

St Benedict's Catholic Academy Trust



Frequently Asked Questions

September 2023

What is a Catholic-Academy Trust?

A Catholic Academy Trust (CAT) is a group of Catholic schools overseen by an educational charity. Our CAT is proposed to be formed by a partnership between primary and secondary schools across SE London. Our charity trust board will be recruited based on skills, and can include Governors from our schools. Rather than being funded by and accountable to the local authority, a CAT is directly funded by and accountable to the Department for Education. Academies are still part of the community and serve children and families in a particular area and retain the same responsibilities as any maintained school as part of the learning community. Outstanding CATs also help to support other schools within the Diocese. The Trust is accountable for all of the schools that are a part of it, and through Schemes of Delegation decide which powers are retained by the Trust and which are delegated to individual schools.

Why are we considering forming a Catholic Academy Trust?

The education landscape is changing and there is uncertainty about the Government's intentions regarding the academisation of schools at this present moment. What we do know is that Archbishop of Southwark is keen for all Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Southwark to become part of CATs:

"It is my hope that this will establish a focus for productive conversations with governing bodies and colleagues in local schools in forming a framework of a small number of Catholic academy trusts across the Diocese in the coming months and years. I urge all of you to engage in discussions with an open heart to do what will strengthen Catholic education here in the Archdiocese of Southwark." **June 22**

By implementing strong families of schools across the Diocese, Catholic Education is protected for the next generation.

The Diocesan Trustees have indicated that the Diocese of Southwark will have up to 6 CATs across the Diocese. There are currently 2 – Kent Catholic Schools Partnership (KCSP) and South East London Catholic Academy Trust (SELCA). This proposed CAT will join the family of Southwark CATs.

By joining the proposed trust now, our schools can influence and shape the CAT, providing an opportunity to protect Catholic education in our communities and support each other. As a group of schools, we already work collaboratively and the CAT will formalise those relationships and further strengthen collaborations.

Who makes the final decision on whether each school converts to an academy?

The Governing Body of each individual school.

Who runs a CAT?

Academy Trusts are charitable organisations and have members as the foundation of the legal structure. Members set up the charity. There will be up to 6 Members of an RCAOS CAT and these will be members of the clergy. Day to day running of the trust is the responsibility of the Board of Directors (The Trust Board). The Board of Directors are responsible for setting the

strategic direction, as well as management of the Senior Leadership team. Board of Directors have legal responsibilities to ensure that the CAT is carrying out its purposes for the charitable benefit which is sets out. Each school will retain committees ensuring schools continue to focus on standards and serve their local communities.

How many schools should there be in a CAT?

The Government white paper recommended a minimum criteria of at least 10 schools or 7500 pupils. However, in order to achieve strong financial sustainability, the Diocese is seeking to create Trusts with 20+ schools.

How many schools will be in St Benedicts CAT?

St Benedict's will grow, however the first wave is likely to be four schools. Following the initial conversions, the Trust will work with the Diocese and DFE to grow, ensuring that growth does not impact on schools within the Trust.

What is the timescale for conversion?

If the Regional Director agrees to the CAT, we would expect the first schools to transition into the CAT within 9 months.

Do Academies receive more money than local authority schools?

Academies receive the same level of per-pupil funding as they would receive from the local authority as a maintained school, plus additions to cover the services that are no longer provided for them by the local authority. However, Academies have greater freedom over how they use their budgets to best benefit their pupils. Academies receive their funding directly from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA – part of the Department for Education) rather than from local authorities. Currently, maintained schools are “top-sliced” by the local authorities as the local authority takes this funding to run some of the services it provides. As an academy school, we would have the freedom (through the Trust) to select the services and providers that would best meet the needs of the students in our care. The CAT will be able to bid for additional funding directly from the government to improve the buildings and ensure the schools are fit for purpose.

Does the Academy cause any further cost to parents?

There is no financial cost to parents. Provision is free of charge.

