



Grayshott CE Primary School

Grayshott CofE Primary School Application to Join a Multi Academy Trust

*A Parent's Guide to the Pros and
Cons of Joining a MAT*

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Document Summary

This document outlines Grayshott CofE Primary School's consideration to join a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) in response to government directives aimed at transitioning all schools in England to a trust-led system by 2030. It details the research conducted by governors, including visits to other schools that have joined MATs, to evaluate the potential impacts, benefits, and drawbacks of such a transition.

- **Government Directive:** The initiative follows the Schools Bill, mandating that by 2030, all schools must be part of a MAT or in the process of joining one. Furthermore, the diocese has also required that all CofE schools become part of a MAT by 2030.
- **Research and Visits:** Governors met with Head Teachers from various MATs to gather insights on their experiences and the implications of joining a MAT.
- **Pros of Joining a MAT:** Benefits highlighted include better support and resources, collaborative practices among schools ensuring continued provision of high quality education and improved HR and safeguarding processes.
- **Cons of Joining a MAT:** Concerns include loss of autonomy in policy-making, potential changes in school ethos due to the GST leadership turnover (in the past), and complex dynamics between local governing bodies and the MAT.
- **Financial Considerations:** The document discusses financial implications, including funding models and the potential costs associated with joining a MAT, emphasizing the need for clarity on financial expectations.
- **Consultation Process:** The governing body plans to engage with staff, parents, and the community during the consultation period to assess the suitability of joining a MAT.
- **Voting Outcome:** In January 2025, governors voted in favour of joining a MAT, specifically the Good Shepherd Trust (GST), citing its local proximity and support structure as key factors.
- **Next Steps:** The governing body will communicate with diocesan representatives and the Good Shepherd Trust to clarify the process and conditions related to joining a MAT.

Introduction

In June of 2022, two governors from Grayshott CofE Primary School were asked to look into the possibility that our school could join a Multi Academy Trust (MAT). This followed a directive from HM Government that to achieve its ambition for education, the 'Schools Bill' had determined that schools in England would have a fully trust led system by 2030. By this time, all schools should be within a MAT or well advanced in the process of joining one. Accordingly, there would be no maintained LA (Local Authority) schools and all schools will be part of a MAT.

Published on the 28th March 2022, the Schools White Paper, "Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child," set out the government's vision for a stronger and fairer school system. To support its implementation the DfE published on the 25th May "Implementing school system reform in 2022 to 2023 - Next steps following the Schools White Paper" which provides a framework for how schools and academies should consider moving forward.

To better understand how joining a Multi Academy Trust would affect Grayshott CofE Primary School, two of the schools' governors arranged to meet a number of Head Teachers across different Multi Academy Trusts to understand the positive and negative impacts of joining a MAT. What followed was the generation of a comprehensive report into whether a MAT may better serve the school.

This document is intended to serve as a summary of those visits and an account of what we learned while we were with the MAT schools. This initiative was conducted in July 2022.

Schools Visits

The following schools were visited as part of the task to assess the suitability of Grayshott Primary School joining a MAT.

Meetings were arranged predominantly with the Head Teachers although in some meetings, administrative staff joined at some points.

Schools Visited during this Process

The Holme School,

Openfields

Headley

(joined The Good Shepherd Trust)

Ottershaw Junior School

Fletcher Close

Ottershaw, Surrey

(joined The Good Shepherd Trust)

St Andrew's CofE Primary School

Lockhart Rd

Cobham, Surrey

(joined The Enlighten Learning Trust)

Potters Gate CofE Primary School

Potters Gate

Surrey

(joined The Good Shepherd Trust)

The above schools were selected due to their relative proximity to Grayshott Primary School.

All of the meetings were conducted in June and July of 2022.

Questions asked of the Head Teachers

We formulated some questions to ask each of the Head Teachers and in most cases, provided these to the heads prior to meeting them. We asked all of the heads the same questions so as to ensure consistency. The following is what we asked each of the schools:

- How did you arrive at your decision to join a MAT and what influenced this decision?

- What was involved in the transition process?

- How have the following aspects of school changed?
 - o Curriculum and T&L
 - o Admin and Finance
 - o Pastoral/Safeguarding

- What are the pros and cons of belonging to the MAT?

- Other Points

Each of these questions was intended to generate a discussion on the topic and to ultimately gain awareness of the potential pros and cons of joining a Multi Academy Trust.

A Summary of the Pros and Cons of Joining a Multi Academy Trust

Here below are the responses from the Head Teachers in respect of joining a MAT. These were in response to the questions on the topics on the previous page. Dark blue text indicates those responses from those who are in The Enlighten Learning Trust.

