

# Diocese of Westminster Education Service

## Case for Catholic Academy Trusts (CATs) April 2018

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### 1. Introduction

**1.1** We believe that children and young people in our Catholic schools and colleges deserve the very best educational opportunities and life fulfilling experiences, within communities which have the teaching of Christ and his Church at the centre.

**1.2** To this end, in October 2016, the Trustees of the Diocese of Westminster approved the expansion and development of Catholic Academy Trusts (CATs) across the Diocese through the introduction of sets of clusters of local schools coming together to protect, secure and develop the Church's mission in education. These are in the spirit of 'families of local schools' within the wider diocesan education family. We anticipate the programme will take three to four years to implement.

**1.3** This important step forward for Catholic education in our Diocese seeks to ensure that every school and college sits within a network of collaboration such that each institution both gives and receives support.

### 2. The Mission of Catholic Education

**2.1** The commitment to working together through CATs will help to realise further the aim of Catholic education as set out by the Church:

Education must pay regard to the formation of the whole person, so that all may attain their eternal destiny and at the same time promote the common good of society. Children and young people are therefore to be cared for in such a way that their physical, moral and intellectual talents may develop in a harmonious manner, so that they may attain a greater sense of responsibility and the right use of freedom, and be formed to take an active part in social life. *Canon 795.*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Canon law is the codified system of laws and legal principles promulgated by the authority of the Catholic Church to properly regulate and organise the Church's life and mission.*

**2.2** Every Catholic school and college is an equally valued member of the diocesan family of schools. The Archbishop is, by virtue of the authority given to him in Canon law, the head and father of that family.

The Diocesan bishop has the right to watch over and inspect the Catholic schools in his territory ....and has the right to issue directives concerning the general regulation of Catholic schools....Those who are in charge of Catholic schools are to ensure, under the supervision of the local Ordinary, that the formation given in them, in its academic standards, are at least as outstanding as that in other schools in the area.  
*Canon 806.*

**2.3** The Archbishop, together with the Trustees of the Diocese, will set out a Memorandum of Understanding that ensures each CAT is conducted in accordance with Canon Law and the teaching of the Catholic Church, and in compliance with the Trust Deed of the Diocese of Westminster. In this way every Catholic Academy Trust will be at the service of Church's mission in education. At all stages we will collaborate with the statutory education mechanisms.

"In such circumstances it is right to look for economies that can be achieved by structures of cooperation, between schools within the same locality and within the wider family of schools. This is not an enforced 'master-plan', as you well know. It is a measured and appropriate response to the reality we face.

In these ways your task is to give a powerful witness in our society today, through your daily work in schools, through the leadership you give, to the coherence of our Catholic family and its unswerving commitment to work as one, and to the service we constantly bring to our pupils, their families, their parishes for their safety, growth and wellbeing."

*Cardinal Nichols 21<sup>st</sup> February 2018.*

### **3. Why the move to Academies?**

**3.1** It is government policy that the majority of schools in this country should become academies in forthcoming years. Whilst the government has withdrawn the proposed mandatory nature of this, all the legislative elements necessary are in place for schools to become academies. There are some divergent political voices, but it would seem that most schools will move towards academy status. This is because:

- a. The direct funding of Academies has reduced the capacity of Local Authorities to provide adequate resources to support schools. This may have implications in the future for Catholic schools if an Academy Order (mandating academisation) is issued to all maintained schools in any Local Authority;


- b. There are increased powers of intervention in struggling schools that receive a warning notice about their performance. These powers mean that schools need proactive, robust action that will bring change at a rapid pace. We need to place secure structures around vulnerable schools in order to help them flourish;
- c. Financing schools and services is increasingly demanding. Budget management and changes to the national funding formulae are causing significant challenges for many schools. Schools will need to be able to operate with slimmer services as well as working with other schools to create economies of scale.

#### **4. Establishing Catholic Academy Trusts**

**4.1** The move to establish a network of Catholic Academy Trusts in the Diocese seeks to ensure that Catholic schools and colleges will be better enabled to work together. Isolation and fragmentation compromise the Church's mission in education. The academisation process allows clear working relationships to be established between local Catholic schools to assist with school improvement, leadership recruitment and formation, governance and co-operation to strengthen Catholic mission. This development moves beyond the existing partnerships between schools to enable a new spirit of collaboration so that the present success of Catholic schools and colleges in our Diocese might be harnessed more effectively by working collectively in transparency and dialogue.

