

ACADEMIES BRIEFING MESSAGE

JOHN HENRY NEWMAN CATHOLIC COLLEGE

14TH JULY 2016

Good morning again and thank you all for coming today.

My duty is to speak to you as the Director of the DES and on behalf of the Trustees of the Archdiocese of Birmingham.

I am very grateful for the presence of Pank Patel the out-going Regional Schools Commissioner for the West Midlands and to Paul Barber the Director of the Catholic Education Service for their presentations this morning. They have enhanced our understanding of the current and potential future educational landscape of this country and the way in which the Church continues to be at the forefront of championing Catholic education at this time.

On behalf of Archbishop Bernard, I wish to make it known that the Archdiocese of Birmingham will continue to promote and work for the security, protection and ongoing improvement of Catholic education across the schools of the Archdiocese. We must continue the mission entrusted to us of educating young people in an environment of faith, helping them to hear the Gospel of salvation and to grow in faith. This work coincides with supporting parents as first educators, the on-going mission of our parish communities, and assisting young people to grow as members of the Body of Christ and great citizens of our world.

For those of you who attended the Leadership Conference at the ICC in Birmingham on 17th June, you may recall that I remarked on Catholic education being provided in different forms in the past, both here in the UK and around the world. The Catholic community has always had to work with the challenges of change; reading the signs of the times, ensuring that Catholic education is fit for purpose and that the powers of structures of any day do not dampen its core purpose and mission.

Dear friends, we are very conscious that we are living through one of these times of challenge and change. The last five years have seen fast and furious change to our education system; it has demanded that we look at new ways of working with one another and adopting new systems. The advent of teaching schools, national leaders of education, new models of school leadership and changes to initial teacher training alongside the academies programme are just some of the signs of this shift.

The Royal Assent that has been given to the Education and Adoption Bill, together with the publication of the White Paper that will form the basis of a further education bill at the back end of this year, requires the DES on behalf of the Archbishop and Trustees to provide the features of a strategic plan for the future of our schools.

When the academies debate and then the diocesan academies policy began to unfold some years ago there were key questions such as, "Could we?" or "Should we?" The approval of documents and the transfer to academy status of currently 93 of our diocesan schools tells the story that the Trustees of the Diocese are supportive of schools moving forward to academy status. In all of this, the DES, working on behalf of Diocesan trustees, has taken an "academy neutral" position, indicating our support for all schools be they academies or continuing as VA Schools.

Whilst the DES continues and will always support every school within the family of schools in the Diocese, the strategic position that we are now adopting for the future is changing.

So what is this position?

- 1) No Catholic school in the Diocese should be seen as working in isolation. There must be a clear working relationship established with local Catholic schools to assist with school improvement, leadership recruitment and formation, the governance of schools and working together to strengthen our Catholic mission. This is far more than simply organising joined up events, it demands of all schools that what they do together is striving to secure, protect and improve Catholic education.

By saying this, I do not wish to see undone great links that have been established with other community schools. These should flourish and grow, but there is a need to ensure that no culture of isolation exists with the Catholic schools of the Diocese.

This will demand for some a new spirit of transparency and being open to dialogue and working together on really important issues. I know that there is a massive amount of work being undertaken across Diocesan schools to make this a reality, but as the future unfolds, more opportunities will need to be taken.

I would ask you all to look at your local family of schools and just make sure that links are strong and that no one is in isolation. If you are a school that has successfully worked independently, it is important that critical links around key areas of your success are formed with your local Catholic schools. You may well have much to offer them, and they in turn have an opportunity of enriching your work.

In the past the DES has faced some critical moments, such as working to find appropriate leadership succession where schools have been isolated, or supporting partners to aid school improvement. When Catholic schools work together through a model of school to school support, evidence suggests that it begins to make these issues more manageable and easier to find solutions that help schools improve.

- 2) The on-going formation and development of these relationships between schools are so important because every Catholic school in this Diocese now needs to be **academy ready**. This is going to demand of all governing bodies that they make preparation for the real possibility of joining a multi academy company, or alongside other local Catholic schools forming a new company.

Real foundation work for this task is undertaken by the formation of the kind of working practices that I have outlined already. When we are working together to drive school improvement, leadership formation and our Catholic mission, then we will be in a stronger position to be part of a multi academy structure.

I know that on all governing bodies, the academies agenda has been an item for discussion and I appreciate that you will have monitored developments in the academies programme closely. What I am asking of you today is to take a proactive position as governing bodies to look at **being ready** to form an academy. The DES advises that a good course of action would be for governing bodies to create a small working party to reflect on this. It would serve the purpose that such a working party be established across other local Catholic schools. I am not asking you to do this work and undertake this activity to reach a “yes” or “no” decision on

becoming an academy, but rather to do it so that you are *ready* to become an academy. Much of what we have been doing together in the past few years has been about discerning whether we should make the decision or not; this is now about being ready to take this option.

So why am I asking you this? The agenda of the government is clear: the majority of schools in this country will become academies over the forthcoming years. Whilst the political wrangling of past months has reached a level of compromise for some, the academy solution for most schools is unlikely to disappear. Why? a) The failure of local authorities to be able to provide adequate resources to support schools and any underperformance by local authorities in raising the standards of education. We know that this may well have implications in the future for our schools if an academy order is issued on all maintained schools in any local authority. We know that in the area that our Diocese serves, we have a number of vulnerable authorities. b) The powers of the Secretary of State to issue an Academy Order on any School have been strengthened by the new Education and Adoption Bill. We know already from our experience in the Diocese of two Orders being issued, one which has caught us by surprise, the least expected, and another for a school that has been struggling to come out of special measures. c) Increased powers of intervention in struggling schools that receive a warning notice about their performance. These powers really mean that schools need proactive, robust intervention that will bring change at a rapid pace. Whilst we have tremendous school improvement tools to hand, the RSC and the Diocese will want to see that our improving schools have secure structures around them enabling this work to flourish. d) Money. This I suggest is a huge argument for change. There is no doubt that current budgetary issues and changes to the national funding formulae are causing grave challenges for many schools. Schools in financial decline will need to be able to operate with slimmer services as well as working with other schools to improve their economies of scale. Less money also means the need to share more effectively resources in terms of time and personnel which is another reason why our schools need to be academy ready.

