



Archdiocese of Birmingham

Diocesan Education Service

Archdiocesan Vision For Catholic Education

Speech given by His Grace Archbishop Bernard Longley at the launch of the new Archdiocesan Vision for Catholic Education 11th July 2024

It is wonderful to welcome you as representatives from our family of schools across the Archdiocese. Firstly, I would like to thank you for the tireless work that you do on a daily basis to pass on the Word of God and to allow children in our schools to be influenced by it. Your vocation serves as a daily witness. As I visit schools, it is wonderful to see how children in your care flourish as a result of the love and devotion you give in our MACs and schools.

When we profess our belief, in the Nicene Creed, in one, holy, catholic and apostolic church we are acknowledging the gift of unity which has been entrusted to us in its fulness as Catholics. But we also receive the gift of unity as a task to which we must be committed. This is made all the greater as we are facing uncertain times in education with many challenges ahead.

I could not unfortunately join you at your recent leadership conference led by Canon Jonathan and Steve. As we look forward, we pray for the strength we need for a new beginning and relationship as we move from collaboration to co-responsibility so that all schools are part of a smaller number of strong and flourishing Catholic multi-academy trusts. The development of CMATs, focused on the achievement of the vision as set out in the strong and flourishing Catholic MAT framework, will enable the sharing of experiences and resources to more effectively secure the future of our Catholic education system. Importantly, the framework substantiates the role of subsidiarity in terms of each school's vital role in its individual context at the heart of its local community.

The framework aligns with the diocesan vision statement which says:

We are called to be a Catholic diocese which is:

faithful to the mission entrusted to us by Jesus Christ

full of missionary disciples who work together co-responsibly
in vibrant communities of faith,
joyful in their service of God and neighbour.

The new CMATs will provide, with God's help, the strength for us to ensure the vision is a living reality in our education system. In these times of challenge in our schools, the CMAT will facilitate co-responsibility and empower us to work in vibrant, joyful communities so that we can continue to provide faith-filled schools that have the resources they need, both now and in the long term, to provide for children who are at the centre of our mission.

I recognise the transformational change required to realise this vision. There are many moments when we are asked, as individuals or as the Church, to place our trust fully in Christ – to acknowledge that we cannot see the full picture yet – and to pray that he will let us see our lives and our mission as he can see them. This has been very much my prayer as we have developed the education vision for the future – a future that lies entirely in the Lord's hands but which he needs us to bring about in his name. Psalm 94 reminds us that we are the people who belong to his pasture, the flock that is led by his hand. I am asking that you unite behind this new vision so that we are led by his hand and engage in a new approach to fulfilling the Church's mission in our schools.

Let us remember the words of our Lord in the Gospel of John: "I came so that they might have life and have it to the full" (John 10:10). This full life is not just a promise but a mission for us to realise through our collective efforts in education. By forming these larger trusts, we aim to create flourishing environments where every child, particularly the disadvantaged and those with special educational needs, can thrive spiritually, academically and personally.

Therefore, I am asking Steve and his team to work with you in a spirit of unity and hope to create an inaugural large, strong, and flourishing Catholic Multi-Academy Trust (CMAT) in our Archdiocese. By bringing together the multitude of talents and resources available within our larger, stronger, and flourishing CMATs, we will be able to provide enhanced support and opportunities for all pupils, staff, parishes, and communities. Let us move forward with faith and confidence, trusting in the Lord's guidance and the strength of our community.

Following careful consideration and discussions with trustees, the Department for Education and the Education Skills and Funding Agency, the first CMAT will be created in the north of the diocese to open on 1st September, 2025. The MACs and schools comprising the CMAT are displayed on the screen. A key reason for the choice of CMAT is the relatively small number of voluntary aided schools involved in the transfer. This reduces the complexities of the transfer and enables the well-established MACs to join together and realise the abundant collective talent that each comprises. I am also very pleased to announce that Steve will from 1st September 2024 be the permanent and full time Director of Education, relinquishing his role as Painsley Catholic Academy's CEO.

I realise that some MACs and schools will be disappointed that they are not involved in the first project. However, I have asked Steve to ensure that he reaches out across the Archdiocese to ensure that knowledge and skills are utilised as we reflect on the implementation of this first project. We will need all of you to unite to achieve our collective aim and we pray that the Holy Spirit guides us throughout the journey.

Further announcements will be made regarding the subsequent CMAT projects after we have had time to reflect on the first CMAT's journey. This will ensure that lessons are learned and implementation plans adapted accordingly. In the meantime, I am asking voluntary aided schools and MACs to continue their conversations so that they are ready when their time arrives.

In conclusion, I call upon each of you to support this initiative wholeheartedly. Let us work together to build a future where our schools are beacons of faith, hope, and love. As St Paul reminds us in his letter to the Corinthians, "In the same way, though we are many, we are one body in union with Christ, and we are all joined to each other as different parts of one body." Together, united in our mission, we can achieve great things for the glory of God and the betterment of our children.

May God bless this new endeavour, and may He guide us in our efforts to create a truly flourishing Catholic Multi-Academy Trust.

Thank you, and God bless you all.