**4.2** Within a changing landscape of national education policy and provision we need to reinforce and develop the relationships between our schools. We are at our best when we work together, for each other and in service of the dignity of the individual and the common good, embracing both solidarity and subsidiarity. This is essential to all decisions and actions undertaken by Catholic schools and colleges in our Diocese. We also see this as an opportunity to help those schools identified that are in need of support and challenge that are *not Catholic*. Our schools are part of a wider community and have long established partnerships with local community schools that have been of mutual benefit. The establishment of CATs will allow partnerships to be developed, promoted and reviewed over time. The CATs will actively seek to support the identified needs of the RSC offices, the DfE and SRIB to ensure that standards and attainment in local areas are supported where possible by CATs.

**4.3** Utilising our previous experience of forming CATs, and drawing upon that of the Catholic Education Service and other Dioceses, we will assist schools and colleges to establish a network of CATs through a gradual programme of implementation. The realisation of these CATs will evolve across our Diocese as we work initially with those schools and colleges that are best placed and desirous to make a more immediate transition.



**4.4** In the formation of each new CAT, or in consultation about how existing Academies form part of this new structure, the established Project Board will support the process of transition and will be available to assist with the process. Within our current Academy Trusts there is a wide range of expertise that can help to support the evolution that needs to take place. We will seek to draw upon this as the new pattern emerges.

**4.5** One of the significant advantages of academisation is that the delivery of services to schools and colleges will be improved through partnership with key providers, for example in the areas of school improvement and succession planning and training. There will also be opportunities for more effective centralised services, such as in HR and legal and financial support.

## **5. The Structure of CATs**

**5.1** The structure of each CAT is built upon the Catholic principal of ‘communion,’ of working together in a ‘common union.’ It is not simply a communion amongst member schools, but also, and importantly, a communion, an interdependence, among those who lead and manage CATs at every level.

**5.2** At the level of the Academy Trust there is a Board of Directors who oversee the whole group of schools. At the level of each school there is a Local Academy Council (formerly the Governing Body) which relates to a particular school. The Academy Trust Directors and Local Academy Council Representatives (previously governors) need to know what each other’s roles and responsibilities are in order to ensure that these are fulfilled. As we move toward a new expression of our diocesan family of schools and colleges, this area of oversight and support is critical and requires a process of recruitment for Directors and Representatives.

**5.3** The Local Academy Council will carry out some duties and functions on behalf of the CAT, such as the monitoring of standards and the Catholic life of a school. In this it reports to the main Board of Directors.

## **6 Grouping of Schools**

**6.1** The planned clustering of schools into new CATs is designed to translate the collective vision of the Diocese into a workable and durable reality that secures and enables the development of all schools and colleges.

**6.2** Regarding financial viability and sustainability the Department for Education indicates that each Academy Trusts will need 5,000 plus students. The due diligence undertaken by the Diocese shows that we are best served by each cluster of schools having 6,000 students across 11 different geographically located CATs.

### **6.3 In this:**

- a. Clusters of schools and colleges across the Diocese have been planned. They bring schools together within their Local Authority area or local deaneries;
- b. The planned clusters seek to allow close proximity in order to facilitate collaboration, cooperation and mutual benefit;
- c. The clusters will allow local parishes to maintain a direct link to a local network of schools which reflect the local identity and community in partnership and cooperation;
- d. The clustering of schools enables tangible, durable and sustainable partnerships to improve security for the future;

### **6.4 The clusters of schools have been designed to**

- a. Contain both Primary and Secondary schools, wherever possible ensuring opportunities for closer ties between the two sectors with mutual benefits;
- b. Prevent isolation or fragmentation between schools;
- c. Ensure that should a CAT encounter any unforeseen trouble another CAT will have the responsibility to help steer a course to recovery by working closely to address and resolve any obstacles to improvement;
- d. Provide opportunities to support the wider community of schools that are not Catholic.

## **7. Next Steps**

**7.1** Further explanatory documentation is available from the Diocesan Education Service.

**7.2** The Diocese welcomes the support of the DfE, RSC and the Headteacher Boards to approve the development of the CAT programme for the benefit of all schools.

**7.3** The Diocese seeks the approval of the two CATs presented to the DfE in April 2018 at the earliest opportunity.