

# **Rebuilding the church in the Diocese of Salford**

## ***Shaping the future structure of diocesan schools***

For further information on the Catholic Academy Trust strategy to date and key guidance documents please follow this link <https://www.dioceseofsalford.org.uk/education/academies/> then scroll down to Documents and open the **'Academy information and key documents'** section.

This FAQ document will be updated on a fortnightly basis with the most recent questions being found at the top of the document and can be found using the same link above and opening **'Latest Communications'**.

### **Frequently asked questions – last updated 10<sup>th</sup> March 2022**

#### **What is an academy?**

Academies are publicly-funded schools which operate outside of Local Authority control. They receive their funding directly from central government, through the Education Funding Agency (EFA), rather than through a Local Authority. The government describes them as independent, state-funded schools. Academies have more freedom than other state schools over their finances, the curriculum, length of terms and school days and teachers' pay and conditions.

#### **What is a Multi-Academy Trust?**

A Multi-Academy Trust is a charitable company limited by guarantee and is responsible for running the academy. It has three layers of governance: members, who are best viewed as guardians of the constitution; directors, who are legally responsible for the running of the Trust and the local governors who are responsible for monitoring standards in the individual schools in the Trust. The five 'Members' of any Catholic Academy Trust (CAT) as we know them will always be the Diocesan Bishop, Vicar General named Diocesan Trustees and the Director of Education.

#### **How does the CAT model work?**

The CAT model has been designed to maintain the identity of each school in the trust as separate academies each retaining a Local Governing Body (LGB), headteacher and its own budget. The Trust is the employer of all the staff in the CAT. A Scheme of Delegation is put in place between the CAT Board and the LGB to enable each school to operate in much the same way as it does now but the Trust has overall responsibility for standards and as such all schools in the Trust are required to work together to improve standards across all schools in the Trust

#### **Isn't taking the schools out of Local Authority control a risky move?**

Catholic schools are not, and have never been, under Local Authority (LA) control. Catholic schools are Voluntary Aided (VA) not Voluntary Controlled (VC) schools. The governors of Catholic VA schools are the employers of the staff, are able to set the length of a school day and term times, following consultation with parents. The decision to admit children to the school is already made by the Governing board and not the Local Authority. All of these will be unchanged when a Catholic school goes into a CAT. Our schools have had a good relationship with the relevant LAs and it is envisaged that this will continue as LA's continue to have statutory responsibility for children with additional needs (SEND) and for the overall planning of school places in their local area.

## **Schools are facing unprecedented challenge as a result of COVID-19. Is this really the right time to press ahead with such a significant decision?**

Whilst COVID-19 has caused unprecedented disruption to the smooth running of schools and has significantly increased responsibilities and workload for headteachers and governors, establishing CATs would be a longer term strategic objective which will benefit pupils and staff for generations to come. COVID-19 has highlighted the strength and resilience of CATs in response to a crisis. Schools are stronger when they collaborate. During the pandemic CATs have been able to reduce the workload for individual headteachers, teachers and support staff by allowing for a common approach to undertaking risk assessments for schools, joint procurement of PPE and signage, implementing schemes to provide free school meals vouchers to vulnerable families and providing appropriate learning materials for pupils during lockdown. It is easier for larger organisations to allocate resources to these activities than it is for individual schools

### **What are the benefits of a Catholic Academy Trust system?**

- Solidarity - Where no one school is left behind - A joined-up, family of schools and Parish linked system - An ethos of 'our schools' not 'my school' and therefore 'our children' not 'my children' .
- A wider pool of staff and governors looking for more opportunities and helping each other.
- Opportunities to develop future teachers and future school leaders and establish pathways for staff development.
- Curriculum development, shared working and school improvement peer to peer support.
- Sharing services and developing imaginative ways of supporting our schools - Business services - Training - Value for money funding opportunities.
- Bid-funding that is only available (capital and revenue) to MAT based academies.
- Capital funding – unlike VA schools academies do not need to find 10% of any capital funding - There are guaranteed capital grants and opportunities to bid for additional funds that are only available to academies.
- CATs provide a formal framework for collaboration, shared curriculum expertise across schools and enhanced opportunities for sharing good practice in a variety of settings and phases.
- Formal collaboration frameworks allow for more shared planning, more shared examples of good practice, more shared resources and more shared assessment and moderation.
- Inbuilt collaboration facilitates buddying/mentoring systems to enhance teaching and learning and enriches school-to-school support.
- Shared curriculum events such as Science Days, Languages Days and shared creative arts events become much more practicable.
- Greater opportunities for career progression enabling schools to grow their own leaders. The Ambition Institute research shows that CATs have much higher rates of promotion from classroom teacher to middle leadership, particularly at primary school, than non-MAT schools.
- Improved recruitment and retention. The evidence is that CATs, with the flexibility and career progression opportunities they allow, attract more applications.
- **In short, CATs systemically enrich professional dialogue and practice, thereby improving pupils' learning experience.**

### **How will academies make a difference to the challenges we face? How would CATs help with falling pupil rolls or lack of finance or deficits in schools? Will there be more money for schools?**

The principle of a problem shared being a problem halved will apply: in CATs, headteachers by definition no longer struggle alone; they are key members of a larger network with a CEO carrying the can. The very existence of a Catholic Senior Executive Leader (CSEL/CEO) with oversight of a group of schools allows for a more coordinated approach in mitigating risks to that group, and to the sector as a whole.

With government borrowing at record levels and a contracting economy, there is very little chance that more money will be put into schools. We therefore have to make economies where we can and CATs will help to alleviate the stress schools are under. They will not remove that stress, but they will help; in fact, they are the best mechanism available to us to create that help.

As far as falling rolls are concerned, the more money that can be directed back into front-line education through economies of scale, and the better the educational provision that CAT structure will provide, the more popular it will prove with parents. The hard fact is that the only way in our power to increase numbers is to render ourselves more attractive to parents who are applying elsewhere. The CAT Trust Board will have responsibility for a group of schools, and so will not allow, insofar as they are able, one or more to languish at the expense of others.

Furthermore, academies are able to share staff across schools and deploy them flexibly to respond to cost pressures from falling rolls.

### **Will schools lose their individuality when they become part of a CAT?**

No. CATs enshrine the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity which underpin Catholic Social Teaching. Subsidiarity – decisions are best made by those who are closest to their effects – is key: its express purpose is to avoid excessive centralisation. This can find expression in the CAT's Scheme of Delegation. Our pupils are best served if schools keep their individual charism.