
Children and Young People's Scrutiny – November 2024
The Changing School Landscape

This paper provides an update on the changing school landscape across Bury.

It is written in the context of a significant shift in the proportion of schools operating within Trusts.

The former Government published its Schools Bill in 2022. The Bill set out the Government's ambition to encourage all schools to join a strong trust. Whilst the Bill never made it through the parliamentary process, there was nevertheless, a clear message to schools about the Government's intent.

Between 2011, when the first Bury school converted to become an academy, and 2023, there were 27 schools that converted representing approximately 30% of state funded schools. This was typical of the proportion of academies across the 10 Greater Manchester local authorities, but much lower when compared with LA's nationally.

In the 2023/24 academic year Bury saw a further 16 schools convert and join a trust. Whilst a small number were required to do so because of an Ofsted Judgement, the majority of those converting chose to do so. At the end of the last academic year over 55% of state funded schools in Bury were in a trust.

With the change in Government, some immediate changes have been implemented that means that schools that are identified as requiring special measures or have successive 'requires Improvement' judgements following an Ofsted inspection, will not now automatically be issued with an Academy order. Currently in Bury there is one school that has a Directive Academy Order (DAO) that will progress to conversion, and one other that would ordinarily have been issued with a DAO but won't now receive one. That school will still receive support from a strong trust, but won't automatically be required to join that trust.

Since the start of the 2024/25 academic year, one secondary school has converted, and two primary schools are due to convert in February 2025. A number of other schools are at various stages in considering joining a trust, with several having progressed to submission of an application to the Department for Education. The proportion of schools operating within a trust is therefore expected to grow still further.

With a growing proportion of academies, and also the scale and pace of change seen in 2023/24, there is an impact on the role and relationship that the LA has with its schools.

The paper highlights a number of key points/issues:

- The measures that the LA has and proposes to take to influence the evolving Trust landscape
- The considerations given by the LA when brokering support for those schools that require it, including links to potential Trust sponsorship
- The impact of conversion on the LA's ability to facilitate those conversions
- A review of the charging arrangements to recover reasonable LA costs incurred in supporting conversion
- The development of appropriate governance arrangements, to establish the vision for education across Bury, and hold stakeholders to account in an increasingly autonomous school system.

The role of the local authority

Local authorities are and will remain a key stakeholder in respect of education, retaining responsibility for all maintained schools, having a duty to support schools causing concern, including facilitating conversion for those schools wishing to join a trust, and retaining a range of statutory duties for children and young people across the borough whether attending maintained schools or academies.

Crucially, the LA is the one organisation that has responsibility for place, both understanding the local context of communities and the schools that serve those communities, and being able to represent the wider interests of Bury and its residents.

Whilst there is a comprehensive list of statutory duties that remain with the LA, they can be broadly summarised as follows:

- Ensure every child has a school place – ensuring there are sufficient school, special school and alternative provision places to meet demand
- Ensuring the needs of vulnerable pupils are met, including:
 - Identifying, assessing and making provision for children with SEND
 - Promoting school attendance and tackling persistent absence
 - Ensuring alternative provision is available for children and young people excluded from school or otherwise unable to attend mainstream school
 - Leading on safeguarding responsibilities for all children, including those in unregulated settings, educated at home and children missing education, as well as children at risk of radicalization; working with schools to ensure that they understand and discharge their safeguarding duties
 - Identifying, assessing and making provision for looked after children
- Acting as a champion for all parents and families

In respect of academy conversion, local authorities have no formal decision-making role in the process.

The final decision to approve a school's application to join a Trust is one for the DfE Regional Director. The RD is advised by an Advisory Board that meets monthly.

The RD and Advisory Board have regard to the guidance on commissioning High Quality Trusts, published in July 2023. A copy of that framework is available here: [Commissioning high-quality trusts - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/114141/Commissioning_high-quality_trusts_-_GOV.UK.pdf)

For faith schools, the Diocesan Boards for Education must also approve prior to consideration by the DfE.

Influencing the future school landscape

A presentation was produced in autumn 2022 for school leaders and governors in Bury, to inform and guide on what to consider when thinking about joining a Trust.

More recently, the DfE has published its guidance on commissioning high quality trusts which sets out the role of the DfE when making decisions about trusts.

In addition, the Diocesan Education Authorities have determined their own frameworks, placing stipulations on the basis by which CE & Catholic schools can join Trusts. This will influence the trajectory for faith schools.

