

Frequently Asked Questions

Proposal for SaGe schools (St George's CE Academy and St John's CE Academy to join with the Durham and Newcastle Diocesan Learning Trust (DNDLT).

1. What benefit is there to SaGE in joining with DNDLT?

The school effectiveness support and greater shared buying power of a larger Trust will benefit all of the schools in the Trust whilst allowing each to retain their own unique ethos. Whilst the other schools within DNDLT are not all immediately nearby, several of the DNDLT schools are within the Darlington area and others are within the Teeside and County Durham area. The schools are all Diocesan schools and are close enough to benefit from shared networks and forums and systems, particularly now many meetings can be held remotely.

In addition, the Department for Education is very clear that small Trusts are unlikely to be sustainable longer term and should look to grow or join with other Trusts in order to ensure the very best outcomes and shared working for children and staff. In summary the reasons we are considering joining with the DNDLT are:-

- Educational-the school effectiveness support and networks available through DNDLT will enable our staff to fully benefit from wider collaboration in the interests of all of our children.
- Financial- to take advantage of increased shared buying of services and increased negotiating power.
- To retain our own unique ethos in our schools and reduce the risk of being left in a position in the future where we feel we need to join a large MAT without the opportunity retain any autonomy at school level.

2. What day-to-day changes will happen?

- **Will this change mean a new name for the schools?**
No, there is no intention to change the name of the schools.
- **Will a the schools need to have a new uniform?**
No. Parents will not need to buy a new uniform.
- **Will a proposed change mean the schools will still be open to the community?**
Yes. There will be no change to the current provision.
- **What will be the impact on our children with special needs?**



There will be no change to the level of support provided. The schools will continue to recognise that every child is different and has the right to be included as a valued, respected and equal member of the school community.

- **Will the school hours be any different?**

Although it is highly unlikely that the school day will be changed, it is already the decision of the Trust Board to decide this as they have the power to do so. This decision is usually delegated to the school specific 'academy council' of an academy, so there is no real change from our authority in this regard. As is the case now, parents would be consulted prior to any change in school hours, although no change is envisaged.

- **Will pupils' education be disrupted by a transition to join the DNDLT?**

No. When an proposal to join a Trust is approved to go ahead, it will do so with minimal disruption to the staff and students. Most of the changes will take place behind the scenes with support from a dedicated team from the DNDLT.

- **If we move to join the DNDLT will this change what is taught?**

We would be expected to continue to offer the full range of National Curriculum subjects. OFSTED continue to inspect academies and their handbook for inspection is the same one as used in any other school. The academy would be expected to strive to be outstanding in both the statutory OFSTED (section 5) and the Church School (section 48) inspections. In other words, there may be no change in what or how pupils are taught.

We would maintain our status as a Church Schools and the existing emphasis on our Christian values and ethos would not change. Church schools are also subject to the statutory (section 48) Church School Inspection and this also would not change. If a community school were to join the MAT they would not be required to change their current ethos and values and would retain their own unique 'non-church' ethos.

3. What will this mean for Teachers and Staff?

- **What are the Terms and Conditions for staff?**

On joining the DNDLT teachers and staff employed by SaGe will transfer with the same terms and conditions, via a formal TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment) process. In addition, this will not affect any union memberships.

- **Who will employ teachers and staff following the change?**

At present teachers and staff are employed by SaGe. Following conversion, teachers and staff will be employed directly by the DNDLT.



- **Will the DNDLT employ non-qualified teachers?**
All class groups of pupils will be registered to a qualified teacher, as is the case in schools currently.
- **Will the two current schools within SaGe become entirely separate entities again**
Yes in effect they will be their own individual academies with their own local governing bodies (called academy councils in DNDLT) and accountable to one Trust board across the whole of DNDLT. However, where shared working has worked well this can be looked at being continued as we would not want to undo links which work, so if there is currently a shared School Business Manager across both schools this could continue with discussion about how best to utilise this role.
- **What is the current leadership structure in the DNDLT?**
The DNDLT is an existing Trust with its own leadership structure. Paul Rickeard is CEO and each school has its own HT. Eileen Bell is CFO but she works closely with both EPM for Finance Director support and each School Business Manager to ensure the finance policy is working well in each of the schools and to provide support to each school in working with the finance system, audit and internal assurance. Liane Atkin is COO and there are various networks to ensure joined up working-Heads and School Business Managers meet half termly to catch up on various areas including HR, GDPR, policies, IT, premises, admissions, health and safety and links with the wider MAT and directors. The Challenge and Support Partners (CSPs) meet regularly with Heads and other school staff and the CEO meets with HTs and also separately with chairs of academy councils and chair of the trust on a termly basis.
- **How will joining the DNDLT affect back office staff?**
This shouldn't change internal back office structures but the Trust uses Access Finance as an accountancy and budgeting system so there will be training for back office staff to get used to that system and move on to Trust HR, student information and finance systems. The networks mentioned above should create further opportunities for sharing of experience for back office staff.
- **Will staff be required to work at other sites?**
If staff are employed on MAT wide contracts then they could be asked to work elsewhere but in reality this would be discussed with staff and their HT and issues such as geographical proximity and job role would need to be considered. Staff who have a defined place of work in their contract could not be asked to work elsewhere without agreement.

