

Rebuilding the Church, fit for future generations

Growth of Catholic Academy Trusts in Salford

October 2022

The letter sent to all schools on 21 September 2022 confirmed the decision, taken by the Diocesan Trustees and endorsed by Bishop John, to work collectively towards the implementation of a fully CAT model for our schools by 2030.

In this new, emerging landscape, a critical role for school governors and leaders is to look to the future and guide the strategic direction of the totality of our diocesan family of schools. As Catholic leaders, we can play a significant part towards the common good (c795) in 'rebuilding the Church' (Pope Francis) and renewing faith formation to preserve and protect high quality, excellent Catholic education (c806b).

How the 2030 position might be achieved

At this stage we wish to affirm that at a diocesan level no specific timetable of conversions with dates attached to schools has been created. Rather, the variables that may influence such decisions are being refined and a two to three year rolling conversion plan, identifying groups of schools, (the DfE refer to this as 'batches' of schools), will be issued by the end of 2022.

Many colleagues dislike the term 'stakeholders' but, short of having a more appropriate noun, it will suffice and be used to describe the various organisations with a significant interest.

Key Stakeholders (in no particular order)

- School community – Governors, leadership team, staff, parents, pupils, parish community
- Diocese of Salford – The Bishop, Diocesan Trustees, the Episcopal Delegate and the Diocesan Department for Education
- Romero, Emmaus and St Teresa of Calcutta Catholic Academy Trust boards
- DfE Regional Director (through Acts of Parliament, Regulations and regional priorities through the Regional Directors Office (formerly RSC)
- Local Authority

Strong Trusts

The DfE language is 'strong trusts', but they have not formalised a definition of a strong trust. The DfE describe them as resilient, well led and with a clear commitment to high standards through ongoing school improvement. Our diocesan language is of 'strong families' of schools, based upon existing relationships and networks. Families of schools who, with an alignment of mission and the principle of subsidiarity, can thrive and continue to serve their local communities both now and for future generations.

Our challenge is to continue to develop our existing CATs into strong, resilient and collaborative structures to ensure that each child is an enthusiastic learner and all adults have the encouragement and opportunities to learn and develop as teachers and leaders.

Each school will have its own perspective on when might be the best time to join their CAT. Other stakeholders will have their considerations which will help build a picture of what the strategic growth of our CATs will look like in the short, medium and long term.

Applying to join a Catholic Academy Trust

Phase 1 – Governing board resolution, diocesan consent and DfE online application form – typically 2-3 months

- Currently, the decision regarding a school joining a CAT sits, in the first instance, with the governing board making a resolution and applying for voluntary converter status to the diocesan trustees. They will give or defer consent, and the diocesan department for education will regulate the flow of applications to the trustees
- Once Stage 1 and 2 consent is confirmed by diocesan trustees, the school's application to convert and join the CAT is made to the DfE. Each application is then considered by the Advisory Board (AB) representing the Regional Director. The decision to approve a school joining a CAT will be based on the context of the school and the capacity of the CAT to effectively add value to that school
- Once the AB approve the request to join a CAT, the school will receive an Academy Order direct from the Secretary of State (SoS). This would conclude Phase 1

Phase 2 - typically 6-9 months - project planning meetings of all stakeholders dealing with consultations, legal matters, land issues and staffing

- Once the school receives their Academy Order from the SoS, the DfE will appoint a project lead to manage the technical/legal aspects of the conversion process and all stakeholders will be invited to a number of online progress planning meetings. Once an intended conversion date is identified by the school and ratified by other parties, a schedule of date specific tasks are systematically completed concluding with a binding Funding Agreement being signed.

Throughout both phases the views of all key stakeholders will be sought to determine whether conversion within any given timeframe is being supported and meets the needs of the school.

Key Variables

It is important there is a clear understanding of the numerous factors and variables that will influence the timescales for conversion for our schools. The detail which follows is not exhaustive and is subject to revaluation and change as we implement the diocesan strategy. Often, external push/pull factors are influential when making decisions.

<i>Stakeholder</i>	<i>Push/Pull factors which may influence decision on when a school or group of schools will join a trust – Key Variables</i>
School Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent of the desire and commitment from the governing board to convert • How can we add value to our school in the CAT context • Ofsted judgements linked to DfE intervention powers • Changes or potential changes in school leadership • School stability eg, pupil numbers v PAN, budget position • Estates condition and/or planned/in-progress capital works and compliance
Diocese	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversion of families of schools within a strong sphere of influence with schools that may already be in a CAT • School deemed at risk in relation to standards, governance or leadership by Diocese and/or LA • DfE Priority Areas or Education Investment Areas • School viability and sustainability (eg pupil numbers v PAN) • Capacity to support other diocesan or CAT schools • Balance of schools within each CAT – those with both capacity and willingness to provide support and those requiring some level of support • The balance of an LA school estate that are maintained VA against those already academised within the LA • Estates condition and/or planned/in-progress capital works and compliance and current SDSBP balances
Our Catholic Academy Trusts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic growth rather than incremental or piece meal expansion • Balance of strong schools and those requiring additional short/medium term support

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estates condition and/or planned/in-progress capital works and compliance and current SDSBP balances • Risk assessment of financial position, HR and ongoing insurance claims • Geographical spread of schools across a CAT footprint • Balance of schools by phase • A CAT's central services capacity
DfE/Regional Director (RD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools with a directive academy order (dAO) • Schools in scope of current or future DfE powers of intervention • DfE Priority Areas or Education Investment Areas • RD view on schools 'at risk' through regulatory adjustments • Their view on LA priorities and plans
Local Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools the LA believe to be at risk • Where further reductions to school services put our schools at risk • An LA policy is to no longer maintain any schools other than special schools and require schools to join a trust • The balance of an LA school estate that are maintained VA against those already academised within the LA

Sequencing families of schools for conversion

Before the end of 2022, an overview document, to be provided as an Annex to this paper, will be shared. This will identify 'families of schools' and their anticipated sequence into the various rolling phases of conversion. Sequencing will be given for 7 school terms (around 30 months), in advance, beginning from January 2023. The Annex will be reviewed and updated regularly. Families will normally be identified in their local authority, district or geographical location, for example.

A family of schools will come into scope at the beginning of each term. At this point, schools will automatically receive Stage 1 consent from diocesan trustees and should then work with the trust and progress their application to Stage 2. This Stage 2 application requires a governing board resolution and it is anticipated that the completed Stage 2 application will be submitted for trustees' approval within 2 terms of a school coming into scope. At this point the school is able to submit its on-line application for voluntary conversion direct to the DfE on the dedicated sign in service.

Throughout this period schools will be offered direct support from diocesan and CAT officers.

Next steps

We recognise the challenges ahead in articulating how we will sequence and deliver the conversion of schools into our CATs. We will do this in close collaboration with our three CATs and their respective CSELs. The triangulation of the diocesan, LA and DfE strategic plans will be critical. At present, some of these elements are not yet fully developed and ongoing dialogue is taking place.

Given that the DfE wish for conversions to take place in batches of schools (families of schools) over the conversion of individual schools, this will be foremost in our thinking. This will not mean that individual governing board resolutions to seek voluntary converter status would not be considered or approved by diocesan trustees and therefore may continue to be made at any time using the established, published protocols.

We will soon seek the initial views of schools based around this question: *'What stage is the governing board at in your planning to join your Catholic Academy Trust?'*

A link (for a google form) will be circulated shortly and replies from each board will be required.