Pros

- The Director of Education at the GST supports and challenges with more experience and knowledge than the governors.
- There is always someone available by phone/email at the GST and collaborative working with the other schools within the GST is a real bonus, especially with regard to training and resources, sharing ideas and best practices.
- HR matters are still managed by the school but are supported by the GST.
- “We have a very good relationship with other schools within the trust”.
- The school shares inset training, resources and sharing best practices. “There is always someone available on the phone to talk to at the trust”.
- There are very useful Trust Central Team meetings every Monday. Any complaints or issues are managed by the Trust if not handled by the school locally.
- Geographical clusters/hubs are important; curriculum leaders are then able to more easily meet regularly as well as with the GST.
- School Fund/Trust Monies/PTA funds are controlled by the school and audited locally – no involvement by the GST.
- All curriculum leaders get together once a term to discuss positives/areas for improvement.
- Collaboration across Trust schools for subject leads and SLT to share ideas and best practices to the benefit of staff and pupils – ensuring best possible education provision.
- HR matters are dealt with by the GST team which has built up over the last 2+ years and is considered as being “very good”.
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policies are managed by the GST and are therefore compliant but these are also localised and personalised by the school.
- Unified IT Network (for example, Office365, SharePoint etc.) across the GST so all schools within the trust have access to all of the IT applications infrastructure.

- The IT Strategy is very strong – the schools are allowed autonomy regarding procurement and services. Cyber Security is very strong
- The GST is ‘ready for growth’ and in ‘listening mode’.
- Checkpoints are provided through collaboration to ensure the students are on track.
- Extraordinary costs met by the GST (for example, extra expenses due to COVID) paid for from central funds (e.g., extra cleaning involved)
- The Good Shepherd Trust is ‘hands on’ regarding support with OFSTED inspection criteria.
- Generally, the school staff have more time and space to make decisions.
- The Head Teacher and staff are able to focus on and have autonomy regarding the curriculum – the central team focus on the curriculum and education provided (e.g., deep dives into PP and SEND) and investigation to improve standards. (*The Enlighten Learning Trust*)
- Collaborations is a key factor – all schools are ‘hard-wired’ and communicate well regarding aspects of the curriculum – sharing staff and resources for training.
- The school no longer pays the local authority for services. The school is allowed to generate its own income.
- Safeguarding advice and support are excellent – this is considered to be a major strength of being part of the GST
- It has been beneficial for the school to work with like-minded schools in collaborative projects with staff from other schools in the trust. This makes the whole process much easier and a lot more accessible.

The trust “..takes care of the nitty gritty..”.

- Support overall is “..way better than it was before (the MAT)..”
- A further benefit of the trust is the opportunity to share good practice and voice concerns in a mutually supportive and ‘non-threatening’ context.

Cons

There had been considerable turnover of CEOs at the Good Shepherd Trust leading to concerns that this would lead to a change of ethos. However, the current CEO is settled and the GST is performing very well.

The relationship between Local Governing Body (committee) and the MAT is a “tricky dynamic”. This is a focus for the ELT moving forward. (*Enlighten Learning Trust*)

Some autonomy is lost regarding policy writing and risk assessment (*The Enlighten Learning Trust*)

The staff would need to build new relationships with the GST.

Other Points Raised

- No significant disruption to the running of the school during the process
- Contracts were TUPEd across; TUPE = Transfer of Undertakings – Protection of Employment
- GST made a point of speaking to all members of the school staff and the Governors.
- The Head Teacher sets the school’s budget which goes to the GST Central Finance Team
- The Head Teacher still recruits and appoints staff while the Trust provides support with contracts and HR matters
- The Head teacher has worked for three MATs and would not work for a Local Authority again. Staff feel they are part of/belong to St Andrew’s School. (*Enlighten Learning Trust*)
- The GST Director of Education visits the school 3 times a year to monitor T&L and analyses the data/results – this happens up to 6 times a year for scrutiny if the school is experiencing difficulties.
- Upon joining the GST there was an ‘in-depth’ Safeguarding audit by the trust.
- GST would only ‘step in’ if the school did not take steps to address shortcomings or any areas of concern.
- PP and Sports funding remain in the remit of the school.

- There has been no expectation or insistence by the GST to conform to a corporate image or way of operating.
- The individual schools within the Good Shepherd Trust are given autonomy in planning and decision making.

Full Governing Board Meeting

To Discuss and to Vote on Whether to Join a Multi Academy Trust

At an extraordinary governor meeting at the school in January 2025, all governors were requested to join this meeting to vote on whether to join a MAT. If the vote was in favour, then a discussion would commence as to which MAT the school should select.

