



LEARN, GROW, SUCCEED TOGETHER.

Proposal Statement

Schools Joining The Stour Federation Multi Academy Trust

There have been many recent national announcements about the benefits of schools working formally together and the future of Local Authorities. At the forefront of these national plans are the formation of strong 'Multi Academy Trusts' or 'MATs' as they are more commonly known.

HISTORY

Acorns Primary School and Shipston-on-Stour Primary School created The Stour Federation Multi Academy Trust in September 2014, having federated together in January 2011. Schools in The Stour Federation worked formally with Brailes C of E Primary School from September 2015. This formation of The Stour Federation Partnership allowed the three schools to work closely and effectively over a sustained period of time to ensure that children under our care had every opportunity to become outstanding learners who can make a real contribution both now and in the future. During this period, Brailes School established before and after school wraparound care, a Nursery, balanced a significant budget deficit and increased the number of children on roll.

Brailes C of E Primary School formally converted to an academy on 1st August 2021 and became part of The Stour Federation Multi Academy Trust. This conversion paves the way for church schools and non-church schools to join The Stour Federation as our articles of association and other legal documents are suitable for mixed MATS, reducing some of the conversion costs too! However, retaining a local governance structure of The Stour Federation MAT is a key part of the proposal whereby local people maintain control of the development of education in the local area both now and in the future.

WHAT IS AN ACADEMY?

Academies are state-funded schools, independent of the Local Authority and held accountable by the Department for Education (DfE) by a legally binding Funding Agreement. Academies receive their funding directly from central Government so that all of the money allocated goes directly to that school. Academies retain the same responsibilities as any maintained school, as part of the learning community.

Academies should not be confused with schools that need to improve. Whilst this may have been the case a number of years ago, since the Academies Act 2010, all schools are now able to become Academies.

WHAT IS A MULTI ACADEMY TRUST?

A School Trust is an education charity. It has a single legal and moral purpose - to advance education for public benefit.

A Multi Academy Trust (MAT) is a group of Academy schools who agree to work together, overseen by an overarching charitable trust. There are a number of models under which a MAT can operate. Our structure is for each school to retain a local governance structure (Local Academy Council) and therefore a local decision making function.

Each local body will report to an overarching Trust Board (Directors). This Board will consist of current serving governors from each respective school. The Board will also have the opportunity to appoint roles that will bring a skillset that will further support the schools in the partnership.

WHAT DOES THE NATIONAL LANDSCAPE LOOK LIKE?

Academies first began under the Labour Government. In 2010 the Conservative Government expanded the process.

As of January 2021:

- 37% of primary schools are academy schools, accounting for 39% of the primary school population.
- 78% of secondary schools are academy schools, accounting for 78% of the secondary school population.
- More than half (55%) of all children and young people are educated in school trusts.
- Research from [Ofsted](#) and the [University of Nottingham](#) provide evidence that trusts have shown themselves to be robust and resilient structures.

WHY THE STOUR FEDERATION MAT?

Our Vision

At the very heart of our plan is that the children, families, staff and governors that make up the school based education community in rural South Warwickshire retain a governance structure that ensures decisions about the current and future educational provision remains local. Our vision is to ensure teaching and learning is the focus of our work and that we have the courage to innovate with a passion to achieve the very best we can. The core function of a multi academy trust is to raise standards and then sustain them. We want the very best outcomes for our children, and our focus is always to do this quickly and for as many children as possible.

Working together we are stronger. Through partnership and collaboration, our mission is to develop our group of inspirational and ethical schools which instil ambition and desire in education staff and children, open their minds, widen their horizons and equip them to succeed in a challenging world. Through shared knowledge building, coherent strategies and high quality leadership at all levels, we look to balance holding schools to account with helping them to improve - transforming outcomes for children at scale. Our School Trust brings clear, tangible and inspiring benefits to children, families and staff.

The Stour Federation believes that to be a high-performing multi academy trust we must focus on aligning schools around a common model of school improvement; schools that are the most

harmonious are the highest performing, whilst respecting earned autonomy - a powerful caveat for individual schools to be able to innovate and showcase specific strengths or areas of interest providing the centralised alignment is harmonious and having the desired impact.

