



Letter from Bishop Alan for Education Sunday 2021

Education Sunday is a day on which can we focus on the wonderful work that is done in the Catholic schools up and down the country. The last year has been a terrible, challenging time for all, as we have had to face the full impact of the pandemic and to find new ways to live and work. Only time will show the full impact of the days that our children have had to stay at home and try to study. There are, I fear, some areas of inequality in the provision of the pupils' learning, which may impinge on their development for some time. Having said that however, I know that the schools in the diocese have worked tirelessly to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on the children. On your behalf and my own, I offer my deep gratitude to all our Catholic schools for all that they have done during the pandemic. I encourage them to keep up the good work and not feel dispirited.

When the Catholic hierarchy was re-established in the ninetieth century, one of the first actions was to establish schools to support the Catholic community. In order to help overcome the many obstacles, including illiteracy, in the way of so many people. In our times the call to make Education a priority has not diminished in any way. As your bishop I heed the call of Pope Leo XIII given over a hundred years ago when he called on the bishops of the world to carry on "*making the young your chief care; press onward in every way your work; and cultivate with enthusiasm and hopefulness whatever good seeds you find: for God, who is rich in mercy will give the increase.*"¹

In recent times some of our schools have had to face hostile approaches from those who do not share our vision for Catholic education. They would want to influence the direction of travel for their own purposes rather than necessarily for the benefit of the children and young people in our Catholic schools. Pope Francis writes that "*Education is an enterprise that demands cooperation on the part of all involved – the family, the school and social, cultural and religious institutions.*"² I feel strongly that the best way to achieve such cooperation which, in turn, furthers the vision and tradition of those pioneers, is for our schools to work more closely together by joining Catholic Multi Academy Trusts (CMATs). Whilst this may be in line with thinking coming out of national Government it is also genuinely my firm belief that this is the best future for our schools. It is an opportunity for schools to work together actively and formally to shape the Catholic education system in their locality. It is this approach that will enable high standards of Catholic education to be maintained and where schools can contribute more widely as beacons of good practice in the local community. Indeed, where CMATs have been established in our diocese benefits have already been identified, including financial savings, greater inter-school support and renewal of the mission they share as Catholic schools.

As the pandemic recedes and a growing sense of normality returns, it is my strong belief that we will be able to move forward collaboratively with the wonderful work of enabling our young people to reach their full potential. I entreat all associated with our Catholic schools, as Pope Francis has said, to "*persevere with courage and tenacity*"³. Once again, thank you to all who work in and support Catholic education whether as pupils, staff, governors or parents. I will keep you in my prayers and ask that you join me in praying for the flourishing of our Catholic School communities.

Yours in Jesus and Mary
+Bishop Alan
Bishop of Brentwood

¹ Spectata Fides p.6 1885

² Address of his Holiness Pope Francis to participants at the seminar "Education: the global compact"

³ Ibid