Below, is a summary of the discussions we had and how we came to make such decisions. First of all, we reviewed the pros and cons that were identified by the visits we made to the Head Teachers in 2022. The summary of these precedes this section.

General Questions from the Meeting

Why are we looking at the GST and the TAMAT?

First of all, the GST and TAMAT have schools that are more local to Grayshott Primary than the other MATs that were considered. There is a distinct advantage to the school to have access to other schools to share best practices for example.

There were differences between the two MATs we considered joining. As discussed at the parents meeting and earlier in this document, there were some clear advantages of joining the Good Shepherd Trust (GST) verses the The Alliance Multi Academy Trust (TAMAT).

The funding model was very different as the GST is a substantially larger organisation and would absorb the costs of joining a MAT whereas the TAMAT required that we join with two other schools and share the funding.

Grayshott has an active PTA and the benefit of funds from the Fircroft trust; what would happen to this funding if the school joined a MAT?

All funds generated by the school from a very active PTA and any funds from the Fircroft trust would remain under the control of Grayshott Primary School.

How long would it be before the school was committed to joining a MAT?

The school would not be legally bound for the first twelve months. However, if the due diligence process was started and the school decided that it would remove itself from the process, then it would be possible that it could be liable for a financial liability.

Was this the right moment to make such a decision in light of the Wellbeing in Schools Bill which will alter the position of MATs?

There was discussion about the timing and being in the middle of change with a new government. However, another view was that this had been under consideration for a couple of years and so a decision had to be made. Even if Governors voted to join a MAT, it was not immediately legally binding and the Governing Body could revisit the situation in the future. The view was expressed that it was important to establish at this stage what the governors' intention was. It was pointed out that the Academies' conditions were due to change, but that changes were not yet known. It was pointed out that if the goalposts changed, this might influence the Governing Body's decision. It was noted that the situation in Hampshire was different than in Surrey, where most of the Guildford Diocese's schools were based, as Hampshire still had a strong Education Department and most of Hampshire schools were still maintained.

Would parents or staff get any say in the decision?

It was up to the Governing Body to make the decision but parents and staff would be consulted during the consultation period with a MAT. The consultation period dictated how the journey shaped rather than the end point and the consultation period would be the time to do due diligence, to liaise with staff and to ensure whether there was a good fit between the school and MAT.

Had the prospect of joining a MAT been shared with staff?

No, this had not been shared with staff. This would be included in the consultation which would have different stages:

The due diligence consultation would include stake holder consultation with staff, parents and the wider community. Then there would be TUPE consultations, which would be another opportunity to change conditions. Staff could ask questions all the way through the

process. There was discussion about TUPE and it was noted that staff would need to be transferred on the same terms and conditions. MATs could not make any terms and conditions worse, although some were more creative in their approach. It was not in their interest to make terms and conditions worse.

Staff are now informed about and involved in this process.

Questions Relating to Education & Financial Security

The discussion now considered the pupils' education and financial security. Hampshire County Council (HCC) support and backing would be exchanged for MAT provision of the same.

Curriculum

It was pointed out that HCC had partnered with the school-on-school improvement. HCC was under financial strain which was increasing. The latest result of that was that catering would be outsourced although managed by HCC. It was pointed out that they were reliant on finances from central government.

Autonomy

Would the headteacher have autonomy and shape the school as a special community?

Nothing in either of the MATs considered were a cause for concern that this would change. From the interviews with other headteachers the MAT working party did not doubt that the staff would become part of the team.

It was pointed out that HCC developed its staff quite well and were supportive. However, they were under financial constraints. A MAT would be a different support network. The support given by HCC came at a considerable cost and a MAT would do more in house. It was considered that the school had a strong enough team to stand up for what was right for the school.

Collaboration

In a MAT there would be collaboration between schools. The school had taken part in English moderation at Bohunt School that day - moderation of this kind would be more possible in a MAT. However, the school was strong enough to maintain its individual identity. As an RI school it needed to be ready to show who what the school was doing to improve.

Funding

There was discussion about how MAT schools were financed. The Local Authority received funds from central government and then finances were allocated to schools. One governor had looked at the published accounts of the MATs. In particular the cost to keep the executive running and the salaries of the MATs compared to the Director of Education for HCC. The HCC Director earned slightly more than the Director of the bigger MAT with far fewer schools. There was discussion about how funding was organised within a MAT. The school would work out an operational budget and argue their case for funding with a MAT. The Budgets of the two MATs were £40million and £8million both MATs made losses of £250K. There was a view expressed that all schools would become MATs and it was better to choose to convert to a MAT rather than be left behind. Schools in Surrey were converting to MATs at a rapid rate, but in Hampshire conversion was very slow.

