

DEAL EDUCATION ALLIANCE FOR LEARNING TRUST (DEALT)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

We are very grateful for all those members of our school communities who have contributed to the consultation on our proposal to establish the Deal Education Alliance for Learning Trust. This document provides additional information in response to questions which have arisen so far.

Why are you making this proposal, and why now?

The Deal Learning Alliance is already successful, why can you not stay as you are?

The seven schools who are making this proposal already work closely together in the Deal Learning Alliance. That has provided opportunities for shared working and for joint activities and all schools have seen benefits from working together. But we have reached the limit of the work we are able to do without making a more structural change.

The core principle in establishing DEALT is to improve opportunities through collaboration whilst supporting and celebrating each school's individual character and ethos. Parents and children will see very little visible change when we convert, but opportunities for staff to work more closely together will provide support for continued improvement in all schools – and therefore in outcomes for children.

The wider context is also changing. The Government continues to promote academy status, particularly within multi academy trusts, as the way of organising groups of schools to ensure that they can support each other and that the school system is led by the best leaders and teachers. At the same time the Government is reducing the funding available to local authorities and as a result schools have to pay for services that would previously have been provided at lower or no cost. Forming a multi academy trust provides the opportunity to use our funding more effectively whether by seeking alternative providers, by appointing our own staff to lead particular areas and by securing economies of scale in back office purchases so that we can protect funding for teaching and learning.

As more schools consider academy status and propose to establish MATs, the opportunity to choose how we do so may be reduced. Our main driver for this proposal is to enable us to develop our successful collaboration; we don't want to risk that by waiting.

Does this mean a standardised approach to teaching and learning across all schools?

No. One of the core principles we have established is that each school will retain its individual approach, its character and ethos. Each school has developed approaches to teaching and learning and to the curriculum which aim to ensure that their pupils can make the most of the opportunities that are available. All seven schools are good schools. We want to celebrate that diversity, not to seek to change it.

DEALT will provide opportunities for staff to share good practice and to learn from each other. But staff will then reflect on how best to implement any changes that they believe would be right for their pupils. We seek to empower the professional staff working in our schools – at all levels – and in that way to continue to improve outcomes for pupils.

Members and Trustees: Who are they? What is their role? Who holds them to account?

All academy trusts are charitable companies limited by guarantee which have members instead of shareholders. All the funding received by the Trust must be spent on improving education and opportunities for pupils attending those schools. Members and Trustees are all volunteers and are not paid.

The members form the company. They appoint trustees to run the academy trust on their behalf – and have a general oversight of the trust to ensure that it is successful. For that reason, members are recruited to bring a balance of skills and expertise. The five members proposed for DEALT are:

- The Diocese of Canterbury, represented by its Director of Education Quentin Roper, an experienced primary headteacher
- The Archdeacon of Ashford, Ven Darren Miller
- Peter Gregory Principal Lecturer in Education, Canterbury Christ Church University, Adviser to the DfE on Art and Design, National Leader of Governance – working with schools and academy trusts in the South East to improve governance.
- John Dunkley - a local businessman and farmer, involved with scouting and with business and charitable organisations in Deal.
- Tricia Sherling - a former primary and secondary teacher and headteacher of 3 primary schools; an OfSTED inspector and school improvement partner and a local lead governor.

Although members will approve the appointment of Trustees, the steering group of governors and heads from each school forming the MAT have worked closely to identify an initial group of Trustees who bring a range of skills and expertise including in education, in finance and in business. Some of the initial trustees are members of the steering group so that there is continuity in decision making about how the Trust develops. The seven initial trustees proposed for DEALT are:

- Sandie Butcher – an experienced school governor and former teacher in the Early Years
- Matthew Hudson – a qualified accountant and business development manager, formerly a school governor
- Leisha McKechnie – a qualified accountant with experience in business and in education
- Phil Marsh – a BT survey officer and Trades Union Official
- John Utting – retired former managing director of a transport and forwarding company
- Roger Walton – chartered civil engineer and Director with Dover District Council
- Sheila Wilding – former headteacher, OfSTED inspector and school improvement adviser

All Academy Trusts are monitored and held to account by the Department of Education, through a Regional Schools Commissioner advised by a group of local headteachers. They will challenge members and trustees where they identify concern. All academies are inspected by OfSTED who will consider the impact of the Trust on outcomes at each of its schools.