In order to provide exciting world class, evidence-based opportunities for all our children, leading to outstanding achievement and a readiness to flourish in life, we place children at the centre of all we do, maintaining a climate where excellence flourishes as a result of outstanding leadership, brilliant teaching and high quality learning. We will:

- Ensure the highest standards for safeguarding and pastoral care, and develop a central resource to support staff, pupils and families.
- Develop a collective focus on well being and personal development, working together to support physical and mental health and build resilience, character, confidence and independence.
- Develop coordinated provision to offer the most effective support to our most vulnerable children, such as those with special educational needs, and their families.
- Further enhance school improvement and enrich the curriculum, by continuing collaborative curriculum development, utilising expertise of Core Leaders, Evidence Leads in Education, LA teacher moderators and Curriculum Teams, with a focus on achieving outstanding outcomes across the full curriculum.
- Provide a programme of excellent professional learning for staff, drawing on the best quality support from within and outside the Trust, to develop best practice in all aspects of our work, particularly teaching.
- Further develop a central resource to manage our finances, starting with combining shared services such as payroll, insurance and tendering, and bringing together a team to deliver services including legal, HR, IT, utilities, buildings and grounds work as well as purchasing. This team will achieve efficiencies and reduce burdens on the Executive Headteacher and Heads of each school, so they can focus on education.
- Provide effective strategic Trust governance, working openly and collaboratively with our Local Academy Councils to enable successful local leaders to continue to deliver effective school improvement.
- Achieve efficiencies through effective management and financial prudence, taking advantage of natural staff changes and providing new opportunities for staff.

Confederation of School Trusts

The Stour Federation is a member of the Confederation of School Trusts, who make four propositions:

1. The goal is for every teacher in every classroom to be as good as they can be in what they teach (the curriculum) and how they teach (pedagogy).
2. For this to happen, we need to mobilise for every teacher the best evidence from research.
3. There is no improvement for pupils without improvement in teaching, and no improvement in teaching without the best professional development for teachers.
4. Strong structures (in groups of schools) can facilitate better professional development and thus better teaching and improvement for pupils.

Our Ethos

All partners are committed to the belief that education has the power to change lives. Through ensuring that every child across the MAT is able to bond and learn together, we can provide experiences to enable all children to progress and achieve. Our *RESPECT Values* underpin

system leadership and the capacity to collaborate with others leads to a long-lasting driver for improvement - partnership only works when both sides are adding capacity and receiving support as the foundation of the relationship.



Building on Success

- All three schools are strong and successful. The advantages of expanding locally established educational collaboration formally together is one that we feel will provide even more opportunities for our children.
- All three schools are distinctly unique and individual and we wish to maintain and strengthen this through formalising and continuing to develop our own local partnership rather than an externally controlled one.
- All three schools already work closely to provide increased opportunities for our children e.g. through bespoke workshops, sports fixtures, events and initiatives, professional learning for staff and jointly employing staff. Additional schools joining The Stour Federation would strengthen this and allow it to expand.

Importance of Locality

At the heart of our plan is a locally based decision-making structure responsible for leading education in our schools. Strengthening our unique character through the process of extending our own MAT is paramount. It would ensure that local people shape our futures, control our educational finances and make decisions on our curriculum..

Of course there are risks associated with any change. The risks are significantly reduced and managed when we retain the decision-making capacity through a local partnership development. The risks increase significantly if we do not maintain the lead position in the decision-making process.

School Improvement

A key aspect of the drive to be a MAT nationally is the focus on school improvement and the significantly increased capacity that schools have to support each other. The Stour Federation MAT proposal recognises the importance of this key driver. The partner schools have a strong record over time, high standards and good performance, which will only be enhanced further through partnership.

Academy Trust structures create robustness but don't bring about improvement themselves. The strongest Trusts facilitate knowledge building through professional development, with a view to improving curriculum, pedagogy and the quality of teaching. They bring professionals together in

ways that are supported by proper strategic oversight and accountability. Trusts are the vehicles for school improvement at scale.

