions.
- In addition, any capital reserves balances (LCVAP or DFC) held at conversion will become unrestricted at the point of conversion and can therefore be used to supplement the post-conversion revenue budget.

What if we don't join? What's our Plan B?

Carry on as we are, managing our challenges without formal support from DBAT, but using LA support or 'pay as you go' support from e.g. DBAT, another MAT or a Teaching School, or exploring the option of a formal federation with another school.

(N.B. Teaching School funding nationally ends in March 2020 with uncertainty around how school improvement and professional development will be delivered after this point; a new TS model is being tested from January 2020 but delivery of services is likely to look very different).

We believe that eventually the vast majority of schools will be in MATs, LA provision will have diminished significantly and all schools will eventually be required to join a MAT.

Our recommendation

There is diminishing support and funding available within LAs nationally, with lots of schools continuing to convert to become academies each month. 62% of children in the South-West are educated in academies and this number continues to rise, reducing LA funding further each month.

With RI status in both OFSTED (March 2019) and SIAMS (June 2019), a deficit budget position and negative progress outcomes for the last three years (we are on the DfE's coasting 'watch-list' for improvement), SB is extremely vulnerable and needs robust help, support and challenge at all levels.

If we do not join DBAT we will continue to operate on the back foot and Governors will continue to be ultimately responsible for addressing the numerous challenges we are facing. By joining DBAT we firmly believe we will get the support required to help us through this difficult time and enable the school to flourish once again.

We recommend that Sutton Bengier School joins the Diocese of Bristol Academies Trust with a proposed conversion date of 1 October 2019.

James Passmore, James Hirst and Mel Knight (co-chairs)