



# CMAT NEWS



BRENTWOOD DIOCESE MULTI ACADEMY TRUST NEWSLETTER

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## Special points of interest:

- Catholic Multi Academy Trusts are growing in our Diocese.
- Advantages and challenges identified
- Sharing good practice is the key.

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## The Story so far ....

There are a total of 83 schools in the Brentwood Diocese of which 66 are primary schools and 17 are secondary. Since 2011, 43 of these schools have converted to academy status with the overwhelming majority being organised into 6 Diocesan multi academy trusts. We call these organisations Catholic Multi Academy Trusts (CMAT).

The 6 trusts are largely regionally based but not exclusively so and do include schools not in their immediate area:

The Assisi Trust (Southend & South Essex)

The Good Shepherd Trust (Redbridge, Barking & Dagenham)

Our Lady of Grace Trust (Newham)

Our Lady of Fatima Trust (Harlow)

The Rosary Trust (Colchester, Chelmsford & Mid Essex)

The Christus Trust (Thurrock, Basildon & Billericay)

## How does this compare with the national picture?

About a third of Catholic schools nationally are academies educating 37% of Catholic pupils. In some diocese, namely Nottingham, Plymouth and Middlesbrough virtually 100% of schools are in Catholic MATs. In others like East Anglia two thirds of schools are in MATs while Birmingham, Brentwood, Northampton, Hallam have approximately 50% of schools as academies. In Leeds and Southwark a third of schools are academies. There are currently 83 CMATs in England and they educate 32% of Catholic pupils nationally. The total number of academies nationally continues to grow by about 8% each year according to the DfE's own figures. In England 35% of

primary and 77% of secondary schools are academies.

## What does our Bishop say about academies?

Bishop Alan issued a position statement in September 2018 which was read out in all parishes on Education Sunday that year. This document clearly outlines the setting up of CMATs as the way he wishes his schools to move forward. He said *"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"*. Bishop Alan talks about providing a "safety net" for schools but also discusses the potential benefits of collaboration and working together in a formal structure. He says the development of deanery based CMATs across the Diocese *"preserves and develops Catholic schools so they are effective and secure places for all"*.

The Bishop's letter as well as a Frequently Asked Questions document is on the Diocesan website.

*" We are committed to doing our best for our Catholic schools"*  
- Bishop Alan Williams



## Spring Focus on ..... The Good Shepherd Trust



*"I will give you  
shepherds after  
my own heart,  
who will feed  
you on  
knowledge and  
understanding"  
(Jer 3:15)"*

This is a Trust based in the London Boroughs of Barking, Dagenham and Redbridge and consists of 6 primary schools and one secondary school. The Trust board are a group of trustees who represent the Bishop. The trust has a Chief Accounting Officer. This group meet regularly to set the strategic direction of the trust.

Each school has its own Headteacher, leadership team and local governing body who manage the school on a day to day basis. As with all of the Diocesan trusts decision making at school level is vested in those closest to the school, namely the school leadership group and local governors. One of the founding principles of the Good Shepherd Trust is subsidiarity, all decisions are made at the appropriate level.

The schools aim to collaborate on a wide range of issues and in particular they aim to share good practice and expertise for the benefit of all the pupils. This collaboration and working together is one of the major advantages of being joined together in

a multi academy trust. The trustees however have also worked hard to ensure that the schools also benefit from a number of other initiatives. For example there are a range of shared central services which provide better value for money and greater efficiency. The money saved is re-invested back into the individual schools to improve facilities and teaching for pupils.

Most importantly the schools within the trust have their Catholic faith at the centre of all that they do. The CAO of the trust Michael Corcoran states: *Our vision is the provision and development of a world class community of schools, providing the highest possible care, support opportunities and outcomes for every child. Pupils are cherished for who they are, as much as for what they achieve and all achievements are celebrated.*

*The Trustees are committed to working closely with schools, their governors, staff, parents and the local community to develop together the successful citizens of our future.*



## COVID Advice

Schools within our CMATs are dealing effectively with the pandemic and strive to follow the latest government advice.