Our innovative and pioneering teaching and learning approaches, rooted in research and aligned across our current three schools, ensures a sustained improvement in learner attainment and progress. Our Core Leaders School Improvement Team, Specialist Leaders of Education (SLE), Evidence Leaders of Education (ELE), Teacher Moderators and SENCO work across our Trust schools, supporting all of our teachers. The Trust's School improvement model is responsive to the needs of each individual school. It is the means by which the best teachers can have the biggest impact on more children that they could ever reach in one school.

Financial Security

With the ongoing reductions in school funding, the cost savings of schools maximising economies of scale together is another significant advantage of working together. We have a responsibility to get value for money for every penny spent in school.

We have learned, through our partnership thus far, that collaborative working with other schools can provide improved educational experiences for our own pupils through teaching and learning, an enhanced and engaging curriculum, staff development and opportunities for progression and streamlined services (including finance, human resources, legal services, school improvement structures and governance arrangements).

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF BECOMING A MAT AND HOW HAVE THEY BEEN ADDRESSED?

- **Would other school partners be excluded from joining the MAT?** No, this would not be the case as any school wishing to join in the future would be able to apply. The Trust would then consider each application.
- **Would the MAT be called The Stour Federation if other schools joined?** Yes. There are no factors known at present that would need to alter this. Individual school names would not change.
- **Would children joining a MAT school be at a disadvantage if they didn't start in the MAT school?** Not necessarily, although there might always be the need to support a child settling into a new school or identifying potential gaps in learning (due to curriculum timetabling) if they join one of our schools part way through the year. All schools in the partnership are very experienced in dealing with and supporting the movement of children within the school year.
- **Will the ethos of each individual school be lost?** No, in fact quite the opposite would be expected. Our Trust has been built around the solid basis that all three of us already share many aspects of our ethos. Continuing to build this further will provide an opportunity for our ethos to be further embedded.

WHY DO THIS NOW?

1. The current and future educational climate, with the diminishing capacity of the Local Authority and the increased number of schools becoming Academies and joining Multi Academy Trusts. As a group of schools, we are in a strong position to respond to changes in the local and national education landscapes.
2. The Stour Federation has successfully navigated its own future and own successes so far and would wish for this local focus to continue, acting as talent architects for retaining and recruiting the best staff available. Expanding the MAT would provide further opportunities for staff development and progression through working across schools to share best

practice and support particular subject developments, which all three schools have benefited from the arrangements over the past five years.

WOULD OUR SCHOOLS CHANGE?

The day to day life of each school would remain unchanged by another school converting to an academy and joining The Stour Federation MAT.

Yes, there will be changes but they will be positive changes that strengthen our operations over time. Therefore the changes will not necessarily be obvious to see initially unless you work in the school in certain roles within the Trust. The teaching in the classroom and the curriculum experience that the children and families have will continue to develop and be aligned. Children will continue to wear the same uniform and continue to experience day to day life in their schools as they would have done prior to the change.

In our proposal, the MAT will retain its current leadership structure with an Executive Head and Heads of School/Headteachers. Staff contracts will be TUPEd across to the MAT with the same employment terms and conditions that they currently have and points of contact will not change for families. Therefore, the change to a MAT, for the vast majority of people, will not result in any obvious immediate changes. We want to continue to be great schools where every child is valued and will only look to change in the future what we think will improve our schools even further.

WHO WILL RUN OUR MAT?

The proposed leadership structure is outlined below. The fundamental principle behind this proposal is that local people, based in and around rural south Warwickshire, will run The Stour Federation MAT.

The Trust Board of Directors and Members

The Trust Board of Directors runs the MAT. A small group of trustees will also serve as 'Members' who will serve as shareholders of the Trust and the running of the Trust Board of Directors. Members of the Trust are responsible for the strategic oversight of the academy. They appoint and have the power to remove the Trust's directors.

Our proposal is for each school to have its own Local Academy Council whilst also contributing governors who would create the Trustee Board of Directors. The Local Academy Council would then have responsibilities delegated to them by the Board through a 'Scheme of Delegation'. It is our proposal that the only change to the allocation of budgets to each school is a top slice to pay for central services.

