Catholic Education Service
Since 1847

Catholic education - building and sustaining for the benefit of future generations

Context

- The Catholic Church has actively engaged for some years in debate and reflection about the impact of academisation and the structures that will best protect and strengthen Catholic education for the future.
- Each diocesan bishop is responsible for Catholic school organisation in his diocese and for securing and developing Catholic education for future generations. In making decisions about school organisation, diocesan bishops consider the needs of their own schools, the needs of their communities, the common good, and how their schools can best support each other to provide excellent outcomes for all, particularly those most in need.
- Each diocesan bishop is entrusted with safeguarding the schools founded in his diocese through the hard work and dedication of Catholic communities of the past.
- Whilst each diocesan bishop acts autonomously; all diocesan bishops have published strategies that involve a transition towards full-academisation to safeguard Catholic education for future generations.
- Around half of all schools in England, including Catholic ones, have become academies, with more doing so every year.
- Becoming an Academy does not alter a school's relationship with the Church.
- Academy trusts are the civil vehicles which have been chosen by the Church to preserve Catholic education for the future.
- Academisation provides opportunities to deliver functions centrally and with our Catholic ethos front and centre, including the provision of formation, professional growth and the development of talent.
- We are all called to work together to build on the legacy, collaborate for the common good, and act in solidarity with the Church's mission in education to provide the best outcomes for children, families and communities.

If you would like to know more about why the Church provides schools, please see Christ at the Centre.

The following are questions and answers for school staff, parents and governors currently discussing becoming an academy, based on the Catholic education sector's experiences.

Q: Is academisation the same as privatisation?

A: No. Academy trusts, like maintained schools, are charities. They are public bodies funded with public money and they are accountable for that funding directly to the government. Academy trusts are not private, profit-making organisations, the only funding difference between an academy trust and a maintained school is the route through which they receive their public funding.

Academy trusts are subject to stringent accounting requirements which are set out, for example, in the Academy Trust Handbook and the Academy Accounts Direction. Academy trust accounts are audited by independent auditors.

The land and buildings occupied by Catholic schools are owned by dioceses or religious orders, not local authorities. When a school becomes an academy, that does not change: the land and buildings continue to be owned by the same diocese or religious order.

Schools that are part of Catholic academy trusts remain in the ultimate control of the Church, they are not "handed over" to any private individual or company to run.

Q: Do Catholic academy trusts pay school staff less?

A: No. Staff who transfer to an academy trust are protected by law from any detrimental changes to their terms and conditions of employment.

In addition, all bishops require their Catholic academy trusts to adhere to the government's School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document and other nationally agreed terms and conditions for teachers and support staff. There are also new government controls on pay for academy trust executives which Catholic academy trusts will be required to adhere to alongside the rest of the sector.

Q: Does being part of an academy trust benefit staff?

A: Yes. Academy trust structures provide more opportunities for professional development pathways and career advancement. They enable the sharing of good practice across phases, and the creation of roles that would not be possible in a single school structure due to funding constraints.

FIND OUT MORE: faced with a shortage of applicants for school chaplain vacancies, Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Multi Academy Trust created a career pathway from apprentice level up to regional chaplaincy director, to support recruitment and retention. To avoid teaching assistants taking on extra pastoral duties beyond their role, a lay chaplain support staff post was also created.

FIND OUT MORE: amid a national teacher shortage, Xavier Catholic Education Trust recruits trainee teachers from among its own pupils, parents and support staff.

Q: Are academy trusts unaccountable?

A: No. Academy trusts are financially accountable to the government, and they are also accountable to their bishop and to the charitable trustees providing the Church land and buildings that they occupy. Catholic academy trusts have local committees of their board of directors who are rooted in their local communities and parishes and who subject them to local scrutiny. Academy trusts are also legally required to collaborate with local authorities and other local schools.

By law, Ofsted will begin inspecting academy trusts, a requirement of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026.

Q: Are the curriculum requirements different in an academy trust?

A: No. By law, academy trusts must deliver a broad and balanced curriculum, including following the national curriculum, a requirement of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026. They must also follow the Religious Education curriculum set by their bishop.

Q: Do individual schools lose their identity?

A: No. Catholic academy trusts have local committees of their board of directors who are rooted in their local communities and parishes and who subject them to local scrutiny. One of their primary functions is to ensure that their schools retain their unique identity, reflect the needs of their local communities and collaborate with families and parishes.

Q: Our school is one of the best in the area. Why risk this by becoming an academy?

A: In many areas the demand for school places is diminishing. This means that more schools are becoming financially vulnerable. Being part of a Catholic family of schools sharing resources helps to protect against this and any austerity agenda of future governments. Catholic social teaching requires all schools to act for the common good. Academisation is not just about how it can benefit an individual school, but how schools can use their gifts, talents and resources to support other schools and pupils in the diocesan family of schools.

FIND OUT MORE: the Diocese of Westminster Catholic Academy Trust (DoWAT) recruited an educational psychologist; macro-SENCo; autism advisory teacher; speech and language therapists; family support workers; training for school staff including in English as an Additional Language and sensory needs. Pupils with an EHCP in DoWAT schools now achieve a full grade higher in each GCSE than the national average.

Q: Do academy trusts divert money from already-stretched school budgets to fund unnecessary central functions?

A: No. The government gives maintained schools' funding to local authorities first. Those authorities then use some of that funding either through a 'top slice' or traded services to fund their

education departments. Academy trusts receive funding directly from central government and they use some of the funding to provide essential centralised services such as banking and finance, estates and human resources. The provision of centralised services is more cost-effective than entering into multiple service level arrangements at an individual school level. This frees up more funding for pupils and enables academy trusts to provide more consistent, bespoke services with our Catholic mission in mind. Central functions also free up school leaders to focus on educational outcomes for their pupils and the way in which they serve their local community.

FIND OUT MORE: Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust consolidated its schools' bank accounts to save on administration charges, which is then reinvested into schools. It also created a green deposit account where funds are ring-fenced for green projects and green companies, to align with Catholic social teaching.

FIND OUT MORE: read in The Tablet how four Catholic multi-academy trusts signed catering and cleaning contracts requiring Catholic social teaching commitments to form up to 20% of the tender marking process.

Q: Why should Catholic schools become academies anyway?

A: Governing bodies make the decision to become an academy after consultation with school leaders, staff and parents. In making this decision, they also take into account the bishop's strategy, which is designed to benefit Catholic education, children, families and communities across the whole of the diocese.

Reasons include those listed above, as well as curriculum continuity for pupils from primary into secondary and secondary into sixth form; collaboration with other schools in SEND provision; support for development of leaders and RE teachers for the future; and to put Catholic social teaching into practice when buying products and services.

This report from the Confederation of School Trusts looks at two decades of data and sets out the positive impact on pupil outcomes which is made when schools are in academy trusts.

Q: How will we know what is going on in our local area?

All conversions are subject to consultation with schools, parents, staff, parishes and local communities. There are formal statutory processes which must be followed.

If you would like to find out more, please speak to your Diocesan Education Service.

The Catholic Education Service
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