



Special points of interest:

- 10,000 Academy Schools in England
- New Secretary of State for Education
- Levelling up Agenda

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CMAT NEWS



BRENTWOOD DIOCESE MULTI ACADEMY TRUST NEWSLETTER

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The Multi Academy Trust System : Where are we now and what's next?

Did you know that the school system in England is rapidly approaching the 10,000th academy opening? 43% of schools are now academies educating 55% of the pupils in this country. At secondary level 78% of schools have converted, while 37% of primaries have done so. It could be said the logic of a continued fragmentation with the school system split between academy and local authority schools may not make sense for much longer.

"Academy schools are no longer a subset of the school system, increasingly they are the system."

In fact, the move towards a system in which all schools are part of a Trust is now more pragmatic as opposed to ideological. So what are the main reasons for the remaining schools holding back? The answer can be found in the recent DfE publication report "Schools views on the benefits and obstacles of joining a MAT" published in November 2021.

This report identified a couple of main reasons which schools stated as obstacles. Primarily schools said it was fear of a loss of autonomy as the main reason followed by a reduced control over finances and increased workload due to adapting to new procedures or processes.

If this is the case Trusts can focus on having open conversations with potential schools about what people mean by autonomy, and dispel any myths that arise. Those conversations could include a couple of head teachers as part of that discussion so they can highlight how, for example, they feel empowered to focus on teaching and learning within their school because of

the level and types of support the Trust provides. Highlighting vision and strategic plans and how important individual schools are in delivering that would also be helpful, as well as concrete examples of cost savings that have derived from being part of a Trust.

The answer is to be clear on your vision and values and ensure your messaging focuses on:

○ **Why:** The need to secure every possible opportunity to ensure high-quality education for pupils.

○ **How:** Giving staff access to the highest standards of professional development, fulfilling career pathways and opportunities to engage in meaningful collaboration to share learning and further develop practice and curriculum.

○ **What:** High quality teachers and staff in the classroom using their expertise to continuously improve teaching, learning and the quality of education for children and young people.

But the key thing may be about thinking more strategically. The rationale for every step on this path should be about creating better schools, better trusts and a better system. Rather than to do the same old things better, the education system must be designed to do better things and CMATs can be a key component in doing this.

The academy sector is still young enough both to be moulded and to mould the wider school system. The strength of the leaders within it now can help to shape what it looks like for generations to come. As Catholic leaders we are in a unique position to help shape the faith development of our young people for a generation to come.

Focus on The Christus Trust



*“working in
partnership for
the benefit of the
children and
communities we
serve”*

This is a trust consisting of 6 primary schools in Thurrock and South Essex. One of the schools is rated “Outstanding” by Ofsted while the other 5 are all rated as “Good”. This trust includes one of the largest primary schools in England with 3 forms of entry and over 600 pupils on roll. The total number of pupils in all the schools combined is over 2,000. The exceptional head teacher leadership group work collaboratively on a wide range of educational initiatives including peer review, joint moderation and CPD. They also provide strong support for each other in terms sharing best practice and ensuring outcomes for pupils are consistently strong. Catholicity and faith development are other strong features

of these schools which have close links with local parishes. Three of the schools have outstanding section 48 judgements.

The Trust Board contains a wealth of experience including former head teachers, business leaders, educationalists, and those with experience of providing children’s mental health and wellbeing support. The trust employs a central team which aims to cover the financial, HR and school improvement functions thus enabling head teachers to concentrate on teaching and learning in their schools.

The mission statement for the trust states that the ***“Christus Catholic Trust is a beacon of the great treasure of Catholic Education that looks to realise Christ’s desire for us all that we might ‘have life and have it to the full’.*”**



Catholic turn around trust

An interesting recent development in CMATs has been the pilot Catholic “turnaround trust” which has had its remit expanded to take on schools in financial trouble or those that are coasting. It is called the St Joseph’s CMAT and is based in the North West of England. With £1.25m of government funding it will take over Catholic schools unable to find sponsors.

Three of the six schools that the St Joseph Catholic Multi Academy Trust will take on are rated as ‘requires improvement’. All St Joseph’s schools are in the Liverpool city region and have academy orders. A spokesperson said that St Joseph was “more than a turnaround trust. We are a Catholic home for schools at any stage of their development but which are characterised by wishing to work together and share best practice.”

It has said it will focus on “short-term recovery and stabilisation” for schools in challenging circumstances, though some will need only “light-touch” support. The aim is to pass them on to other trusts as “viable assets” and “capacity-givers” in two or three years. The trust describes itself as more “highly ambitious” with a “higher appetite for risk than other MATs”. It will support schools in the Archdiocese of Liverpool and Diocese of Shrewsbury and expects more schools in the summer and a third wave in the next academic year.