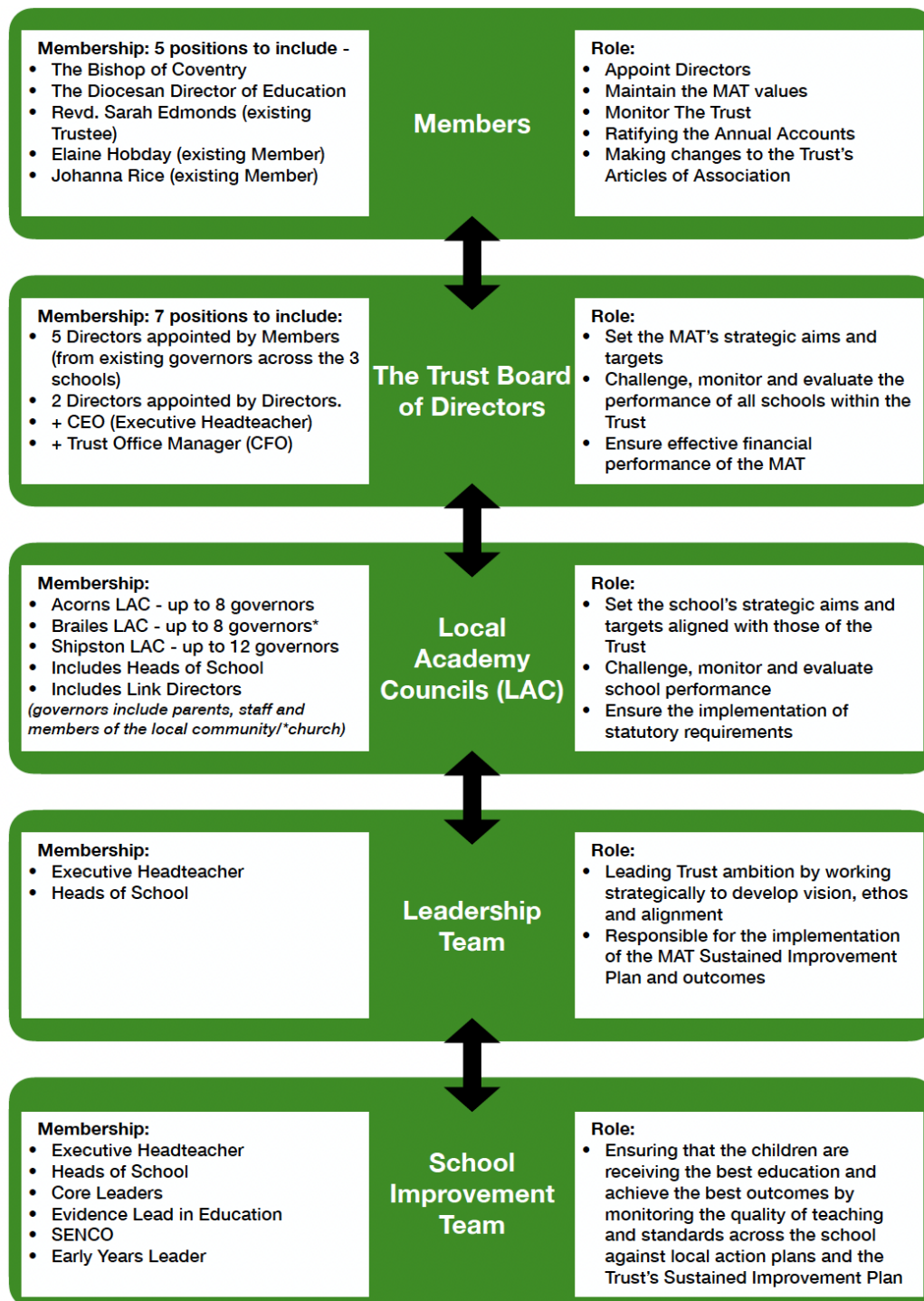
The Trust Board of Directors would sit above the Local Academy Councils. They would be the main decision-making group and accountable for all partners within the Trust. The Board of Directors would consist of seven existing governors, specifically selected for their skills and tasked with ensuring the excellence of all schools and the delegation of powers to the Local Academy Councils. The Board composition would also ensure that each partner is represented equally with membership coming from each Local Academy Council.

