

Position Statement regarding formation of Multi Academy Trusts **Brentwood Diocese- November 2018**

The Catholic Church is the largest provider of education throughout the world and education is the biggest work of the Catholic Church in our country. Education has been the key priority of the Bishops Conference of England and Wales since 1852. We are therefore committed to doing the best for our Catholic schools and we are in the educational arena for the long term. We are however living in difficult times where our Catholic schools are having to find ways of operating effectively with tighter and tighter budgets. Archbishop Malcolm McMahon talked recently in Chester on 10th October of the challenge to Catholic education from groups within society who are not supportive of Catholic education and who would like to degrade or remove faith schools such as ours from the national picture. Given this challenge the Archbishop said that it was important that we find ways to come together as a Catholic community to support and protect Catholic education. The development of Local Deanery based Catholic MATs is a way in which our Catholic schools can come together in natural groupings based on existing Church structures to collaborate and support each other. In some parts of the country these Catholic Trusts have been referred to as CATs (Catholic Academy Trusts) to distinguish them from other commercially based academy chains. This is a principle that we are in sympathy with.

Our starting point for this programme is currently a strong one with almost all schools identified as good or outstanding by OFSTED. Currently about a third of our Catholic schools are already academies and they are doing very well. Picking up a failing school, supporting it to improve and finding a sponsor can be an extremely long and difficult process. The reality is that for most trusts a failing school with a weak budget position would be an unattractive proposition. Consequently, we want to take the initiative now and create a family of Catholic schools who will be partners in support and collaboration going forward. In order to protect our Catholic schools in to the future we want families of schools where all schools will give and receive to each other in a spirit of joint endeavour, solidarity and trust. Sometimes things do go wrong with schools. Up and down the country there are plenty of examples where schools have got in to trouble. Through this approach we are trying to put in place a safety net so that if something unforeseen happens in one of our schools they have prompt access to greater protection and support from within the Catholic family that they are part of. Given the extremely tight budgets that all schools are facing we believe that there are genuine opportunities for economies of scale. Savings can be made and income generated by groups of schools working together especially where the search for economies of scale are strategically coordinated for the benefit of all schools within the group. We already deal with an organisation called the Churchmarketplace where it has been shown that where contracts are aligned across groups of schools, coupled with increased bargaining power achieved by the group, significant savings can be made. It is important to state that what is not being proposed through academisation is a reduction of school budgets or a redundancy programme for school staff. Schools need to work smartly to maximise their finances and working together in a CAT to engage in strategic procurement exercises so that

this might be achieved. We know that school funding that comes through a Local Authority has historically been top sliced before the schools received it. As academies schools receive their funding directly from Central Government in full. In addition, for Voluntary Aided building projects the government normally funds 90% of the cost of the project. By contrast, Academy building projects are funded at 100%. All building projects are subject to a bidding process but with MATs they do not need to bid when they reach the size outlined in our plans.

Working in a Catholic school within a Catholic MAT should enable each school to retain its own unique identity. Unlike some of the big academy chains, our schools are natural partners with each other. They are all Catholic schools with a distinctive ethos with Christ at the centre of what they are about. This must continue. This is an important reason why we must preserve and protect each catholic school. Our Catholic schools are places where many families want to send their children because they receive a great education in an environment which has a distinctive ethos, where their children are safe and cared for. Many teachers want to work in our Catholic schools because they recognise these aspects as well. We believe that the recruitment and retention of good teachers will be enhanced by Trust based partnerships where in addition to the great working environment, there are also greater opportunities for shared training and career development. We want to ensure that Continued Professional Development (CPD) opportunities, access to resources and the sharing of good practice do not stay in just one lucky school. At a time when we are asking schools to collaborate and work much more closely together as a Diocese we are working with six other Dioceses in order to develop training and professional development opportunities for our future Catholic school leaders including governors. We are working with other Catholic colleagues across the South East to enhance links with Training Schools and Higher Education Institutions. We are doing this because we need to ensure that we have the Catholic leaders in place who understand the mission and vision of Catholic education today and also in the future. Some people outside of Catholic education do not appreciate the importance of this aspect on the life of the school. In all that is going on, do not forget the children. We want the children in our Catholic schools to get the best chances that we can give them. We want our schools to be thriving places, where the search for excellence and an enriched educational experience for the children is the reality. This is why education has been the key priority of the Bishops Conference - 4 - The Brentwood Diocesan Trust - Registered Charity No. 234092 since 1852. We are therefore committed to doing the best for our Catholic schools and we are in the educational arena for the long term despite the challenges we face.

