



CMAT NEWS



BRENTWOOD DIOCESE MULTI ACADEMY TRUST NEWSLETTER

Volume 1, issue 2

Summer Term 2021

Special points of interest:

- Catholic Multi Academy Trusts benefit from capital funding
- New academies minister promotes growth in the system
- The importance of vision and values

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Our trust schools go from strength to strength.....

One of the more tangible advantages of joining a Catholic multi academy trust is the ability to move forward with improving the school estate of the trust's own schools. This can be done by utilising the existing funding arrangements for financing capital building works for academies. A clear example of this was provided by **St. Joachim's Catholic Primary school** in Newham which, as part of **Our Lady of Grace multi academy trust**, was able to complete an impressive building project. The project was the building of the Walsingham wing of the school which opened in September 2019. This project included an extension to the school hall, a new library, new classrooms and new group rooms. All in all it was a very impressive achievement.

Celebration

In celebration and recognition of this milestone the building was opened by Bishop Alan. Head teacher James Allen said: "It is with great pride and joy that I can announce that the new wing of our school has officially opened. Last Thursday, in an historic day for our school, the Walsingham Wing was blessed and opened by Bishop Alan of Brentwood, and what a marvellous day it was. The day began with a special service by the Bishop – attended by the children and special guests. Among the guests invited were ex-head teachers of the school, Fr James, governors, trustees and the deputy Lieutenant for Newham. After the service, the day was commemorated by a whole school photograph, a celebratory lunch and fun activities for the children".

What are the advantages for our academies?

Trust schools have a clear advantage over voluntary aided schools in terms of capital projects. To begin with there is no requirement for governors to find 10% of the cost for new builds or other capital works. As trust schools the government will provide 100% of the total cost. Schools and those responsible for school buildings receive condition funding through different routes depending on their size and type. Each year, the Department for Education allocates funding to help maintain and improve the condition of school buildings and grounds. Larger CMATs receive the School Condition Allocation (SCA) directly to invest in priorities across the schools for which they are responsible. Smaller CMATs can bid for the Condition Improvement Fund. Projects out of the price range for individual schools can thus be afforded by the trust. Prudent use of this funding will be one way in which trust schools can continue to thrive.



Bishop Alan and Fr James at the opening ceremony

Summer Focus on The Assisi Trust



“To inspire, to learn, to achieve

To keep our Catholic faith at the centre of our lives

To fulfil our academic potential

Welcoming all and reaching out to others

To truly be.....

God’s servant first”

This is a Trust based in Southend and South East Essex and consists of 8 primary schools and one secondary school. This is a relatively large trust with over 3,200 pupils covering 13 different parishes. There are over 500 school staff. The aim of the trust is to provide the children in their care with the best possible education within a caring and supportive Catholic ethos. Their website states:

“We will support the spiritual, moral, social, cultural and physical development of each child, as well as maximising progress, achievement and attainment to ensure their intellectual growth and to fulfil their potential”.

The Chief Accounting Officer is Gemma Ackred who combines her role with being head teacher of one of the academies. The chair of the trust board is Frank McEvoy who served for many years as a very successful head teacher in one of our Diocesan schools. Mr McEvoy would emphasise several strengths within the trust, in particular leadership that is practical, pragmatic and non-bureaucratic. He also praises

the close working relationship of the executive leadership team (all the head teachers and CAO) who work well together and share a strong common approach.

Indeed this is a real advantage for academies in our diocesan trusts. All the academies benefit from the collective expertise of leaders working together to develop structures and initiatives across all the schools. This has the potential to secure genuine school improvement and better outcomes for all our pupils over time. It also encourages the sharing of good practice and tangible financial savings which can be re-invested in our schools. The Assisi trust has a particularly strong record in sharing financial expertise and supporting IT across all its academies.



COVID Advice

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

For individuals or groups of self-isolating pupils and pupils who are shielding following government guidance related to coronavirus (COVID-19), remote education plans should be in place.

You should continue to operate as normally as possible. In the event that

restrictions in schools are needed to help contain the spread of the virus, you may be asked to revise your delivery models for a short period of time. To help with this, the Dfe have published a [contingency framework](#), which outlines how schools should operate in the event of any restrictions.

Any decision that there should be local restrictions in any childcare or education settings will be made by central government .