School Leadership

Operationally, the proposal is for the current Heads of School/Headteachers model to continue, contributing to the daily leadership and strategic development of the MAT, under the directorship of the Trust Board of Directors. The Executive Headteacher is supported by Heads of School in each

Academy. This is already in place. These leadership posts will continue to undertake responsibility to lead on key developments across the MAT.

The position of the proposed operational leadership of the MAT, relative to the other aspects of leadership within the MAT is shown in the diagram below:



WOULD THE ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS CHANGE?

Our proposal is that we would continue to follow the Warwickshire Admissions arrangements and therefore there would be no change. If for some reason the MAT wanted to change its admissions arrangements in the future, consultation would be required.

WOULD THE SCHOOLS HAVE TO CHANGE THEIR NAMES?

No, our proposal is that the schools continue to retain their names, uniform policies and unique identities. Each school would retain their school badge, but there would be a logo to represent The Stour Federation MAT for school communication.

WOULD CHANGES BE MADE TO THE LENGTH OF THE SCHOOL DAY AND TO TERM DATES?

No, in our proposal we would not seek to make changes to the length of the school day or to term or holiday dates. Term dates and INSET dates have been aligned for the current three schools for the past 6 years to support collaborative professional development.

WOULD CHANGES BE MADE TO THE SCHOOLS' RELIGIOUS DESIGNATION?

No, in our proposal this would not change for the schools. As a church school, Brailes C of E Primary School continues to demonstrate that they are a distinctively and recognisable Christian institution and will undergo inspection under the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) to evaluate the effectiveness of religious church schools, as before. This will include the impact of collective worship, the effectiveness of religious education and how well the school, through their distinctive Christian character, meets the needs of all learners. This will be made explicit in the Trust's Articles of Association.

Non-church schools will retain their own individual character and ethos through protections in the legal documents.

WOULD CHANGES BE MADE TO THE CURRICULUM?

Academies do not have to follow the National Curriculum and can set a curriculum that is more relevant to the needs of our students and the community. However, our proposal is to maintain the current approach and deliver the National Curriculum. Our schools already have strong and effective aligned curriculum frameworks and there would be no plan to alter these at this point.

HOW WOULD SCHOOLS BE FUNDED?

Funding to the schools within a MAT is allocated on an individual academy basis. Funding is governed through a master funding agreement between the Secretary of State and the MAT and a supplemental agreement between the Secretary of State and each school within the MAT.

Most funding for the running of academies comes from the general annual grant (GAG). This is paid to academies by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), based on a formula provided by the local authority.

All schools continue to receive capital funding. Academies can apply for additional capital funding through the Condition Improvement Fund. In recent years, this fund has supported the building of a new Nursery and Reception building for Acorns and a new heating system for Shipston Primary.

WOULD ACADEMY STATUS AFFECT THE SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS PROVISION?

No, SEND services would stay the same. The Academies Act 2010 and the Children and Families Act 2014 (part 3) require academies to follow the same statutory framework for special needs as local authority schools.

Schools will continue to receive funding for children with existing Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) in the same way, whether they are academies or local authority schools. Where children have special needs, but do not have an EHCP, academies are required to have regard for the SEND Code of Practice 2014, in exactly the same way as local authority schools. This means that

in both types of school, children will be supported according to the level of need and involvement of external agencies. Each school will continue to use their best endeavours to make sure that a child with SEND gets the support they need.

However The Stour Federation MAT would ensure an even closer and effective partnership approach to SEND services. Recently, the SENCO for Acorns, Brailes and Shipston Primaries has taken up post as Ilmington SENCO and there is ambition and vision for a specialist resource provision as part of the Trust.

WOULD THE SCHOOLS CONTINUE TO ACCESS SERVICES FROM THE LOCAL AUTHORITY?

