

Our Ref: SS/AW

15th July 2026

Dear Colleagues

Re-building the Church, fit for future generations

In 2022/23, Bishop John set out his vision for his schools in the Diocese of Salford called 'Rebuilding the church, fit for future generations'. It sets out the direction the diocese will take to provide for a fully academised model of three academy trusts by 2030. The purpose of this letter is to provide affirmation of the bishop's vision and plan as we approach the halfway point at the end of 2026.

First, the bigger picture. When the plan was first introduced, there were some who thought the three CATs would be too large an organisation, having around 60-70 schools in each, with roughly 22,000-24,000 pupils. However, this has proved not to be the case, with the strengths of belonging to three distinct geographical families being very effective. Indeed, other dioceses have followed this model over the past few years. There is still plenty of work to do, and not everything is perfect at this stage. We have neighbouring dioceses that have modified their plans and reduced the number of CATs and others who have relaunched their strategies with just two or three CATs similar to us. Every diocese in England has now either fully academised or is on the journey and there is a growing network of support for CATs across the Catholic sector in the country which is starting to benefit our schools and have a positive impact. So, we continue to be focussed on this growth and periodically reflect and tweak what we do and how we do it. The Bishop and trustees are very grateful for the cooperation and faith placed in them as the growth strategy is implemented and schools have joined their CAT over the past couple of years.

Today, 83 schools are part of the three trusts out of 193 diocesan schools in total which, roughly, is about the point we expected to be now when the strategy was launched in 2022/23. With the help and support of our CATs, just one diocesan school is in special measures and they are looking forward to being inspected where the expectation is that they will be removed from category. Credit should be given to the schools themselves, and we note that the wider system sometimes plays its part too in collaboration with our CATs. We remain one big family of God in Salford.

Throughout the last few years, diocesan trustees have been open to listening to the views of everyone within our diocesan family about what they believe works well and what they think could work better. Colleagues from the department are often in our schools and hear that feedback as do colleagues from the CATs working regularly in schools. All colleagues are committed to ongoing dialogue. It is fair to acknowledge that some school leaders and governors have not yet fully 'bought in' to how the delivery model secures this vision and that other ways might be more desirable, even if the vast majority of you do support the published diocesan vision. The national landscape clearly identifies academies and CATs as part of the schools system and, given the direction Catholic education has taken in England, I wish to affirm, on behalf of the Bishop and trustees, there will be no change to the vision for schools as set out in the 2022 document 'rebuilding the church, fit for future generations'. This remains the bishop's wish and expectation.

Simon A Smith
Diocesan Schools' Commissioner
Director of Education
Department for Education
E: education@dioceseofsalford.org.uk
T: 0161 817 2204

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Mindful that every board of governors must initiate the journey themselves and engage in the journey into their CAT with confidence and ambition, there are a couple of ways we can smooth the pathway ahead in the next part of our strategy. Sometimes, foundation governors are anxious that the requirement to ‘do what the bishop wants’ leads to conflict between undertaking their own due diligence and delivering the strategy. I have written before about the role of foundation governors and have no need to repeat it here, but effective governance also means engaging with different groups, asking questions and considering ways to remove barriers to progress the bishop’s vision as his representatives. Challenges come when barriers are identified and there is no will to work towards finding effective solutions so that the diocesan plan – agreed at the point of application by all foundation governors – becomes a reality in a sensible timeframe. Governors have not been removed from office for example because they did not ‘vote’ one way or another. Governors’ generosity to serve their diocesan bishop does come with a degree of expectation and common sense to further Catholic education and the teachings of Jesus Christ in this diocese in line with the Trust Deed of every school. This is why the church, not the state, has oversight of the appointment of foundation governors, rooted in links to parish communities and the local church. The education department will continue to become involved in positioning governing boards so they are ready and well prepared to begin the journey into a trust when the time comes. Rarely, there may be a delay. However, open and continuous dialogue between all of us will assist in everyone understanding what the barrier is and what needs to happen to remove that barrier moving forward.

Our CATs are consistently looking at their central teams and how they function to best support our schools. To this end, and mindful of the funding issues facing state education in England and Wales at present, diocesan trustees have asked the CATs to review their central charges over time so that best value is achieved and affordability is tempered as a way of alleviating the concern of school leaders. I am grateful for trust leaders for supporting this.

Periodically, the growth strategy is updated, taking into account fiscal planning at a trust level, matters around risk and support for governing boards who wish to join a trust more quickly. It has always been the case that a fully academised model by 2030 is part of the Bishop’s vision. A ‘by when’ date was originally not published, but in the period of discernment that the diocese held in 2022, school leaders and governors wanted to know when they would begin to join the CAT to provide certainty, and so the timescale of 2030 was added. I have previously explained why this date was issued. Some school leaders now want an open ended date; as stated in the opening of this document, the 2030 vision is affirmed and remains in place. There is some pragmatism and trustees are relaxed if dates may slip because of specific challenges. We request generous cooperation with diocesan initiatives such as this, which some of you will note is articulated in the recently published draft Bishop’s directives.

The aim of this document, then, is to restate and reaffirm that the diocesan strategy, ‘rebuilding the church, fit for future generations’, has so far provided some very impactful work in our schools. Church estate, pupil attainment, compliance, governance, Catholic life and mission, to name a few, have all benefitted from the excellent and mission filled work of our CATs. Increasingly, a collaborative theme is developing between our three CATs and other Catholic CATs across England; it is a truly monumental shift in the way Catholic education is developing in the country. Some are still not keen, certainly, but for

Simon A Smith
Diocesan Schools’ Commissioner
Director of Education
Department for Education
E: education@dioceseofsalford.org.uk
T: 0161 817 2204

DIOCESE OF SALFORD

Cathedral Centre • 3 Ford Street • Salford M3 6DP • Tel: 0161 817 2222 • dioceseofsalford.org.uk

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most, the opportunities afforded to the church to speak with one voice in very challenging times and to reinvigorate schools is providing a new level of oversight for the bishops enabling them to comprehensively exercise their stewardship and rights of visitation that until now have been more limited. We are all working hard to rebuild the church so its mission, through its schools, is in a much better place for the next generation.

Yours sincerely



S A Smith
Diocesan Schools' Commissioner
Director of Education

Simon A Smith
Diocesan Schools' Commissioner
Director of Education
Department for Education
E: education@dioceseofsalford.org.uk
T: 0161 817 2204