Change at the top

After four years in the role Lord Agnew has stepped down from the post of Academies Minister. He has been replaced by **Baroness Berridge**. She was previously a government whip in the House of Lords who spoke for the government on education issues. The Baroness was educated at Catmose College, Rutland and Cambridge University where she studied Law. She worked as a barrister before being appointed Executive Director of the Conservative Christian Fellowship in 2006. She became a life peer in 2011. She will combine this role as Academies Minister with the role of Parliamentary Under Secretary of state for Women.



Baroness Elizabeth Berridge

Elizabeth Berridge has been an active advocate of the fundamental right to have, choose, change and manifest one's religion or belief, as enshrined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. She is a member of the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief.

Part of Baroness Berridge's initial focus was on the financial performance of academies. It should be noted that in spite of the rigorous expectations most trusts do well.

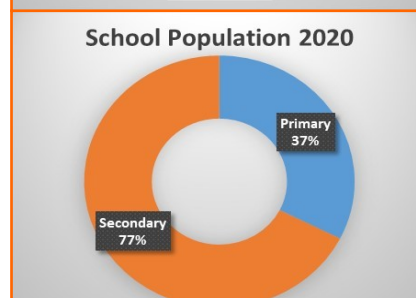
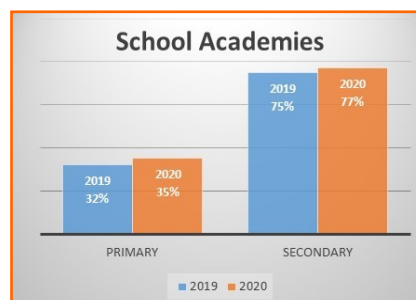
She stated in 2020 *"When I became the minister responsible for the school system in February, I was enormously impressed with the standards of financial management achieved by academy trusts."*

In recent years, the great majority of trusts have reported a cumulative surplus against their budgets and have received an unqualified opinion from their auditor. These are results that all of you involved in running academies have worked hard to achieve, and I want to thank you for that".

As Academies Minister she is ultimately responsible for strategy in relation to the government's academies programme. Her responsibilities include multi academy trust governance, intervention in under performing schools, school capital investment (including place planning and school conditions) among others. She works closely with the Department of Education including the secretary of state, Gavin Williamson.

The number of pupils attending **academies** has continued to grow, along with the number of academies.

At January 2020, 35% of primary schools are now academies or free schools, up from 32% in 2019. These schools account for 37% of the primary school population. 77% of secondary schools are academies or free schools, up from 75% in 2019. This accounts for 77% of secondary school pupils.



Department
for Education



Why a SAT should join a CMAT



The National Governance Association recently held a forum for the leaders of SATs. The focus of March's forum was the future of SATs. The Department for Education (DfE) is no longer approving the creation of new SATs, and is often encouraging existing SATs to merge or join an existing MAT. With the Secretary of State for Education's statement at the FED summit in March that schools becoming part of a MAT is "something we [the DfE] want to see more of", many SATs are understandably unsure of their future place in the evolving school system.

At a recent NGA forum for SAT leaders, some attendees stated the strongest argument for joining or forming a MAT was that the available stand-alone schools were only going to keep declining, so it was best to act now than face a poorer choice in a few years. But a more positive view came from politicians. In his speech at the FED summit the secretary of state, **Gavin Williamson** had this to say about MATs in light of the recent pandemic.

What are the Challenges?

"We can be in no doubt about the scale of the challenges that face us. In order to head off a human and economic catastrophe we must double down on our efforts to enable children to catch up."

Partnerships are so important to our work here. This sharing of expertise and experience is a golden thread throughout many of our reforms.

*And partnerships are also fundamental between schools. **We know that schools benefit from being in a strong family of schools, in other words a Multi-Academy Trust.***

Multi-Academy Trusts are powerful vehicles for improving schools – by sharing expertise, working collaboratively and driving improvements. It is living proof of the old adage, a problem shared is a problem halved.

This is something we want to see more of, because it shows time and again how the MAT model consistently improves outcomes for pupils.

By 2025 we want to see far more schools residing in strong families than we do today, and are actively looking at how we can make that happen."

It is pretty obvious from this speech and others from the likes of the Academies Minister, Baroness Berridge, that belonging to a CMAT is the way forward for all our Diocesan schools. Moreover the government will incentivise the acceleration of that process so that all schools, including those that are currently SATs, are encouraged to join MATs.

Everyone is invited to contact the Diocese to access the support available to begin that journey.