From Salford Diocese, the stipulation is that all Catholic schools in Bury will join the St Teresa of Calcutta Catholic Academy Trust, alongside Catholic schools in Bolton and Rochdale. The Diocese has indicated that Bury schools should be looking to join the Trust between now and 2026.

From Manchester Diocese, the stipulation is less prescriptive in that CE schools should join one of the thirteen faith Trusts for which it has responsibility.

From a local authority perspective, it has set out a number of principles in order to influence how the Trust landscape develops. This includes:

- Bringing our schools together to establish our schools as leaders of community.
- Working with existing Trusts with a presence in Bury.
- Developing local solutions wherever possible, as opposed to reliance on national Trusts
- Focusing on supporting strong Trusts to grow, but recognizing the needs to support existing weaker or smaller Trusts with a focus on sustainability and performance
- Primary, secondary & special – achieving a balance (cross-phase solutions)
- Ensuring no school is left behind
- A coherent blueprint for migration to Trusts

All of this to be underpinned by clear protocols. These provide a framework to be used to engage in open and transparent conversation with schools and stakeholders when considering alternative forms of governance:

- Schools should consider how proposed changes might impact on other local schools, to ensure they do not have an adverse impact overall;
- Schools should provide an explicit and unambiguous commitment to inclusion of all children in their area, especially those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and those with challenging behaviours;
- Schools should provide a clear commitment to making or procuring high quality alternative provision for any children who need it;
- Schools should agree to maintain fair and transparent admission arrangements which include highest priority for children with SEND and those in public care;
- There should be a clear commitment from any schools entering into alternative governance arrangements, to support each other and other schools causing concern in the area, via the school-led model;
- Schools should be able to demonstrate how the formation of different forms of governance will enhance the capacity for self-improvement within the system and help develop effective teaching and leadership for the future;

- There should be a clear plan for how the alternative school model will be led, governed and resourced which demonstrates good value for money and transparency over the use of public funds;
- Where schools enter into partnership or collaborative arrangements with schools outside of Bury, particularly where the DfE Regional Director identifies a sponsor in respect of a school that is eligible for intervention, it is important that there is a continuing commitment to ensuring strong local support for Bury schools;
- Schools are actively encouraged to demonstrate that local people form the majority of each level of governance within the model adopted, and that the local authority and parents of children, elected by their peers, should be represented at all appropriate levels of governance.

Rationale for sponsor Trust identification

The local authority has a duty to support schools causing concern, including facilitation of the conversion of a school to join a strong trust in those instances where a Directive Academy Order is issued. The support that the LA brokers on behalf of a school is often sourced from a trust, and increasingly the DfE are looking to the LA for guidance on the appropriateness of arrangements both in terms of where initial support is brokered from, and also in terms of longer term sponsorship arrangements.

In order to be clear and transparent with all partners (schools, Trusts and DfE) on its approach to this, the LA has produced the following:

Rationale for identification of a high-quality trust as a sponsor

Identification a suitable high-quality sponsor Trust will link to Bury's strategic approach to strengthening our school system as a strong family of schools. Our focus will therefore be on working with Trusts that already operate within that family. Decisions will align with our vision that all Bury children are happy, safe, healthy, successful and independent.

We will consider the following:

1. The ethos and values of the trust matching Bury's own so that the needs of all children are met.
2. The Trust's track record in improving schools causing concern rapidly and sustainably
3. The Trust's infrastructure, including governance & growth plan, to support the school's needs
4. The capacity of the Trust to support the school's needs at that point in time
5. The Trust's outcomes for pupils and inspection judgements, including attainment, attendance, inclusivity, destinations and exclusion data.
6. Consider the Diocesan or Faith Board's view where a school is a faith school.

As relevant, at the point of brokerage, Trusts will be approached to provide information to support items 2 - 4 above. The remaining information is in the public domain and will be prepared by the School Assurance Team. Information will be considered at a panel meeting of officers chaired by the Director of Education and Skills.

The decision as to the LA's view on the most appropriate sponsor/s will be discussed with the DfE Regional Director to gain their view of current capacity and any other factors that may affect the trust's availability to sponsor the Bury school at that time. Bury LA will then propose a named sponsor trust.

