

THE FOUR STONES

FAQS



www.the4stones.co.uk





How large could the MAT eventually be?

We anticipate that our MAT would grow in a planned, gradual and carefully considered way. We do not want to become a huge, unwieldy organisation and we do want to stay local. However, new schools can be in any local authority. There are no plans to develop the MAT at speed. Current expectations are that it could be a MAT of up to eight schools, possibly including some specialist provision but a priority is to ensure that the organisation grows at a rate which can be best managed so as to support member schools to maintain and improve performance. Initially we would expect secondary schools to join the MAT as that is where we have the expertise.

A rigorous evaluation of any school wishing to join us (“due diligence”) would be undertaken to identify any issues in the educational performance, financial position and conditions of buildings, to ensure that there are no significant liabilities which would be a drain on the resources of the MAT. If the Trustees feel that a school could be an appropriate partner, a plan would be developed to address any problems which are identified and we would only move forward with the school provided there is a robust and sustainable plan to support the school to address these issues. The final decision on whether a school can join our MAT is taken by the Regional Schools Commissioner at the DfE, and they will only allow a school to join a MAT if they are confident that the MAT can provide the required support to address a school in challenging circumstances or one with financial issues or liabilities.

Why should we join a MAT and what is in it for us?

The Four Stones Multi Academy Trust is ambitious, forward-thinking and wants to develop its schools to be the best in the country. We understand that every school is different and that every school is at a different point in their journey to excellence. Our highly qualified and experienced Executive and Central Teams will work with leaders, trustees and governors to assess every aspect of need and form a complete picture of how we can best support you. The Executive and Central Teams provide the background operations and ensure they benefit and meet the needs of all the schools. By centralising the key services the MAT can not only realise benefits in terms of economies of scale but also free up the Headteachers’ capacity to focus on school improvement.

Our core offer will then be tailored to your school's needs, to create an individual package of support and improvement.

How much does it cost the school and what does the school receive for this money?

We employ the very best Executive and Central Teams and use centralised services by pooling the money from individual schools and supplementing this with centrally-organised bids for funding. A central contribution will be agreed at school level to pay for any services that are provided by the MAT centrally to make them more cost-effective. Over a period of time we will work towards the central contribution being between 5% and 7% of the total GAG and this would be dependent on the needs of the individual schools within the MAT.

The central contribution will be reviewed periodically to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of each individual school. We have found that this has been more efficient than when our individual schools took on this role and after one year of operation each of our schools have had surpluses that can be spent on our students' education. This has been created by the provision of shared professional learning, centralised efficient financial and operations services and benchmarking extensively.

What does this mean for our governors?

There are three tiers of governance in a MAT: Members are like the shareholders of a company and are 'keepers of the flame' and meet once a year. The Trust Board maintains accountability for the MAT and shapes the strategic direction. The Local Governing Body (LGB) focuses on the standards and health and safety in an individual school.

What is a Local Governing Body (LGB)?

The LGB of a school focuses on the standards of teaching and learning, supporting and challenging the leadership of the Headteacher. We ensure that LGBs are fully informed, have clear communication lines to the Trust Board and are able to make a significant difference to their schools. The LGB is a crucial part of governance of a school.

Can our Governors join the Trust Board?

The Trust Board recruits the best people able to lead the MAT. Each of our Trustees has an exceptional skill-set and we ensure a balance of skills on the board in order to hold the Chief Executive Officer and Executive Team to account and direct the MAT strategically. Applications are open and particularly welcomed from those in the communities that our schools serve.

Will we have control over our finances?

We have found that a central finance function has allowed us to employ some of the very best people. Our scheme of delegation allows for flexibility as to the extent of this, but as one organisation, we are audited as a whole. We have exceptional financial systems that allow leaders and governors to be fully informed.

What will we have control over and what are we giving up?

Our scheme of delegation, which is under constant review by our Trust Board, outlines the responsibilities at each level of governance. The latest iteration of the scheme of delegation is on our website.

Does the MAT take our reserves or eliminate our deficit?

We continue to list reserves or deficits next to each school but the Trust Board regard the MAT as a consolidated single entity. Financial control and responsibility are centralised for the benefit of all schools within the Trust. Therefore, all reserves are centralised as MAT reserves and can be deployed at the discretion of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to enhance the core offer, provide capital investment or further improve attainment and achievement in line with the Scheme of Delegation and Financial Procedures Manual. Being a bigger entity allows us to act as an 'insurance policy' where schools need support.

Do we need to get permission to join?

Yes. The school and the MAT will need permission from the Secretary of State for Education via the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). Together we will be required to set out a business plan, on which we can advise you.

We are an excellent school already: what are the benefits for us?

The level of challenge and expectation that comes from being a part of our MAT means that we expect schools to be even better as a result of joining our family. We have a great track record in leadership, standards, curriculum, recruitment, operations, governance, estates and financial management. We are confident that we can be better as part of a larger entity and have more influence on education and the system.

We have some great staff that know our students. Will their jobs be at risk?

We always operate in the best interests of our students. We keep great staff. Being a part of a bigger organisation can mean that we can find opportunities for staff to develop their career whilst still serving our students and families.

Do we need to consult?

Yes. The Department for Education guidance suggests that both the school and the MAT will need to consult with significant stakeholders. The consultation must be designed to maximise the response, so will usually be held in school term-time. We can advise you on this.

What is the process?

The running of the school transfers to the MAT. The steps are:

- The MAT enters into a funding agreement for the school
- The employment of staff transfers to the MAT in accordance with the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 (TUPE)
- The assets and contracts of the school transfer to the MAT
- The MAT is given use of the school buildings and land, often via a long lease with the local authority, or via the freehold

Is it reversible?

Once the school joins the MAT, this can only be reversed by the Department for Education, usually via the Regional Schools Commissioner. This is one of the reasons we encourage schools to do complete due diligence. We want schools completely committed to making a difference to all of our students and families and hence committed to making the MAT even better.

Where can I find out more?

On the DfE website, the latest version of the Governance Handbook for academies, multi-academy trusts and maintained schools gives even more information.

What are our next steps?

A governing body or trust board need to agree to engage in due diligence with the MAT, meaning we can share information freely and confidentially. We are committed to being open and transparent and so as part of any process we will share with you everything you need. Following this, the governing body or trust board, if satisfied, will pass a resolution to join the MAT. We can advise you with all of this.



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