Primary Maths

How do primary schools ensure that pupils are in a strong position in terms of their mathematical thinking and understanding having faced the challenges of the pandemic? One solution is to use the DfE's guidance on teaching maths in primary schools. Many schools naturally prioritised teaching areas of maths as part of their COVID recovery as it's vital for children's progression. The DfE's guidance can be a key tool in supporting this. The materials help to focus on what each year group needs to achieve by the end of the year, which will act as the building blocks for their future learning.

Concentrating on core concepts

Instead of thinking about how to move through the curriculum and mathematical concepts at speed in order to 'catch up', the guidance helps prioritise and concentrate teaching on the core concepts that children need now and how this will help them develop. Children respond positively when learning in smaller steps and are able to make connections.

Ready-to-progress criteria

The guidance identifies a set of ready-to-progress criteria that cover the core concepts from Year 1 to Year 6. These criteria are crucial as understanding each one is a prerequisite for developing mathematical concepts and making connections to other concepts as pupils move through the primary years.

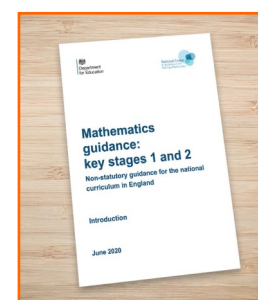
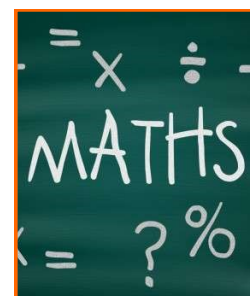
For example, there is no ready-to-progress criterion for fractions in Y2. This is because

the children need time in Year 1 and Year 2 to develop a deep conceptual understanding of multiplication and division before they transfer this understanding to fractions in Year 3.

Many colleagues have found the guidance helpful in planning lessons and working collaboratively to understand and support their children's progression with visible impacts on their learning.

Supporting resources for CPD

Another great addition has been the accompanying PowerPoints on the website of the [National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics \(NCETM\)](https://www.ncetm.org.uk/). There is one for each of the ready-to-progress criteria, unpicking them and suggesting resources and teaching approaches that will help children master the concepts before moving on. These are helpful because they support CPD, which we all know has been difficult to develop during school closures. Many schools focus on the ready-to-progress criteria. They know that these concepts need to be taught deeply so that the children are able to retain and apply their knowledge as they progress through the mathematical concepts throughout the primary years. Perhaps we all need to spend longer teaching the core concepts so that children are able to make the connections in their future learning.



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Think piece

Why does it sometimes go wrong?

This is the second in a series of articles which attempts to address potential issues in schools within a CMAT.

In his book *“Leading multi academy trusts”*, the former National Schools Commissioner Sir David Carter asserts that some trusts fail but **most do not**. Most trusts succeed. But are there common factors evident in less successful trusts? Sir David lists 3 of these common factors. Firstly, it is the case that sometimes no-one has given enough time to decide the reason why the trust should exist in the first place. Secondly, governance can be weak and the leaders are not held to account properly. Thirdly, some MATS comprise of stand alone schools who had no tradition of working together and the leaders valued their autonomy as paramount.

In order to remedy these difficulties Sir David states trusts need to unlock the power of unity as opposed to acting independently. But you can't ask leaders to participate in a faceless corporation, instead you must sit down and thrash out the benefits of collaborating together and have an agreed understanding of this. You must then communicate this to the staff and parents of the school. Teachers become part of a faculty of education and just happen to be in different locations. They are part of a single organisation. As such they can benefit from working together, for example the English departments co-constructing the curriculum and moderating together.

Parents are important in this process. There must be an openness in dealing with them. They need to feel included and able to relate to a face and a name.

It is important to articulate the benefits of the trust to them in a clear and concise manner.

In essence David Carter identifies several key ingredients for a successful trust. It must have values and a vision for the future which is tangible and understood by all. The role of leadership here is key, it's important to remember that the role of CEO/CAO is different from that of a head teacher or executive head teacher. Governance also needs to be strong with the trust board having the right set of skills and experience by which it can hold leaders to account. The trust needs to have a school improvement strategy that meets the needs of all schools including good and outstanding schools. Finally the trust must be seen as a real benefit for the people in it. This may take the form of financial savings for schools due to economies of scale. It may involve access to funding for capital works programmes previously beyond the reach of individual schools. It may involve a sharing of expertise and staff in terms of HR, Finance, site management or IT among others. But the trust must also create genuine career opportunities for its staff in terms of training, promotion and the experience gained through extra responsibilities.

How a trust looks after individual people and has their welfare at heart is often a mark of just how good that trust is.



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