The current landscape

Trust	Convertor Academies	Sponsored Academies
Bishop Fraser Trust	Bury Church of England High School	
Bury College Education Trust	Park View Primary School Greenmount Primary School (1/02/25) Old Hall Primary School (1/02/25)	Elton Primary School Radcliffe Primary School
Sycamore Trust	Christ Church CE Primary School, Walshaw St Thomas' CE Primary School	Holy Trinity CE Primary School St John's CE Primary School, Radcliffe Radcliffe Hall CE/Methodist Primary School St Stephen's CE Primary School
Collective Community Trust	Butterstile Primary School Cams Lane Primary School Heaton Park Primary School Ribble Drive Primary School Whitefield Primary School Woodbank Primary School	
Forward as One CE Trust	Greenhill Primary School	Gorsefield Primary School St Paul's CE Primary School
Northern Education Trust		Chesham Primary School Hazlehurst Primary School
Oak Learning Partnership	Elms Bank School & College Unsworth Primary School Philips High School	Hazel Wood High School
Prestolee Trust	Tottington Primary School Springside Primary School	
Rowan Learning Trust		The Heys School
Shaw Education Trust	Tottington High School Woodhey High School	Unsworth Academy
St Teresa of Calcutta Catholic Academy Trust	St Joseph & St Bede RC Primary School St Joseph's RC Primary School St Bernadette's RC Primary School St Mary's RC Primary School, Radcliffe	St Gabriel's RC High School St Monica's RC High School St Michael's RC Primary School
Star	Star Radcliffe	
Vision Trust	East Ward Primary School Higher Lane Primary School Sunny Bank Primary School Peel Brow Primary School	
Epworth Trust	Wesley Methodist Primary School	Summerseat Methodist Primary School
Yesoiday HaTorah	Yesoiday HaTorah School (Boys) Yesoiday HaTorah School (Girls)	

Future Trajectory

The expectation from DfE is that we will see strategic rather than incremental growth in the number of schools joining a Trust.

However, it still remains in the gift of individual Governing Bodies to determine if they wish to consider joining a Trust and therefore, whether this scale and pace of conversions will be sustained is unclear. However, as a

minimum, we know that the remaining Catholic primary schools will transfer within the next two years, and it is not unreasonable to assume that other schools will also decide to convert.

Conversion activity places significant demands on the Council in facilitating the process, for which there are finite resources. For this reason it is essential that consideration is given to the manner in which conversions are prioritised.

Other than an expectation from DfE that those schools subject to a Directive Academy Order take precedence there is no mechanism for prioritising conversion, largely because it is subject to competing and conflicting drivers. Discussions are ongoing with DfE about ways in which we could achieve a more structured approach to planning and prioritisation. The LA would encourage early discussions with schools planning to convert, and with Trusts to enable effective planning and delivery of conversion activity.

Charging

To date, prospective academies have received an Academy Conversion Support Grant of £25,000 from the DfE which is intended to meet their costs of conversion. No additional funding is provided to local authorities.

From 1 September 2024, the terms and conditions for the grant will be updated. It will be paid only to schools approved to convert as part of a group of 3 or more schools joining the same trust (the three will receive £75k, not share £25k between them). This is designed to encourage the strategic growth that DfE is looking for.

What is important is the converter applications are considered together by the Regional Director when **taking a decision**. The schools do not have to join the trust on the same date (because of the vagaries of individual projects) but **the decision on them joining must be made at the same time**. Ideally, the trust would have submitted a single application which sets out the strategic rationale for this phase of growth, which should focus on why it makes sense for the schools and trust.

The DfE is not changing the conversion support grant for special schools and pupil referral units – these remain eligible for the support grant if applying to convert without other joining schools.

Consideration has been given previously to the Council recovering the cost of conversion from the school seeking to convert.

The Association of Directors of Childrens Services (ADCS) have pointed out that LAs have long highlighted the hitherto unfunded costs in facilitating conversions, this move could heighten these pressures further. It will be important to monitor impact going forward.

Since 2018, in respect of work undertaken for Academy transfers, a charge of £3,500 has been levied to all converter academies to contribute to the costs incurred by the local authority. This has been reviewed and with effect from 1 April 2024, a fee of **£8,000** will be levied for all converter academies.

This will ensure that the Council is reimbursed for some of the costs incurred in facilitating academy conversions. Schools preparing to convert will be asked to plan for this contribution in their conversion process and may utilise their Academy Conversion Support Grant to fund this.

Governance of the changing education system

The increasing autonomy of schools, operating within trusts requires a new approach to strategic governance, enabling all schools and trusts to make a positive contribution to their own local community

and across the borough as a whole, whilst also enabling the local authority to hold the school system to account for those aspects for which it has statutory responsibilities.