While there was some uncertainty about the funding for MATs in the future, it was thought that MATs were more agile in particular regarding education. There was a general view that the more buoyant MATs were thriving whereas smaller MATs were struggling.

It was pointed out that the catering contract situation had been caused by a number of schools withdrawing from the service which meant that it was not cost effective for HCC to continue running it rather than a cost cutting exercise.

Voting as to Whether to Join a MAT

Following the questions and answers summarised above, the governors now voted on whether or not to join a MAT. Almost all governors participated either in person or by a remote vote (via Teams Meeting) – the latter received by the Clerk of the meeting. This was a secret vote. The wording was as follows:

“As a governor of Grayshott Primary School, I am in favour of the school joining a MAT? Tick either Yes or No”

The Governing Body voted by majority that they were in favour of the school joining a MAT.

Voting as to Whether to Join the GST or TAMAT

There now followed a review and discussion of The Alliance Multi Academy Trust and Tye Good Shepherd Trust MATs. Questions were invited and a discussion held before the next vote was to be taken.

What schools were considering joining TAMAT?

Witley Infant School was committed to joining and Milford Infant School was completing their final due diligence. It was pointed out that TAMAT did not have the costs to cover conversion (which would be £25,000). However, if the Governing Body decided to go with TAMAT this cost could be split between the three schools. TAMAT would expect a financial contribution if the school withdrew from the process. TAMAT was looking to expand. There was further discussion about funding and it was noted that the Diocese did not have any funding for conversion even though they were keen for schools to join an academy trust. Two further schools had pulled out of joining TAMAT due to financial constraints. It was not known if other schools were in line to join GST. There was discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of being part of a smaller or larger academy trust. Uncertainty about the viability of a smaller trust was expressed from a business point of view. However, as part of a smaller trust the school might have more opportunity to shape the trust and make partnerships.

Governors agreed that it was important to establish what the financial expectations and other conditions were upfront before the due diligence process started.

Action

Seek clarification about the financial expectations and other conditions from the Academy Trusts.

Question Raised

Was there a difference in achievement and pupil progress between the two MATs?

There were a range of schools from 'Requires Improvement' to 'Outstanding'. TAMAT schools were all good with some outstanding schools. GST also had a majority of good and outstanding schools. It was pointed out that Ofsted grading was not everything although it was important to have high expectations.

There was discussion about the ethos and offer of both of the trusts. TAMAT was a new MAT and had spent resources on building stability recently and establishing its systems. GST was more established and a larger MAT.

The Governing Body wanted to make sure that pupils would continue to be happy and listened to, which was highlighted in the recent Ofsted report. The staff had a strong sense of identity and were confident in putting that forward. The school already operated in a corporate session within HCC. Whichever MAT was chosen, it was important that the school would be able to give and receive in all areas to meet the children's needs in the future as part of the community.

Decision of a preference for TAMAT and Good Shepherd Trust MATs

The Governors voted on the following proposal by secret ballot:

“As a governor of Grayshott Primary School, which MAT should the school join? GST or TAMAT. Tick GST or TAMAT”

The Governing Body voted by majority that they were in favour of the school joining GST.

Agreeing Next Steps

The Governing Body would approach Mark Cripps the Diocesan MAT officer to notify him of the resolutions made and ask for clarification of the points raised as follows:

- What were the initial terms and conditions?
- When would a financial penalty be imposed if the school changed its mind?
- What was involved in the due diligence procedure.

Action Taken

Contacted Mark Cripps at the Diocese to notify of the GB decision and to raise questions about the process.

Confidentiality

A question was raised about confidentiality. It was agreed to keep the matter confidential until advice on the correct procedure be sought from Mark Cripps at the Diocese. This was particularly important for staff and parents. Any communication would come from the whole Governing Body.

Action Taken

Sought advice from Diocese regarding confidentiality of MAT decision and process.

Potential of Stalling the Conversion Process

Would there be opportunities to put the brakes on the conversion? If so, would there be financial penalties?

There would be opportunities in following the due diligence procedure. The Full Governing Body would also be able to raise concerns during the process. Any immediate or strong concerns would be raised with the Chair of Governors.

Who would steer the process?

The MAT working party would continue to lead in the process. The MAT Working Group would continue to be the point of communication. It was also agreed that the working party would be expanded to include the headteacher and invited others.

If you have any questions or queries related to the content of this document or any matter regarding the decision to join The Good Shepherd Trust, please send your comments to the following email address (Subject: MAT) or write to the school directly. Many thanks!

chairofgovernors@grayshott.hants.sch.uk

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*The MAT Working Group for
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