We have been in dialogue with the NEU/NUT Teaching Union and have indicated clearly our desire to protect the rights of those that work in our Catholic schools and academies as we have always done. We are producing a protocol as guidance for our schools and academies which supports teachers' pay and conditions. As a Diocese we require our schools and academies to continue to adopt the School Teachers Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD) for teaching staff and the "Green Book" for associate staff. In working with our Catholic schools we are keen that they should employ the best teachers and ensure the best educational experience for all.

In addition we want strong Catholic leaders to continue to be appointed as Headteachers and for this to remain the norm in all of our schools. We recognise and value the contribution of all employed in the Catholic sector to the success of our schools and in particular to doing so through formally recognising the Trade Unions that support all employees. We acknowledge the importance of Trade Union representatives being given the time and capacity to support staff, individually and collectively. It is also our intention to strengthen governance, strategic oversight and accountability across the Catholic sector, recognising the responsibility of the Diocese for the provision of a Catholic education to the Catholic families in our communities at the same time as acknowledging the changing role of Local Authorities. Bishop Alan already appoints the majority of the Governing Body as Foundation Governors in VA schools and this would also be reflected in any new academy or trust board arrangements that we put in place. All of our schools (whether Voluntary Aided or academy) will continue to have governing bodies that are responsible for maintaining high standards and protecting the distinctiveness of each of our schools. We place an emphasis on ensuring that there is both parental and staff involvement in the governance of the schools. We provide training and support to governors to ensure committed high calibre individuals are appointed (or in some cases elected) to deliver our shared vision for the schools. Our emphasis on local Deanery based Catholic Multi Academy Trusts is borne out of our belief that this provides the best long term sustainable platform for our schools to work together and to continue to thrive. The Diocese owns the land and the buildings of all of our Diocesan schools (with some playing fields owned by a Local Authority) and this arrangement will not change with academisation. We wish to maintain a positive working relationship with each Local Authority and for our schools to work collaboratively with Catholic as well as other local schools that are not Diocesan schools. Schools are required to consult both staff and the school community about any proposal to become an academy and join (or form) a multi academy trust. We are committed to ensuring that full and accurate information is provided to staff and parents and that this acknowledges the range of opinions and research carried out about academies, education, Catholic MATs and the future of our schools. Opportunities will be given for staff and parents to meet representatives of the relevant MAT and the Diocese as well as school leaders so that there can be a full and frank discussion. This will need to be co-ordinated and agreed with the Diocese in advance of any consultation period.

We do not believe that the educational community that makes up each of our Catholic schools will be adversely affected by the development of local Deanery based Catholic MATs across the Diocese. On the contrary we believe that this approach preserves and develops Catholic schools so that they are effective and secure places for all. We have a successful track record in achieving this across the Diocese over a sustained period of time. Preserving Catholic schools in the long term, in our view, is also of direct benefit to those who learn and work in them and for the communities that they are part of.

Therefore in summary:

- the Diocese will continue to own the buildings and the land;
- we are committed to doing the best for our Catholic Schools;
- we will develop a protocol as guidance for our schools;
- we favour natural groupings based along Deanery lines;
- each school will retain its own unique identity;
- almost all schools are currently good or better;
- about a third of our successful schools are already academies;
- we don't want schools to become isolated and fail;
- we will follow due process in consultation;
- we are committed to accurate information being provided to our schools;
- we are looking for economies of scale;
- we anticipate greater opportunities for shared training and career development;
- we want schools to support each other;
- we are not looking to change teachers' pay and conditions;
- we will formally recognise the Trade Unions;
- we will work to further strengthen governance;
- parental and staff involvement in governance will continue;
- governors/Trustees will remain the employers of staff;
- we are not looking to change Catholic Education Service contract of employment;
- we are not looking to employ unqualified teachers;
- we are not looking to have heads of School in preference to Headteachers;
- we are not looking to make people redundant;
- we are not looking to establish commercially based academy chains;
- we have a successful track record over sustained period of time in education.