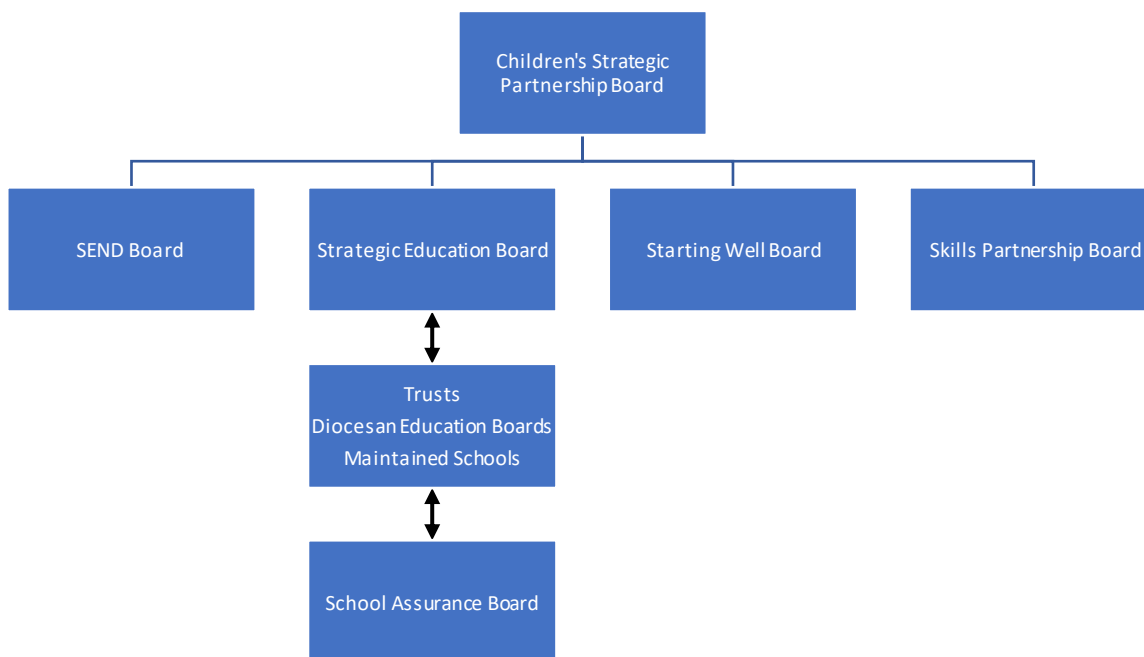
A Strategic Education Board was first established in Bury in 2017, bringing together key stakeholders to develop their collection vision for education, and to provide strategic direction to an increasingly fragmented school landscape.

With the rapidly changing context of that landscape, there is a need to review the role, remit and membership of the Strategic Education Board, providing effective governance to a school system where accountability sits across a number of stakeholders.

The purpose of the Board is to set out the strategic direction for education in Bury; ensure accountability across the school system; and facilitate a place based approach, reflecting the needs of the borough and its localities.

The Board sits within a wider governance arrangements bring partners together, with the Children’s Strategic Partnership Board providing over-arching governance, but with other boards sitting alongside the Strategic Education Board focusing on and providing specific governance in respect of Special Educational Needs, Early Years and Skills, all of which link to the role of the Strategic Education Board.

The structure below illustrates the relationship between these different Boards:



Accountability

In exercising its function and agreeing its vision and priorities for the education system across Bury, the Board will hold stakeholders to account for delivering against those priorities.

This will be achieved through:

Termly meetings, chaired by the Director of Education & Skills (or senior representative) with the CEO or school improvement lead for each of the Trusts. This will follow a structured agenda covering the key priorities of the board.

Termly meetings, chaired by the Director of Education & Skills (or senior representative) with maintained school leaders.

Termly meetings, chaired by the Director of Education & Skills (or senior representative), with the Director of Education (or representative) of both Manchester Diocese and Salford Diocese.

Place Based approach

A key role of the Strategic education Board is to promote a vision for a place-based approach by the school system, ensuring that schools, academies and trusts respond to the needs and context of Bury as a whole, and to the communities served by individual schools.

The Strategic Education Board will promote and encourage schools to work collectively within their localities to respond to the specific challenges of each area.

School Assurance Board

A LA School Assurance Board, meeting every six weeks, will bring together a range data and other intelligence to assess risk, or identify schools that would otherwise be a cause for concern. The outputs from the School Assurance Board meetings will inform the work of the Strategic Education Board and will also support discussions with MAT CEO's, Maintained school leaders and Diocesan Boards.