In the first week of January the Secretary of State gave a statement to Parliament following the announcement of a national lockdown and the partial closure of schools. Early years settings, including nurseries and childminders, will remain open while schools, alternative provision, special schools, and

colleges remain open to vulnerable children and young people and the children of critical workers. All other children will learn remotely until March 8th at the earliest.

The Department for Education (DfE) has added to its COVID guidance to include information for the current lockdown for schools in England. DfE have also published a [blog](#) containing a Q&A on school closures, remote learning, critical workers and nurseries. The key points



to date for governing boards to be aware of relate to:

### Remote education

The updated guidance published by the DfE sets out a minimum amount of remote education which must be provided for each key stage.

### School meals

- Schools should continue to provide meal options for all pupils who are in school
- Meals should be available free of charge to all eligible pupils who are not attending school.

Schools will provide food parcels or vouchers to families entitled to free school meals, funded by the government.

### Exams and assessment

- Statutory key stage 1 and 2 tests and teacher assessments planned for summer 2021 will not take place. This includes key stage 2 tests in reading and mathematics.
- Students are not being asked to sit GCSEs and A-Level exams this summer. The Secretary of State expects Ofqual to consider a teacher

assessed system as a replacement for these exams. A consultation is under way and will conclude swiftly to give certainty to schools, colleges and students.

### School inspection

Ofsted's "supportive" monitoring inspections will go ahead as planned with a strong focus on the quality of remote education. Ofsted can inspect schools – of any grade – where it has significant concerns about safeguarding or the quality of education being provided, including remote education.

### Asymptomatic COVID-19 testing for pupils and staff

The roll out of mandatory mass testing in secondary schools will continue for those on site, with daily testing of close contacts available to pupils and staff and weekly testing available for staff. Primary staff will be included later in January as planned. More detail will be set out in due course.

All this advice is correct as of January 2021 but is subject to change over time.



COVID-19  
MASS TESTING IN SCHOOLS



## Why join a CMAT?

There are a number of obvious advantages:



Academies benefit from greater freedoms to innovate and raise standards, including:

- Freedom to direct all our funding to meet the needs of our children
- Schools would no longer have to contribute 10% directly to capital projects
- VA Schools pay 20% VAT on capital equipment and IT at the moment - academies do not
- The Trust could use its purchase power/economies of scale to ensure the best value (cost and quality) in purchasing goods and services, such as finance and HR services, meaning more money to spend on the children
- The ability to jointly employ specialist staff directly, e.g. business manager, IT technician, that we would not otherwise be able to afford
- Freedoms around the delivery of the curriculum
- A seamless learning journey from 3 to 18 years -excellence in primary practice can be transferred to secondary and vice versa
- Develop collaboration to stimulate innovative research based approaches, share best practice and co-ordinate focussed CPD
- Quality assurance - High level accountability and review of standards in schools to identify and share areas of strength and target support to specific schools
- Enhanced opportunities for shared projects, events, activities
- Opportunities for professional development and growth of staff – sustainable leadership



## Are there challenges in joining a CMAT?

**ARE YOU UP FOR THE CHALLENGE?**

In any organisation there are going to be challenges and CMATs are no exception. Here are some of the most commonly mentioned:

### Financial arrangements

There can be downsides to centralising finances. Often, this was to do with a large or changing top slice. This could be a concern for school leaders and governors who are not sure what they are getting for their funding. "What is the money for?" Tensions can also arise from pooling finances across schools and central allocations of funding to

schools. Schools can be worried that money could be spent on paying for a central executive team including a CEO etc.

*Answer: Of course there is often a partnership contribution but in Brentwood CMATs it is usually small. Often it will be less than the LA were top slicing so schools actually saw a net gain. Some of our trusts have a zero contribution and schools just pay for the services they buy through the trust. Our trusts employ CAOs to emphasise the charitable nature of our organisations but not CEOs on a strictly*



***business model. We do not support CEOs on exceptional salaries.***

### **Centralisation and decision making**

Some school leaders and governors feared that joining the CMAT would take away their authority and diminish the influence they had on their school. Some feared that the autonomy they were promised at the start wouldn't materialise and that the important decisions would be made by the trust board. That the CMAT board may not reflect their school was another worry and that decisions would take longer if they were more centralised.

