

Bishop Paul Swarbrick's Vision for Academisation



Rev Paul Swarbrick, Bishop of Lancaster

Why am I asking schools to join multi-academy trusts?

Our Catholic schools have been the bedrock of our mission to make Jesus Christ known and loved in our communities for nearly two centuries. The past two years have highlighted how vital our schools are and how their work and witness reveal Jesus Christ's presence in their locality. Our schools are an integral and critical part of the Diocese of Lancaster's mission. In a Catholic school, every child is welcomed, valued, and respected, and the person and teachings of Jesus Christ form the foundation of the school's life and activity. My aim is that every child, whether Catholic or not, will be respected, affirmed, supported, and encouraged to reach their full potential. A Catholic school is not just a building; it is a community, and those who form this community and participate in it cultivate this place of human growth. I have to ensure that Catholic Education is maintained and enabled to grow and develop for future generations.

To this end, I invite our parishes and schools to build Catholic Multi-Academy Trusts across the Diocese. Through these local families of schools, I seek to protect, secure and develop the Church's mission in education. This critical step forward for Catholic education in our Diocese aims to ensure that every school sits within a collaborative network where each institution gives and receives support. The reality is that Catholic schools must work together, viewing other Catholic schools as equal partners. As Bishop, I am aware that we need to place secure structures around vulnerable schools to help them improve and flourish. If we do not act proactively, we become reactive to circumstances rather than guiding and controlling change. The move to establish a network of Multi-Academy Trusts in the Diocese seeks to ensure that Catholic schools work closely together to assist with school improvement, leadership recruitment, formation, governance, and cooperation to strengthen our Catholic mission. This development enables a new spirit of collaboration where the success of Catholic schools in our Diocese can remain productive and protected.

+Paul

What is an academy?

An academy is essentially an independent school which is funded by the state. It is independent of the Local Authority and receives its funding direct from central government. In the past, academies tended to replace schools which have poor results or otherwise needed to improve. Under the Academies Act 2010, all schools are able to become academies.

Are there any disadvantages to becoming an academy?

As an academy we will be directly liable for matters such as insurance, employment liabilities, pensions, health and safety, and, property maintenance. However, as mentioned above, academies receive more funding from central government to help them meet these additional costs.

What are the benefits of being an academy?

- academies are independent of Local Authority control – this means that academies have more freedom about how they conduct themselves
- academies receive their funding direct from central government – this means that academies control more of their funding because none is retained by the Local Authority for the provision of central services
- academies have more freedom over the curriculum taught. This means we have better scope for ensuring that the curriculum is more reflective of the Catholic teaching and Catholic ethos, an essential point if we are to remain true to who we are and why we have Catholic schools
- academies can set their own pay and conditions of service for their staff – academies have the freedom to alter the pay and conditions of their staff (subject to normal employment law protections for staff) and so can provide staff with better pay and conditions than previously
- academies have more freedom to undertake innovative projects – academies are companies and so have more freedom to undertake innovative projects, such as setting up and utilising trading subsidiaries

Our schools have been established as part of our parishes – this is especially true of the primary schools. This is a link which must be kept.

Will the admissions arrangements change?

A Catholic voluntary aided school already deals with its own admission arrangements. As an academy, it would still deal with its own admission arrangements and would also still be bound by the national admissions code, and Admissions Appeals Code. Accordingly, there will be no change in the way in which the admission arrangements are set if the school becomes an academy.

The current admission arrangements will remain in place for the time being. If the academy wanted to change its admission arrangements consultation would be required.

Will staff leave?

If the school converts to an academy, all staff currently employed by the school will automatically transfer to the new academy on their current pay and conditions. Although the academy will have more freedom to amend those pay and conditions in the future, the Governing Body does not intend to take such a step in the foreseeable future and in any event, any change to pay and conditions would need to be consulted upon with staff representatives.

Will the school definitely become an academy?

The governing body has expressed an interest in becoming part of a multi-academy trust along with other schools in the region. However, the school is not obligated to become an academy until the contract between the academy trust and the Department for Education (known as the Funding Agreement) is signed. We anticipate that it will take at least nine months for the Trust to reach this stage. The academy trust will not sign the Funding Agreement until parents and carers of pupils at the school, staff at the school, and pupils themselves have had the opportunity to comment on whether the school should become an academy. We have held a meeting with staff, and will be keeping pupils informed throughout the process. The academy trust will not sign the Funding Agreement unless they are content that conversion would be in the best interests of the school taking account of all of the legal and practical ramifications.

Will the name of the school change?

We do not intend to change the name of the school. However, it will be known as an academy, not a voluntary aided school. For pupils, it is unlikely that they will see much, if any, change in their day to day school lives. Academies do have the power to vary their curriculums and vary the length of the school day, however, we do not intend to take any such steps at this stage and would engage with parents/carers, staff and pupils if we did ever intend to make such changes in the future.

How can I find out more?

There is also more information about academies on the DfE website:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/academies>

How can I make representations?

Any comments or representations which are made about the proposals will be considered by the governing body before a decision is taken to sign the Funding Agreement. Details of how to provide comments and representations will be available from the 6th December.

If you have further questions, please contact school.