So, I am outlining to you some of the reasons why the Diocese is asking you to become academy ready. In terms of moving forward and looking at structures I also want to announce some other changes. For schools converting to academy status we have listened carefully to what has been said to us in dialogue with many schools and academy boards. The Diocese would envisage in the future, the possibility of MACs being formed to include ***more than one secondary school and their feeder primary schools***. Our reasoning for this change is to support greater school improvement work for secondary schools and also strengthen the financial resource of the MAC with greater numbers of students.

For those of you whose schools are already in a MAC structure you might be asking yourselves, 'What does this mean for us?' I do believe that you are very involved in some of this change. A responsibility on the part of the Board of Directors is to provide opportunities of increasing the capacity of your MAC by ensuring that the majority of feeder or neighbouring schools are included in your structure. It may also be a moment in time when consideration is given to the possible amalgamation of two MACs to increase capacity in the local area.

This all sounds fine as a blue print, but there are some other implications. The first is financial. All of this will demand capital for legal costs and the whole process of forming the MAC or changing the structure of an existing MAC. I am pleased to announce that the DES has been in consultation with the Regional Schools Commissioner and we have been assured that

additional financial support will be made available to support conversions and changes to academy documents as and when required. It will be the task of the DES to broker on behalf of your MAC the necessary financial support to help you to make this a reality.

Supporting Developments

The DES now has a wide range of experience and expertise in the formation of multi academy companies. It is our intention to assist schools in the project management of establishing multi academy companies through the guidance we can provide and the services that we can broker. For each new MAC being formed, or consultation on existing MACs coming together, we would envisage that a named officer from the DES would support you through the transition, be available to help you with the process and assist with your queries. Within our current MACs there is now a wide range of expertise that alongside the DES can really help to support the transition work that needs to be undertaken.

I want you to know that as a Diocese we are wanting to take these developments very seriously and wish to help you in the tasks you undertake not only in the period of transition, but also as the new or expanded MAC begins to operate.

It is our intention to explore the best ways of providing you with guidance on support services that are available to you. Some of these services will be familiar and at work in your schools, others may well be new. There may be opportunities in the future for the Diocese to provide greater centralised services around key areas such as HR, legal and financial advice. This is an area of support that we are actively pursuing at this time.

At this juncture I wish to announce that the DES intends to appoint a new senior officer to work alongside Yvonne Brennan in school improvement. The post holder will assist in the monitoring of school and academy performance across the Diocese and ensure that effective support is implemented.

During the summer term we began a financial health check on our multi academy companies through the work of auditing annual financial returns. A response to these audits is soon to be shared with the individual MACs. Further information may be requested from the MACs with guidance and direction for the future being offered. These are important moves to secure, protect and improve Catholic education within our Diocese in the years to come.

Whatever the future might be, we see it as a duty on our part to be able to direct you to some important services that we know to be of high quality, value for money and who work within a strong ethical business framework to support you. There are many services on the market, many may follow the letter of the law in what they provide, but some may not always conduct themselves in an ethical framework which mirrors the Church's teaching on social or economic justice.

A key area of our work in the future, and we would hope that this work is undertaken in conjunction with our multi academy companies, our teaching schools and national leaders of governance, is the on-going formation of Boards of Directors. This formation demands an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the Board as well as those of Academy Committee Members and Local Academy Committee Representatives. The structure of every

MAC is built upon the Catholic principal of “communion”. It is not simply a communion amongst member schools, but it is also a communion amongst those *who lead and manage the MAC at every level*. Directors and Local Academy Committee Representatives need to know what each other’s roles and responsibilities are and ensure that they undertake them.

As we move forward as a diocesan family, the DES sees this area of support as being critical to success in the future. It is also going to demand an on-going recruitment drive for directors and governors. Archbishop Bernard Longley will be addressing this issue in a forthcoming Pastoral Letter for Education Sunday. At this time the DES will be working closely with the Catholic Education Service in promoting governance through a strong recruitment campaign.

In my address to you today, I am setting forward the key Catholic principals of “Communion” and “Mission”. Our insistence on schools continuing to work together and being ready to become academies in the future is so that our mission as the Church to the children and to the world can be realised.

To help you reflect further, the DES will be working over the summer to look at some possible groupings of schools and make them available to you. (This will probably be available at the start of the new academic year). I wish to add that this is to assist you in dialogue and discussion at a local level, but the very best dialogue for the future will be that which you create within your local family of schools.

I hope that what I have put before you today will enable you to go away and to reflect in your communities about the future. You will notice that we have not placed any time-scales around future developments, but this is something you may very well wish to consider with the DES. I am conscious that some of the changes will happen sooner than others given the challenges that some of our schools face as we move into the future.

Dear friends, I ask you to accept these words in the spirit they are offered today. This is a strategic approach that I offer on behalf of the Archbishop and Trustees for the future of Catholic education in this Diocese.

Fr. Jonathan Veasey
Director
Diocesan Education Service
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