



Archdiocese of Birmingham

# Diocesan Education Service

## Archdiocesan Vision For Catholic Education

*Speech given by Steve Bell, Director of Education at the launch of the new Archdiocesan Vision for Catholic Education 11<sup>th</sup> July 2024*

Thank you, Archbishop Bernard, and thanks to you all for being here this afternoon. It is truly wonderful to see you as we embark, with hope, on this journey together. We, as stewards, have the opportunity to secure the very best Catholic education for generations to come but this will only be achieved through working together, deep prayer and trust in the Holy Spirit. This is a point in our history that we are called to truly embrace Catholic Social Teaching as a way of life. I understand that you have worked hard to establish your MACs and schools and that you feel a natural loyalty and love towards your existing colleagues and pupils. Now is the time to flourish together so that our collective God-given talents are truly realised for the benefit of **all** children in our Catholic schools. The best and only way to achieve that is through working together to ensure that our collective talents are pooled.

I begin my new role in September as permanent Director of Education with an immense feeling of responsibility. To be honest, I feel very sad to leave Painsley MAC behind as I love my team and the pupils in the schools. However, I recognise that these are feelings related to my own human frailties of self-interest. Indeed, it was fitting that the second reading from last Sunday's Mass was St Paul's letter to the Corinthians in which he wrote 'So I shall be very happy to make my weaknesses my special boast so that the power of Christ may stay over me.' Responding to St Paul, we must all recognise our weakness in terms of self-interest and respond by acting in solidarity, kindness and hope as we aim to become a truly flourishing Catholic education service. By working together, we will realise a brighter future for our nearly 90,000 pupils in our 245 schools. By seeing that bigger picture and realising our responsibility towards each other, our children will flourish with the new opportunities afforded to them. Let me be clear, we need each and every one of you to achieve the vision. However, like my own position, our roles will need to evolve as we aim to flourish for the benefit of each other.

You will have heard, again and again, that our aim is to deliver a flourishing diocese. And the greatest mission will be to break down the barriers to faith and opportunity, which hold back too many of our children and therefore scar the formation and life chances of our young people. In a flourishing diocese, **every** young person will be at the heart of the Mission in the years to come.

This will mean:

- Giving all of our children the very best Catholic education so that Catholic Social Teaching truly impacts their daily choices
- The creation of strong Chaplaincy teams that support the Mission and the clergy in our parishes
- Enhanced support for children with special educational needs and disabilities
- Greater support for the marginalised, for example, those who struggle in mainstream education and who are at risk of exclusion.
- Improving mental health support for all of our children, and,
- Delivering a people strategy that results in enhanced formation and professional development for school leaders, including directors and governors, and all staff within our schools. Indeed, with the new CMATs, there will be new and exciting roles created that will lead to enhanced job satisfaction, career development and opportunities.

The Catholic values that underpin the mission, the values that drive us all every day, will be at the heart of our approach.

We must be an inclusive Diocesan family for every child, for every young person, for every parent, for every parish, for every director, governor, member of staff, and school leader. A Diocese for each other.

As permanent Director of Education, I will focus, relentlessly, on improving the formation and life chances of all our children, staff and communities so that there are high and rising standards throughout Catholic education. Put simply, to build a better future for all of us.

Our new focus means a new direction in strong and flourishing CMATs, which will come round soon to you all. Our first task is to create this new CMAT in the north of the diocese and, as per the EEF Implementation Planning research, reflect on the lessons of implementation. We will not rush the journey to full academisation but we must all be ready to join when called. This means that we cannot give a specific date for when other new CMATs will be created or the composition of the CMATs but we plan for this to be in the medium term rather than the long term. Please continue to have conversations with VA schools about joining your MAC. Also, ensure your MAC is beginning to work as a larger CMAT by reaching out to other MACs in your area. There is nothing stopping MAC alignment pre a move to a CMAT. In fact, it is essential. There are only two rules: put the mission of the Church first and inform the diocese of planned developments.

And, of course, this will also involve new working groups, which will be confirmed in the weeks ahead. Quite simply, the time for collective participation is now. We need your knowledge and skills to ensure the future success of Catholic education in our Archdiocese.

I do not underestimate the scale of the challenge ahead of us but with God's help and your support we will achieve the vision.

It is a challenge to which we must all rise. And because we want a fresh start and a new, hopeful beginning, the way that we do that must and will change from the past. As I said at the Leadership Conference, the tragedy is that we are less helpful than we might be, not because we are inherently selfish, but because we don't appreciate what we have to give. We need a spirit of courage because when we are more positive about the situation – when we speak well of colleagues, when we praise them, when we offer help and give our time, then we become a more positive colleague with whom to work.

So, I am determined that we will drive change together; together across our Archdiocese.

I know that nobody in this room is here unless you are driven by the determination to deliver a better future for all of our children in our Catholic schools. So I am deeply thankful for all you do for and in Catholic education in our Archdiocese.

We truly appreciate your choice to work in the Archdiocese, on the greatest of our causes, delivering the Mission to our children, caring for them, their education, shaping their future.

I want the Archdiocese to be a place where every one of you in our CMATs and schools is proud and happy to be a part of. An Archdiocese where your vocation, commitment and collective contribution make the difference and are central to everything that, together, we do and achieve.

I very much look forward to working with you with hearts full of hope, minds open to possibility, and hands ready to build. Together, let us create a future where every child has the opportunity to flourish, where every school is a sanctuary of learning and faith, and where the transformative power of Catholic education shines brightly for all to see.