The schools would still have the option, as they currently do, to 'buy in' a number of services from the Local Authority. As more schools become MATs, the provision of services from the Local Authority is going to decrease. Our proposal would be that the Central Finance Team in the MAT will be focused on purchasing the best services for our children at the best value. Services offered by the Local Authority will continue to be considered as part of our proposal.

WHO WOULD OWN THE LAND AND BUILDINGS?

On 1st September 2014, Acorns and Shipston took over a 125 year lease for the land and buildings from Warwickshire Local Authority. The same happened for Brailes on 1st August 2021. At the point of a new academy conversion, the school would take over a 125 year lease for the land and buildings from the relevant freeholder, e.g. the freeholders would be Warwickshire Local Authority (and the Church).

WHO MAKES THE FINAL DECISION ON WHETHER A CHURCH SCHOOL CONVERTS TO AN ACADEMY AND JOINS THE STOUR FEDERATION MULTI ACADEMY TRUST?

The Stour Federation Trust Board of Directors would need to complete due diligence on any new school joining the Trust and consult with stakeholders. Coventry Diocese would also need to agree. Consultation is the first step, with a final consideration when the consultation period has finished and due diligence completed.

COULD OTHER SCHOOLS JOIN THE GROUP AND HOW WOULD THE DECISION BE MADE TO DO THIS?

Any decision on additional schools joining our Trust would be made by the Trust Board of Directors. Any schools wishing to join The Stour Federation MAT would need to abide by our vision, ethos and governance structure. They will also be required to contribute and learn from other schools in the group. Any school joining would not necessitate any change to the MAT structure unless the Trust Board of Directors determined otherwise.

Any school interested in joining The Stour Federation MAT in the future would talk to representatives of the Trust about practicalities of how this would work, and check that the school and the Trust hold common values in their approach to education. If there was an interest in exploring this further, then the MAT would form a working group to work with representatives of the applying school for both parties to reassure each other of the financial, site and performance health of both the applicant school and the existing Trust. There should be benefits both ways.

WHAT COSTS ARE INVOLVED FOR CONVERSION?

A conversion grant of £25,000 will be given to each school by the Department for Education. This will cover the costs of conversion, e.g. legal fees, accountancy fees, site surveys, rebranding, finance and compliance systems and licences.

IF A SCHOOL WERE NO LONGER PART OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY, WHO WOULD THEY BE ACCOUNTABLE TO?

All schools in The Stour Federation MAT would be accountable directly to the Department for Education and our accounts would be audited on an annual basis by external auditors and publicly available.

The Stour Federation MAT is overseen by our Regional Schools Commissioner and would continue to be subject to separate Ofsted inspections and potential Ofsted MAT Summary Evaluations

CAN SCHOOLS WITHDRAW FROM THE CONVERSION PROCESS?

A new school and/or The Stour Federation would be able to withdraw right up to the point that the Funding Agreement is signed. Once this is signed, there is a legally binding agreement between the Secretary of State and the partners.

WHAT IS THE TIMESCALE FOR CONVERSION?

Conversion takes around six months. The conversion has to be agreed locally with stakeholders and then with the Regional Schools Commissioner, through Headteacher Advisory Boards.

CURRENT ALIGNMENT

Current Teaching, Learning and Curriculum Alignment

- Cornerstones Curriculum Maestro
- Whole class reading process (Book Talk)
- Writing Process
- Maths Process alongside White Rose Maths
- Read Write Inc Phonics (Brailes and Shipston - Acorns use Jolly Phonics)
- Computing curriculum
- Charanga music curriculum
- PSHE curriculum
- Teacher WalkThrus
- New Pedagogies for Deep Learning
- Generic Performance Management objectives
- Curriculum Teams
- SEND Pupil Passports
- Seesaw
- School Cloud virtual parents' evenings
- Accelerated Reader
- Homework: Mathletics, Numbots/Times Tables Rockstars, Spag.com

Current Systems and Services Alignment

- Access for Education Finance and Budgeting with Ellacotts accountancy
- EPM HR and Payroll
- Google Workspace
- WES Safety and Premises, Data Protection, ICTDS, Legal
- ParentPay
- SchoolPing
- Evolve