Jo Hygate, Head at Kingsdown and Ringwould – has been appointed the initial CEO of the Trust, working part time. She is coordinating the formation of the Trust, working with heads and governors from all schools. The Trust will reimburse her current school for the time she spends as CEO – notionally 2 days a week.

How do parents have a say in how the schools are run?

Every school within DEALT will continue to have its own local governing body with two elected parent governors. That remains the forum for decisions about the individual school.

Parents are encouraged to talk to their child's teacher or headteacher about questions or concerns they have. The school and the trust will have complaints procedures and the government will intervene where complaints are not properly handled. Parents can also raise concerns with OfSTED.

How will each school's individual ethos and character – whether Church or Community – be protected?

Everybody involved in establishing DEALT is committed to ensuring that every school remains individual. The legal documents which establish DEALT and the contract with the Secretary of State will require that the schools continue to operate with the same ethos and character that they have before they convert. The involvement of the Church of England means that the Church schools can be part of the Trust and that their particular ethos will be protected. But the members, trustees and local governors will be required to ensure that community schools ethos is protected and retained and cannot be changed.

How will DEALT be funded? Can we be sure that individual school budgets will be protected?

Academy Trusts receive their funding directly from the Government, rather than through the local authority, so they receive the full allocation. Funding is calculated for each school in the same way as it is now, based mostly on the number of pupils on roll. The Trust will take a small percentage of the allocation to cover central costs, and the rest will be fully in the control of the school's local governing body.

By shopping around and combining their spending where appropriate, academy trusts are able to secure lower prices and economies of scale to cover central costs.

Funding remains a challenge for academies and for local authority maintained schools, with income remaining broadly static whilst costs increase. By working together schools in other academy trusts have been able to improve their purchasing power and protect funding for teaching and learning. DEALT cannot guarantee that continued funding pressures will mean no change in individual schools, but we are committed to ensuring the success of all our schools and believe that working more closely together gives us a better chance of achieving that.

What other options did schools consider?

In considering how to proceed the schools looked at the option of joining an existing multi academy trust particularly Aquila (The Diocese of Canterbury Academy Trust) and Veritas (Warden House). Since our priority was to build on the strength of our existing collaboration we rejected both options for the following reasons:

1. Veritas would only be able to accommodate the community schools into their MAT (Hornbeam and Sandown) further breaking up the existing Deal Learning Alliance.
2. The schemes of delegation, levels of autonomy, values and key personnel are already established in both of the above MATs. Unfortunately these did not reflect the vision we held for our MAT. Therefore it was felt that it would be more effective in the long run to set up our own MAT reflecting the strengths of our schools. An example of this is that in Veritas- Warden House would be the lead school. In DEALT we feel strongly there will be no lead school and we are looking to establish an equal partnership between all of the schools, through which we will strive for a consensus in decision making and work together to share knowledge and best practice.
3. Aquila is spread geographically across Kent, which will impact on effectiveness of any collaboration. It is very difficult to bring staff together when they have to travel an hour to get to a meeting after work. Aquila is also (historically) made up of underperforming schools, where the challenges that need to be addressed are very different from ours.
4. In Veritas the model does not allow for a Local Governing Body attached to each academy. It was felt that the LGB was essential in our model to protect the individual character and ethos of each of the Primary Schools.

Do individual school facilities become a shared resource, to the detriment of that school's children?

No. Specific facilities, including the swimming pool at Hornbeam and forest school at Northbourne are already well used by their own pupils. That remains the priority for their use.

Impact on school staff – is there a greater risk of redundancies, as at other local academies?

Staff employed in our schools on the date of conversion transfer to the employment of DEALT on the same terms and conditions as they have now. DEALT is committed to maintaining national terms and conditions for all staff. Our staff already see benefits of working with colleagues in other schools and are looking forward to developing those opportunities.

Conversion to academy status and setting up a MAT does not mean that we are protected from the financial pressures that face all schools. We believe that by working together we can provide some greater certainty for staff than by staying as we are; but sadly we cannot offer any guarantees.