One head teacher of a primary school about to join said that opportunities for collaboration, staff development and extra funding would be “hugely beneficial”.

“We know we need to make changes, so it’s positive to be in a trust doing that rapid improvement.”

Nadhim Zahawi

The new Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi was quizzed about his plans for schools at the NAHT school leaders' union's annual conference in London recently. He re-stated his pledge to bring forward a new white paper this year. He said the white paper would ensure "strong schools with excellent leaders and robust systems."

Zahawi said he believed schools "do benefit from being part of a multi-academy trust". "There is evidence that that makes a huge benefit and trusts of course help underperforming schools to improve and provide the opportunities for teachers and leaders to enable them to focus on what I think matters most, which we all agree on, which is high-quality teaching and support for pupils outcomes effectively."

However, he said the government was "not going to set an arbitrary deadline to achieve this."

Nick Gibb

In the September cabinet reshuffle long-serving schools minister Nick Gibb was sacked, bringing to an end his nine-year tenure in the department. Gibb said it had "been a privilege to play a part in helping improve the life chances of the next generation", adding he was "sad" to be leaving. Serving as schools minister for the most of the last ten years, Gibb's departure was unexpected.

Gibb was a divisive figure in the sector. While regarded as somewhat of a hero to fans of traditional education methods, he widely disliked by progressives. Gibb will be remembered for his relentless championing of phonics, overseeing curriculum reforms and introducing tougher exams.

His ability to remain in post through numerous reshuffles was impressive. Gibb had outlasted five education secretaries, the latest being Gavin Williamson, as well as two general elections.

"I think a family of schools if they can be stronger together is a good thing, so that would be my message. I do want us to look at the journey that we've been on and how we're going to move forward together."

A crucial question for the government is whether it will force the remaining local authority maintained schools to become academies, or simply offer them incentives to do so. On this, Zahawi was non-committal.



The Roman philosopher Seneca once said,

"Every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end"

It may be interesting to have a brief overview of the main principles behind his educational thinking which have been a central plank of school curriculum policy for a decade. It is significant that the new **Ofsted framework** reflects his thinking closely. The most recent exposition of these views was delivered by zoom to a conference of the Social Market Foundation last summer. In that speech he said that the 2007 National Curriculum was replaced because it had insufficient subject based content. It was replaced by one containing the "best that has been thought and said". Nick Gibb thinks that all pupils should be taught in schools with a strong knowledge based curriculum and that this will help reduce the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers. This in turn will create a more cohesive society.

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**'7 Myths About Education',
by Daisy Christodoulou**

Nick Gibb would argue that transmission of rich subject based knowledge is the key rather than a competency based curriculum. He says that a great deal of research supports his ideas, notably E.D Hirsch, Derek Matthews and Daisy Christodoulou. The first two found that those students who know more in terms of factual information did better than others in tests. In essence those with more prior knowledge and larger vocabularies did better, students who know more learn more. Gibb said we cannot anymore ignore the evidence that shows that pupils from less advantaged backgrounds are less likely than their peers to access this 'communal knowledge' at home, who by contrast enjoy frequent guided reading with parents from a young age, as well as rich conversations at the family dinner table and cultural visits as they grow older.

In her landmark book, '7 Myths About Education', Daisy Christodoulou deconstructs the myth that the way to develop pupil expertise in subjects like science or history is to teach them to think like expert scientists or expert historians.

She writes, "The difference between experts and novices is that experts have a huge body of background knowledge and processes stored in long-term memory, and that they have spent a huge amount of time practising using that knowledge and those processes. In most fields, it takes several years and thousands of hours to become an expert. There is no short-cut strategy or tactic that can bridge that gap." So, every lesson a teacher spends

trying to make experts out of children through teaching them to 'think like an expert', rather focusing on the essential building blocks of knowledge required on the path from novice to expert, is a lesson wasted.

The contention is that the more shared knowledge we have as a society, the more integrated and inclusive that society. And the vehicle for delivering that shared knowledge is our school system, but only if schools teach a knowledge-based rather than competence-based curriculum. Nick Gibb thinks our schools should be unashamed champions of knowledge; citadels of civilized debate where pupils are encouraged to express views and discuss ideas.

He says ensuring young people are equipped with knowledge is ever more important with the rise of social media, where false narratives, based on fake news, are drawing people in – especially the young – with the starkness of their message and the simplicity of their solutions.

