



# St Francis of Assisi Catholic Academy Trust

## TERMLY UPDATE

## Autumn Term 2021 Newsletter

In this, our inaugural St Francis of Assisi Catholic Academy Trust termly update, please allow me to introduce the idea of our newsletter. At the end of each term I aim to update you about some of the activities of our new eight-School Catholic Education Trust, and this is our first newsletter.

Whilst I'm only including a few examples of our work this term, hopefully this newsletter will give you a flavour of our progress. I am very grateful to all the schools for their support, and would like to especially thank staff, pupils, governors, families and communities who have helped us continue to deliver education onsite during these challenging pandemic months and years. In the face of such challenge, and at this time of year, it seems so good that we can celebrate the hope that Christ's arrival at Christmas brings: **'a light shines in the darkness'** (John 1:5). I wish you all a happy and Holy Christmas, and a peaceful New Year.

Here are just some of the things we have been diligently working on together.



## Mission Statement

One of the most important tasks of this term was for the Trust Board to work with the local governing bodies and Headteachers on our new Trust mission statement.

The mission statement describes what it is we all believe in – our philosophy of Catholic education in this Trust. Whilst each school retains its own unique identity and mission statement, the Trust's overarching statement is drafted as follows:

*"Inspired by the teachings of Christ and the example of St Francis, we strive for excellence, cherishing every child in our care as a unique thumbprint of God, enabling all to realise their full potential."*

The St. Francis of Assisi charisms are at the heart of our Trust and we have chosen a particular focus on four: **Compassion** (especially for the vulnerable); **Peacemaking**; **Reverence for all creation**; and the formation of **caring communities** and schools. If you would like to offer any feedback on our draft mission statement and our chosen charisms, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

# Strategic Development Plan

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Early on in this term the Trust created and set out an ambitious draft development plan. The Trust has chosen seven strategic objectives for our plan which runs across the first two years of our existence. The strategic objectives all focus on Catholic Life, shared School Improvement, as well as increasingly taking the opportunity to develop financial harmonisation opportunities as they arise. These objectives are described [in more detail on our website](#).

## School Improvement, Catholic Life

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Our Headteachers have committed to work on one joint project each across the Trust in Year One. All eight Heads have paired up to lead four themed projects, thereby creating a home-grown development plan with themes and objectives that reflect the wishes and development desires across our eight schools.

In my next termly update, I hope to include a short account of actions for each project.

The four themes fit well with our Mission Statement:



⇒ **Catholic Life Project 1** - Co-ordinated by Miss McHugh & Mrs Napier

*Developing shared liturgical experiences through Lent and Easter. Sacramental life, co-ordinated chaplaincy, retreats and pilgrimage.*

⇒ **Catholic Life Project 2** - Co-ordinated by Mr Maloney and Mrs Walsh

*Liturgy work and charity work / almsgiving, especially for the disadvantaged.*

⇒ **Subject & Curriculum Leadership** - Co-ordinated by Mr Coldwell and Mrs Fusi

*Identifying strengths in subject leadership to develop needs and aspirations in Trust schools, working with subject monitoring and evaluation strategies, sharing 'deep dive' (subject review) approaches across schools, and preparing the way for even better Y6-Y7 transition.*

⇒ **Early Years Focus** - Co-ordinated by Mrs Keating and Mrs O'Connor

*Effective practice and curriculum planning in Early Years, moderation between schools, reading guidance especially in relation to phonics and outdoor provision.*

