

## **Questions answered by St Benet's MAT**

### **About their size and sustainability and their plans for growth**

The MAT is working well economically even though the pupil numbers are at the moment quite small. St Benet's is growing but has learned a lot from the rapid growth of the other diocese MAT (DNEAT) and they were developing a hub system so that all newly joining schools would have the localised support, connection and resourcing and the MAT would not end up overstretched and disconnected from communities their schools are in. Growth is carefully planned for and because of economies of scale, levels of support provided will be the same or greater for each school as the Trust grows.

### **How do the finances work?**

St Benet's takes a 5% slice of the budget. The aim is that the economies of scale the trust can provide by sharing services and buying power will allow our budgets to go further. In St Benet's, any budget surplus stays with the school.

The whole multi academy trust system is a not for profit system with trusts being charitable organisations set up to 'advance education for public benefit'. St Benet's does not make a profit. DoNESC, (the administrative company that supports DNEAT and St Benet's) whilst legally a private company, is set up to break even, or if there is a surplus for that surplus to go to the academy trusts. As it is owned by the two trusts there is no profit making element here either.

### **About support for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities:**

Another headteacher already part of the MAT spoke very highly of the SEND support they received from St Benet's. The trust works with heads to address specific needs in each school, accessing external help if needed. SENDCos across the trust collaborate, support each other, and access trust-wide training. It could really help our schools to have swift access to SEND support and expertise that will help us to meet the needs of all our children.

### **Do schools have to use specific phonics, reading or maths schemes?**

The Trust does want schools to use a mastery approach to maths but does not force them to use a specific scheme. For other areas, they don't interfere in how the school chooses to teach as long as it works well. The Trust works hard to identify the most effective methods and share best practice among schools. It encourages schools that have strengths in certain areas to share that with the other schools in the group with a view to all schools being able to build on their strengths through working together.

### **What is your record on closing the gap for disadvantaged children?**

This is very difficult to evidence at the moment, partly because the trust is relatively new and partly because of the lack of data collected during the pandemic. The MAT has a pupil

premium lead and holds 3 meetings a year to monitor their strategy and make sure they are having an impact and to share successful strategies.

### **What does joining St Benet's mean for staff?**

Staff retention is good within St Benet's. At the time, most vacancies were within struggling schools where the situation is more difficult. Staff say they feel well supported and enjoy being able to work with other schools.

Staff are not required to work in other schools or to move school against their wishes. Being part of a larger group of schools does mean that teachers can develop their careers and provides opportunities for progression that may not exist otherwise. Doing this within the trust can mean that transitions between staff can be planned really well with the least possible effect on children and their education.

### **Has anyone's job been made redundant because the trust now does it?**

In the last 18 months 3 schools had joined the MAT – 2 had no staff changes and 1 employed more staff. The biggest change is in financial management which the trust takes on but this generally allows support staff more time to concentrate on other important functions.

### **What about uniform?**

Uniforms or the lack of them are decisions for each school – children and parents would see no change.

### **How does governance change?**

It will remain similar but there is built in support for governors within the MAT and each local governing board has fixed committees. There is a regular forum for Chairs of governors and headteachers. Parents will still be represented on local governing boards and engagement with local communities is highly valued. Ultimately, overall responsibility for the school would rest with the St Benet's and not the governors.

### **Will being part of a church MAT have an effect on admissions or curriculum?**

The school will continue to welcome families and children of all faiths or none. The approach to Relationship and Sex Education and LGBTQ+ issues is curriculum based and the Trust developed a model policy with Josie Rayner-Wills (RHSE expert and Norfolk County Council). Schools can choose any programme that aligns with diocese policy. We are already a church school that follows the advice of the Diocese so this will not change.

### **How diverse is the trust board?**

The current board is on the website. There are more men than women and one ethnic minority represented. The trust celebrates difference and the inclusive nature of its schools.

Schools must include equality and diversity in their curriculum design or adopt the model provided by the trust. There is a strong awareness and focus on diversity and we are working on it at a strategic level.

### **Trauma Informed schools?**

The trust is building expertise in this. They are working with the Timpson Foundation and have funding to train a deputy head to lead in this area and to train others within the trust.

### **What about pastoral and mental health support?**

This is something individual schools are best placed to decide on as they know the needs of their children best. Some schools have dedicated support staff and others bring in support on a bespoke basis. This is an area that is being developed within the trust alongside the Chaplaincy Project and they intend to develop a framework for best practice in pastoral support so that schools can draw on each other's expertise.

### **We are a small federation, would St Benet's want our schools to join a larger federation?**

You would not be obliged to do that but it would be a point of discussion. The only reason a school would be forced to join a larger federation is if standards were not as they should be.

### **How does the MAT engage with parents/carers?**

Parents are represented on the LGBs and we have parent surveys. Feedback is responded to and acted on. Reviews of education include staff and parents/carers. The trust communicates directly with parents on important issues like the pandemic. Schools and LGBs are the main points of contact with parents/carers and generally parents should not feel much difference if a school joins the MAT as long as the school is working well and standards are good.

### **What would joining St Benet's mean for our children?**

If our schools continue to perform well, our children are unlikely to experience any difference day to day. St Benet's has no intention of changing our schools unless there are problems that all of us would want to see change anyway. Behind the scenes, we hope that being part of a larger family of schools will help our Executive Head to lead effectively and our teachers, support staff and governors to feel well supported, able to draw on the wider knowledge in the trust in order to reduce workload and also to share our strengths with them. There should be financial savings due to the collective buying power the Trust has that can be put back into classrooms. There will be back up available if our Executive Head needs support or if for any reason, they need to take time off. Ideally, the Trust can take away some of the administrative load and allow our staff to focus more on creating fun, effective and high-quality lessons and focus fully on creating the best experience for our children.

