



Archdiocese of Birmingham

# Diocesan Education Service

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7<sup>th</sup> October 2016

Dear Colleagues in Catholic education,

## **Follow up to the DES Academies Briefing of July 2016**

I am writing to provide you with promised follow up information from the DES academies briefing meeting which took place in July.

In prefacing this information, I would ask we remember that the task of Catholic education is truly at the heart of the mission of the Church to evangelise and bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to people of every time and place. The teaching of the Church continually emphasises the contribution Catholic schools make to the spread of the Gospel through the work of educating our young people of every generation. The Church's vision for education centres on every human person being made in the image and likeness of God and called by Christ to receive the gift of life in its fullness.

As we reflect on this universal mission of the Church, we see Catholic education being provided in a wide variety of settings and for different audiences. Yet the vision and purpose of the Church's work remains the same. In this country Catholic education has been organised and provided in different ways to meet changing social, economic and political landscapes. We are conscious that at this time, we find ourselves in such a time of change. Living and working through change, we have the responsibility of continuing to promote the task of Catholic education as part of the Church's mission.

I want to thank everybody who attended the DES academies briefing in July, and for the interest and discussion that has arisen from that meeting. On that occasion I outlined a change in policy from the Archdiocese concerning the future organisation of our schools. A request was made to every governing body for their schools to become "academy ready". I outlined this would involve entering into dialogue with other Catholic schools so as to be ready to form new, or join existing multi academy companies. The change in the policy also included opportunities for new and existing MACs to include more than one secondary school and for the potential merger of some MACs.

To aid these discussions, and prepare to become “academy ready” the DES is providing you with additional information and guidance materials. Accompanying this letter on the website at <http://www.bdes.org.uk/latest-news.html> is an associated guidance document for becoming “academy ready” and for moving forward the discussion and commitment to becoming part of a multi academy company. You will see from the document, we are recommending a “phased approach” to support your understanding of what to do next. The aim of this approach is to help all schools become academy ready within a 6 month period which we believe is a realistic and positive development. I ask you to read this document carefully and to begin considering how you might enter into dialogue with other schools to form or develop further a multi-academy company. A key aim of this consultative work is to ensure that no school in the Archdiocese is left in isolation, so consideration needs to be given to dialogue with schools in your neighbouring area.

I am issuing this guidance one week ahead of releasing suggested academy groupings of schools. I am very aware that groupings have been the subject of much debate and comment since the academy briefing meeting. Before issuing them I am asking that you *take time to read this related guidance* before receiving from the DES the suggested groupings. These will be sent out next week.

I want to emphasise that the DES is providing this guidance and the proposed groupings of schools as part of a *consultative process* with the schools of the Archdiocese. This is a medium to long term strategy which will demand *much input on a local and diocesan level*. We acknowledge that some of the proposed groupings of schools may take time to develop and may be subject to change based on consultation. However, we cannot accept that any school is left isolated and vulnerable and all schools should be in a position to belong to an appropriate multi academy company. The DES will be listening and engaging in discussion with you as the academy strategy moves forward.

The proposed groupings of schools will be based upon geographical areas and linked to feeder primary and secondary school arrangements. You will see from the groupings that consideration has been given to the “size” of the MACs in terms of the number of pupils which has implications for access to capital funding. (See the DfE guidance on capital funding <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/capital-funding-for-multiacademy-trusts-mats>) Where it makes sound sense for more than one secondary school with their linked feeder primary schools to form a MAC then we would ask of you how this may be achieved recognising that this can be planned and prepared for in a staged manner.

In essence the main features of our proposals include:

- Groupings of voluntary aided schools that we can envisage forming a multi academy company.
- Voluntary aided schools joining MACs that are currently in operation.
- In some parts of the Archdiocese the proposed amalgamation of MACs to create a bigger MAC with greater opportunities for secondary schools to work together as well as increasing the size of the MAC and potentially improving the financial and educational resources available to the schools.



The DES will be available to work with our schools as they consult together in taking the academies strategy forward. A lead diocesan officer will be available to support groups of schools through the process of becoming "academy ready." I strongly advise that you seek out this support as it will relate closely to diocesan policy and legal documentation. Other third parties or 'academy consultants' will not be familiar with our policy or approach to the academy strategy. It is therefore extremely important that our DES officers are used when schools are seeking advice, guidance or support.

In conclusion, Catholic education has always played a significant part to the mission of the Church in the Archdiocese of Birmingham. The strategy that the Archdiocese is now providing is to secure, protect and work for the improvement of Catholic education as we move into the future. I thank you for the work you undertake on behalf of the Church for the schools of the Archdiocese of Birmingham.

With my prayers and kindest wishes,

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jonathan Veasey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Fr. Jonathan Veasey  
Director  
Diocesan Education Service