4. What will this mean for standards?

- **Does the DNDLT have the capacity to raise educational standards?**
The DNDLT has its own school improvement capacity for those schools choosing to join which includes a member of the Diocesan Joint Education team (including a current Ofsted inspector) and consultants with a proven track record and capable of working at the highest levels. The DNDLT will offer 3 days of school improvement partner support and 3 additional days of practical school improvement support every year.
- **What happens if a school in the DNDLT has a dip in standards?**
The purpose of a Trust is to provide educational support and increased capacity. The CSP support and oversight of the CEO mean that the trust would be likely to know about possible problems at an early stage and prevent this becoming significant through interventions and increased support. However, if this happened we would draw on existing capacity in the trust with agreement from those schools (there are two NLEs and a teaching school within the Trust) and where necessary external consultants.
- **Does Ofsted consider each school on an individual basis or inspect the Trust as a whole?**
Ofsted considers each school on an individual basis currently but they would look at the Trust board as the accountable body for any individual school. There is currently a Trust review process which evaluates a Trust's performance which is most likely to take place the term after several of the Trust schools have been inspected in the usual window for inspection.

5. What autonomy will there be at local governing body (academy council) level and will there be any SaGe people on the Trust board

In the DNDLT local governing bodies are called academy councils. The academy councils will operate under a scheme of delegation which has been shared with directors and is similar to the current scheme of delegation in place at SaGe. This very clearly sets out the powers which the academy council will have and a large amount of autonomy and decision making remains at that level (as it does now in SaGe). This is set out in a grid, certain decision making has to be at board level to comply with the Academy Trust Handbook, employment law obligations and education law but academy councils continue to work focussed on their own school with input of elected parents and staff, focussing on monitoring standards within their school, finances within school, school specific policies, community links, ethos and staffing below Head teacher level. DNDLT is a very consultative and we always keep academy councils and Head Teachers informed and ask for feedback on trust decisions too. The

DNDLT has a Trust wide governance lead who does inductions for academy councillors and works closely with them to set agendas based on the scheme of delegation. A copy of the Scheme of Delegation is on the DNDLT website. The Trust board is made up of skilled individuals who are independent of the schools however if there is a skilled SaGe person who would be interested in joining the DNDLT board this would always be considered.

6. What are the financial implications of the proposal?

- **How financially secure is the DNDLT, what happens if one of the schools in the Trust gets into financial difficulty**

The Trust is currently financially secure and each school has its own reserve which is ring fenced to that school after the top slice of 6% of the school's budget (after pupil premium has been applied). The Trust has a reserves policy which aims to have a Trust wide reserve of a month's running costs and DNDLT currently has reserves well above this level. Budget setting is carried out well in advance so that any changes which need to be made can be implemented in good time to seek to achieve a balanced budget for each school. Budget monitoring is carried out 3 times a year by the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee of the Trust board, they also receive monthly month end reports by email and budgets are also monitored at school level by academy councils. If a school in the Trust is projecting an in-year deficit we would work with the school to look at cost savings and if appropriate may permit an in-year deficit provided there was a financial recovery plan and the central reserve could allow this. This could result in financial delegation being limited under the scheme of delegation if this was not an agreed position so that directors have even more oversight of the position.

- **How does catering work in the DNDLT?**

Each school currently buys into its own catering provision. We have started looking at a Trust wide procurement but this is complicated and is likely to take some time due to TUPE implications and different ways of owning kitchen equipment. If a school in the Trust wished to change its catering provider or look at changing with another school in the Trust we would support them in looking at this.

- **How does finance, HR and premises work in DNDLT?**

The DNDLT uses Access Finance for accounting and budgeting and this is supported centrally by the CFO and EPM for budget setting and financial forecasting. Each SBM/office manager posts invoices and carries out daily finance tasks such as recording of invoices and checking and running reports. The DNDLT has a central bank account so invoices are paid centrally. The Trust finance policy is regularly reviewed to ensure compliance with the Academy Trust Handbook and to comply with any recommendations from internal assurance processes. Payroll is provided by Xentrall to all DNDLT schools and SBMs check reports locally. HR advice is

provided by Ward Hadaway solicitors and is backed by insurance. This support also includes access to an HR consultant to provide support at more complex hearings. Each of the schools has a team sheet for the relevant personnel at Ward Hadaway and contacts them directly. Provided advice is followed then any claim would be covered by the legal expenses insurance. Each school has Every asset management software to ensure they have a record of assets, this is covered by the topslice. Each school also has a maintenance plan and we are looking at a Trust wide estate management strategy to ensure we have a clear view of condition of the buildings. The central team would support with any bids necessary for capital funding.

7. What are future plans and next steps

- **What are plans for future growth and what will the impact of this be**
The trust has 9 schools currently and if the SaGe schools join DNDLT will have 11 schools. The DNDLT would not look to grow too quickly (no more than 2-3 schools in a year). The DNDLT is also open to schools from the Newcastle Diocese so if a small group of schools from that Diocese wished to join the DNDLT would look at a possible 'cluster' hub model for those schools. If a Church of England school requires sponsorship the trust would look at this and ensuring additional capacity was available without negatively impacting existing schools.
- **Will a secondary school join the DNDLT?**
There are no current plans for this although if a secondary school was interested in joining we would consider this provided we were confident we could properly support this and it was financially viable for it to do so.
- **What happens next, what is the timescale of any change?**
Directors of SaGe will need to consider all of the feedback and outcome of this consultation process and then meet to discuss whether they wish to proceed. If they do and permission has been granted by the Regional Schools Commissioner then we will need to instruct lawyers will need to carry out the legal work involved in the schools and staff transferring into the DNDLT. Staff and parents will be updated at each stage and staff will be part of a separate later consultation process under the TUPE regulations which is more specific and will give them a further opportunity to ask questions and understand how, if at all, their role will be affected. The earliest this proposal is likely to be able to be implemented is April 2022 but this could take longer depending on the views of staff, local governors, directors and parents and any legal issues which may arise.