Is there funding for SEN provision?

SEN funding is provided on the same level and in the same way as it is for Local Authority schools.

Is St Benedict's CAT a profit-making company?

No. Profit making companies are not able to run academy schools and no profit can be made from the operation of academy schools. St Benedict's CAT is a not-for-profit organisation.

How are Academies accountable?

The Academy Trust is accountable to the Department for Education through the requirements of the Funding Agreement. The Funding Agreement requires the Academy Trust to publish proceedings of its meetings. As charitable companies, academy trusts have to ensure that their accounts are independently audited and then the accounts filed with the Education Funding Agency (part of the Department for Education) and at Companies House. The Department for Education wants academy trusts to be at the heart of their communities, and expect them to be established in consultation with local stakeholders. Academies are still subject to the same OFSTED inspection arrangements as other state-maintained schools.

Will the schools still have control over their admissions criteria?

In a CAT, the Trust becomes the admissions body.

Will the primary schools automatically become feeder schools for the secondary schools?

The schools will continue to be part of the LA coordinated admission schemes and at present there are no plans to change the admission policies of any of the schools involved in the Trust.

There has been bad press relating to academies excluding children who are underperforming and being selective as to those children they accept.

St Benedict's CAT will not exclude children on the basis of ability, nor will it select on this basis. Not only is this something that the Trust would not support or accept, it is also not permissible under the terms of the agreement the Trust would have with the Department for Education.

Will the Trust recognise and engage with trade unions?

Yes. The Trust recognises the role of trade unions and sees positive engagement as critical to the transition process and ongoing success of the academy. They will play an important role in the consultation process on TUPE for staff and all relevant Unions will be involved as part of the consultation process.

Who will we be employed by?

You will no longer be employed by your individual school's Governors, as you are now but will be employed by the CAT. If you are part of the Teachers Pension Scheme you will still remain part of this and contributions will still continue to be made by yourself and the CAT. If you are part of the Local Government Pension Scheme or similar you will continue to be part of this. If you are not already part of this but wish to join then you are eligible to do this as the CAT becomes a scheme employing authority in its own right.

Will my terms and conditions change?

No. There is no intention to change terms and conditions.

Will we have executive Headteachers?

Each school will continue to have their own Headteacher but it is difficult to predict what may happen in the future. If a Headteacher does leave a school and the CAT finds it difficult to find a replacement then an Executive model could be considered.

Will we keep the same uniform or have a CAT wide uniform?

There will be no CAT wide uniform and each school will continue to have its own uniform as the intention is that each school will maintain its own distinct characteristics.

Will everything be centralised and will there be a CAT TimeTable expectation?

There will be certain services that will be centralised such as HR, Safeguarding Software, Financial Management Systems and Management Information Systems. There will also be certain policies that will be centralised so that there is consistency across the trust.

It is likely that holidays and INSET days will be the same across the trust as this will mean that we will be able to come together to deliver training that is needed. It may also be the case that if there are any Early Career teachers across the trust they may have the same release day so again they can meet and access training and support together.

There will be no central timetable as this will continue to be down to individual schools to arrange for the needs of their children.

Will we still continue to follow the National Curriculum?

Yes, but the Trust would have more freedom to try different things in the curriculum and make sure that what is taught is relevant to our pupils and their specific needs.

Will my school lose its unique ethos and feeling?

No. It is the intention of the Trust that each school will maintain its own ethos so each school can continue to serve their parents and members of their local community. Each school will be its own entity but be part of the St Benedict's family. .

Does becoming an academy change the relationship with local schools and the community?

No. Academy funding agreements state that they must ensure that the school will be at the heart of its community, collaborating and sharing facilities and expertise with other local schools and the wider community.

As an academy, will it still work with the local authority (LA)?

Academies are independent of the local authority. However, we may wish to continue working with the LA, other local schools and local partners.

What do I do if I have further questions?

You will need to speak to your Headteacher.