



Diocese of Lancaster
Education Service
Euntes in mundum

Growing our Family of Schools

The Bishop of Lancaster's
vision for Catholic education

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What is happening?

How are the schools managed at the moment and what are they being asked to do?

Historically the Diocese of Lancaster has owned and overseen a significant number of Catholic schools in the counties of Lancashire and Cumbria.

Many of our schools remain the joint responsibility of the Diocese of Lancaster Education Service and the relevant local authority, while others have left local authority control by becoming academies and joining one of Catholic multi-academy trusts (also known as CMATs) established by the diocese.

The Bishop of Lancaster holds overall responsibility for Catholic education within the Diocese of Lancaster, and has requested that all our schools progress to joining one of the three trusts.

Groups of schools will join their trust family in waves, with the aim of completing the process of welcoming all Diocese of Lancaster schools to their academy trust by the end of the 2025-26 academic year.

We see this as an exciting opportunity to secure the future of our schools, support each other for the common good, and gain greater freedom to deliver education that is responsive to the needs of our pupils.

This booklet offers an overview of the benefits of this change for children, parents, and staff.

“It is our turn to ensure that Catholic education is maintained and enabled to grow and develop for future generations.”

The Rt Rev Paul Swarbrick, Bishop of Lancaster



What is a multi-academy trust?

Why were they created and what do they do?

Academy trusts were introduced in the early 2000s, and are independent bodies created to run schools.

Academies are publicly-funded schools that operate outside local authority control. Trusts can be established to operate a single academy, or several academies can group together as members of a Catholic multi-academy trust.

Each academy trust is led by a chief executive and board of directors, who set the strategic direction of their trust and are responsible for ensuring that academies have the resources they need to deliver excellent education and staff wellbeing.

Academy trusts receive their funding directly from central government, rather than through a local authority. They have more freedom to set their own policies and curriculum, but pupils still take part in national assessments such as SATs and GCSEs and their performance continues to be assessed by Ofsted.

Academy trust membership is the government's preferred option for running schools.

The Diocese of Lancaster has created three Catholic multi-academy trusts to run its academies. These are:

- The Mater Christi Catholic Multi-Academy Trust - covering north and west Cumbria and north Lancashire [mater-christi.com]
- The Blessed Edward Bamber Catholic Multi-Academy Trust - covering Blackpool, Wyre, and the Fylde coast [bebcmat.co.uk]
- The Mater Ecclesiae Catholic Multi-Academy Trust - covering Preston and the surrounding region [mater-ecclesiae-trust.co.uk]

Within the Diocese of Lancaster, we aim to ensure that our schools retain their distinctive character and local leadership after converting to academies, while benefitting from the guidance and collaborative atmosphere of their Catholic multi-academy trust.

"The development of the trusts will allow the preservation and promotion of the Catholic faith in the future."

Helen O'Neill, Chief Executive

At a glance - key benefits of joining an academy trust

What will it mean for children, parents and staff when schools become academies?



Individuality preserved

Schools joining academy trusts retain existing names, local leadership, and distinctive character



Shared core values

A consistent approach to Catholic ethos and values throughout each trust



Enhanced collaboration

Ability to pool expertise and experience to bring about shared improvements



Shared commitment to excellence

Chance to work together to improve and offer additional support to vulnerable schools



Training and development

Shared opportunities for high-quality staff training across multiple schools



Improved staff support

Shared wellbeing policies and opportunities to manage workload through collaboration



Career development and succession planning

Clear pathways for career progression and development of future leaders



Building Catholic communities

Strengthened links between schools and churches through our academy communities



Efficiency, financial sustainability and investment

Better use of resources through economies of scale, investment in buildings and estates, smart working and access to additional sources of funding



Centralised policy and administration

Policies, procedures and paperwork managed centrally, giving heads and governors more time to focus on school priorities

"The sense of togetherness amongst our Catholic trusts transcends anything I've experienced - sharing challenges, celebrating successes and advancing our Catholic faith."

Peter Duffy, Chief Executive, Mater Ecclesiae Catholic Multi-Academy Trust



Preserving and protecting our schools

How academy trusts help us to preserve our educational heritage

Our schools form part of the proud heritage of the communities they serve.

Many of the buildings and sites our schools still occupy were paid for by past generations of Catholics as an investment for future generations.

As custodians of these precious community assets, our goal is to ensure that they are preserved and protected for future generations.

But it is also important that we are mindful of the here and now.

Each of our schools is an individual community serving children and families, and we are committed to maintaining their unique character.

Schools that become academies will continue to benefit from local leadership and have their own identity, underpinned by the guidance and additional resources offered by their multi-academy trust.

- Academies maintain local leadership roles
- Schools retain local character after joining an academy trust
 - Catholic educational heritage protected

“Belonging to the Mater Christi Trust has fostered a dynamic relationship as we work together for the greater good and benefit of all in our family of Catholic schools, while preserving those characteristics which make each of us distinctive.”

Josephine McCrea
Chair of Governors - St Joseph's Catholic High School, Workington

Nourishing and enhancing our schools

Securing the future of Catholic education in the Diocese of Lancaster

Bringing schools together through membership of Catholic multi-academy trusts creates opportunities to make better use of resources and improve the education and support we offer to children and young people.

Sharing resources and expertise allows us to nourish and enhance our schools, improving educational provision, offering better support for vulnerable young people and delivering better value for money.

Working collectively also allows us to enhance the Catholic ethos of our schools through development of future leaders and creation of clear pathways for career development.

We are already seeing the benefits of these collaborations among the existing members of our Catholic multi-academy trusts.

Schools that have become academies have been able to access additional wrap-around support that was not previously available to them, providing extra resilience in areas such as financial management, governance, inspections, health and safety, buildings, safeguarding, quality reviews, training, and collaboration.

An additional benefit is that schools that voluntarily join an academy trust will retain any financial surplus they hold and the freedom to use the funds appropriately to enhance facilities for children and staff.

- Greater efficiency and value for money through collaboration
 - Career pathways to enhance Catholic ethos
 - Extra support to solve problems and address issues

“There are many benefits to academisation as we set up multiple ways of working together. As a group we are setting out our approaches so that our schools are fully supported and developing together. ”

Jacky Kennedy, Chief Executive, Mater Christi Catholic Multi-Academy Trust

What happens next?

Find out the plans for your school

Your school will provide regular updates on its plans along with further information on timescales.

The Diocese of Lancaster Education Service is working closely with all schools and the three multi-academy trusts to support them through the process.

You can contact your school directly if you have any questions.

Want to know more?

Access more detailed information, or ask us a question

We created this document to offer a simple overview of our aims to develop our schools as members of our multi-academy trusts.

With dozens of schools, three trusts, hundreds of staff and thousands of pupils, this is a massive topic with too much detail to go into here.

Ask us a question by emailing educationservice@lancasterrcdiocese.org.uk

We value your feedback

Your feedback is important to us.

Whether you're strongly in favour of your school joining an academy trust, or have doubts or concerns about the process, your insights will help us to respond to the needs of our children, families, staff and communities.

Send your comments to us at educationservice@lancasterrcdiocese.org.uk