***Answer: The Brentwood Diocese ensures all CMATs use it's scheme of delegation which stresses the continued importance of school leadership teams and governors. It clearly defines their role which continues largely as before. The principle of subsidiarity is key: decisions will be made at the most appropriate level closest to the school. So, in effect school leaders will continue to lead the school largely as before and governors will provide the local oversight. Moreover the CMAT board will ensure that it regularly consults with schools and that they are represented appropriately.***

### **Sharing good practice may not be done effectively**

A common drawback associated with belonging to a MAT was the logistics of working together. Participants identified logistical drawbacks whether they were in a small MAT or a large national MAT. Getting everyone in the same place can be costly, time-consuming and frustrating, particularly if a school is an outlier in a MAT or the geographical spread of a MAT is wide.

***Answer: Our Diocesan CMATs focus on regionally based training and CPD based around a geographically convenient hub. Trusts can usually organise or buy in training for a number of schools which is clearly cheaper than individual schools purchasing it for themselves. This can offset the cost of travel and logistics. Moreover schools within a trust sharing good practice and expertise can be a tangible benefit to staff and ultimately pupils.***

These are just a sample of some of the challenges schools may face in joining a MAT. However in the Brentwood Diocese we are confident that we have the experience and expertise to overcome any of these. If you encounter other difficulties, contact your link advisor or the diocesan MAT development officer (see below) and they will be able to help you or put you in touch with others who have encountered something similar and have been able to find a solution.



*"Working in a Catholic school within a CMAT should enable each school to retain its own unique identity"*  
- Bishop Alan

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## Think piece

### What happens when it goes wrong?

This is the first in a series of articles which attempts to address potential issues in schools within a CMAT. As we all know it can be a real problem if schools do not make the grade in terms of government performance measures. So, what should the trust's approach to this be? Remember the trust board is the ultimate accountable body responsible for standards in its schools.

In his book *"Leading multi academy trusts"*, the former National Schools Commissioner Sir David Carter asserts that many smaller trusts don't necessarily have the ability to turn things around quickly in underperforming schools. They often simply don't have the resources or spare capacity to put in place the support a struggling school may need. Moreover delegating significant authority to the local governing body may in effect hinder the recovery if they are part of the problem.

That is not to say it is impossible for small trusts to turn things around in an underperforming school. It does however require an almost forensic analysis of the problem/need and a finely targeted deployment of the available resource support. Longer term sustainability may be an issue here. Larger trusts simply have greater capacity to deploy teachers and leadership support to effect a quick change. It may be prudent to recall the comment by the former Education Secretary Nicky Morgan "A day is a day too long for a child to be educated in a failing school".

David Carter argues strongly in favour of a "slow and sustainable" approach to school improvement and that trust boards should place this at the heart of

their strategic planning. So, for example, instead of investing in relatively expensive short term fixes for year 11 pupils in their GCSE exam year a trust board may well favour another strategy. This could involve employing attendance officers to get persistent absentees back into the classroom. It could involve redesigning the KS3 curriculum to engage more pupils at a younger age. Additionally the strategy could focus on the application of teaching and learning strategies for staff across the school to ensure greater consistency.

At a primary school the strategy might not be to focus simply on English and Maths for year six but to get KS1 right by investing resources to ensure pupils reach the end of that key stage in a better position to engage successfully with the demands of KS2. It could involve investment in developing "cultural capital" for all year groups thereby better preparing pupils across the curriculum. Similarly a focus on sharing good practice amongst staff with the aim of raising teaching standards generally would be likely to improve pupil outcomes in the longer term.

In our CMATs we are fortunate to have many successful schools with an overwhelming number being rated good or outstanding by Ofsted. However some of the outstanding judgements are historical and those schools will be inspected at some point. Whether they can maintain their Ofsted rating may well depend upon the strategies employed now by their trust boards.



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