Gibb says he wanted to make sure that every child is taught a broad, ambitious and knowledge-rich curriculum until at least the age of 16 and that this was central to levelling up, assisting with pupil wellbeing and preparing them for the 21st century.

Whether you agree with Nick Gibb's views or not, it is difficult to argue that he has not been a forceful contributor to the educational curriculum debate over the last decade.

Ofsted findings: key messages



Robin Walker

He replaces Nick Gibb who was sacked after serving at the Department for Education for around nine years.

Here's what you need to know about Walker...

1. Walker, aged 43, was appointed as Northern Ireland Office minister in February 2020. He was previously a junior minister at the Northern Ireland office. From July 2016 to July 2019 he was a minister in the Department for Exiting the European Union.
2. He was elected Conservative MP for Worcester in May 2010.
3. Walker was educated at St Paul's School, a private school in London and studied ancient and modern history at Balliol College, Oxford.
4. Walker previously served as a parliamentary private secretary to former education secretary Nicky Morgan.
5. In 2015, Walker was named a parliamentary beer champion! According to his website, this was due to his efforts to stand up for the great British pub, secure reforms to business rates and freeze beer duty.
6. His father was Peter Walker, also MP for Worcester and served in the cabinet under Edward Heath and Margaret Thatcher.



Levelling up

Nadhim Zahawi says : "This country is one of the greatest in the world. Inch for inch, pound for pound, it has always punched far above its weight. Our athletes, our inventors, our artists, our businessmen and women, all of them mark this country out as a very special place which can transform lives.

I haven't had what you'd call a traditional background for a government minister, having arrived in this country as an 11-year-old boy who fled Iraq under Saddam Hussein with my family. I was unable to speak a word of English and hid at the back of the classroom. The support I received from my teachers was life changing and I want to make sure that no matter where that young boy from Iraq goes to school, he has the chance to succeed.

Put simply, while talent is equally spread, the same can't always be said for opportunity. That is why this government has been so committed to levelling up. I want everyone to have a chance to see their potential flourish.

The Levelling Up White Paper sets out how we are going to achieve it. It is going to set new targets to raise school stand-

ards and outcomes for skills, schools, and families across the country. It is everyone's right to have a great, world-class education and schools have a key role to play in levelling up.

We are setting the bar higher for schools: we want 90 per cent of children in England to reach the expected standard in reading, writing and maths by 2030 – making sure pupils leave primary school with knowledge and skills needed to excel at secondary school and beyond.

Schools that have been judged less than Good in their previous two successive Ofsted inspections could be moved into strong multi-academy trusts. In this way they can get the support they need to improve, and that includes attracting the best teachers.

Many of our skills reforms are already well under way. Apprenticeships, T levels, Institutes of Technology are all part of this skills revolution. We are building one of the best technical education systems in the world that is going to drive prosperity at a local level as well as a national one."

Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi has written about why levelling up is so important to him



The Real World Impact of MATs

Trusts don't exist only to exist. They exist to educate children. It's written into their articles of association that they are there to advance education for the public good. There are plenty of examples nationally of MATs taking over struggling schools and transforming them. From North Shore Academy which went from inadequate to outstanding when it was supported by a trust to the work of trusts like Dixons or the Turner Trust. These are examples of successes replicated nationally.

In our diocese we are fortunate to have the majority of our schools rated good or outstanding already but that does not mean they are perfect. We all recognise that we can still improve and that we need to aim as high as possible for the benefit of the children in our care. The diocese would like to see all its schools join a CMAT and that those CMATs become centres of teaching expertise that are helping to share and operationalise high-quality teaching. We believe firmly that the structure of a school trust facilitates this outcome. Strong school trusts are not simply legal entities, they are knowledge-building institutions. It is the role of every governor and school leader to scan the educational horizon to see the challenges and opportunities that face a school under their care. In doing so school leaders need to grasp those opportunities if they will ultimately benefit the young people of the school.

Our diocese already has 6 thriving CMATs and each one is steadily growing. This is a clear sign that they offer opportunities and benefits of which schools want to take advantage. Why else would they seek to join? We know that CMATs benefit from having a mix of primary and secondary schools

especially in terms of developing pedagogy cross phase and facilitating transition. Moreover we know there is an optimum number necessary to secure capital funding allocations automatically rather than having to bid for it with all the uncertainty that that entails. If your school has not yet joined we would earnestly ask you to investigate the issue further and set yourself a timescale to apply.

It may be easier for leaders to delay their decisions and wait but the common good dictates that if we all work together then pupils will reap the benefits now, sooner rather than later. Leadership decisions often require bravery and courage as well as foresight. They are not easy decisions. Change is never easy but the rewards can be great if we are brave enough to pursue them.



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