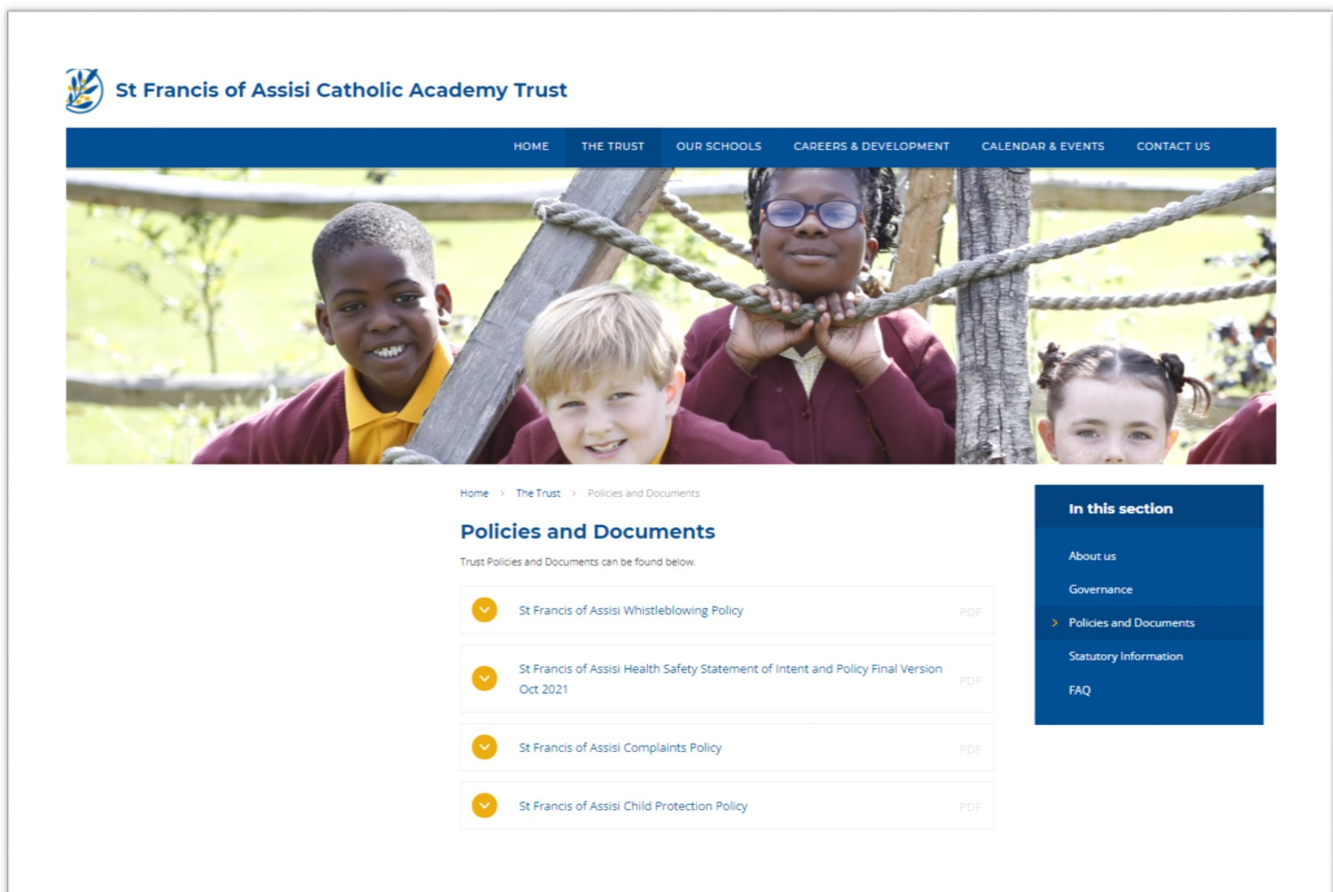
These are all exciting projects and very strong examples of how being in a Trust can ensure our delivery of joint school development. Something we may have previously wished for but never quite managed to deliver as we wanted, until now!

# Supporting friends in need

You might recall that at the end of September one of our schools suffered a significant fire; the repair work does not look as if it will be complete until later in the Summer Term. The local governing body, Headteacher, building consultants and Trust Board are working together to secure the complex operation of refurbishment and continued use of the premises. Being part of the Trust during this challenging time was also extremely beneficial in other ways. For example we were able to achieve things that were not possible outside of the Trust; St. Mary's Catholic School managed to provide an entire teaching block of four classrooms for four classes of Sacred Heart pupils to receive education in person whilst emergency repairs were underway in Ware.

## Policies, Procedures & Websites

An important function of a Trust is to create and put in place policies, systems, procedures and practices to operate across and in each school. As an employer of hundreds of staff, the Trust has created and adopted over twenty required policies in its first term. Eventually these will all find their way onto our Trust website, some of the important Trust policies, e.g. Child Protection and Complaints have already been published.



The screenshot displays the website of the St Francis of Assisi Catholic Academy Trust. The header features the trust's logo and name, followed by a navigation menu with links to Home, The Trust, Our Schools, Careers & Development, Calendar & Events, and Contact Us. Below the menu is a large banner image of four children in school uniforms. The main content area is titled 'Policies and Documents' and includes a breadcrumb trail: Home > The Trust > Policies and Documents. A sub-header states 'Trust Policies and Documents can be found below.' Below this, there is a list of four policies, each with a download icon (a yellow circle with a white 'v') and a PDF icon. The policies listed are: St Francis of Assisi Whistleblowing Policy, St Francis of Assisi Health Safety Statement of Intent and Policy Final Version Oct 2021, St Francis of Assisi Complaints Policy, and St Francis of Assisi Child Protection Policy. On the right side of the page, there is a sidebar titled 'In this section' with a list of links: About us, Governance, Policies and Documents (which is highlighted with a yellow arrow), Statutory Information, and FAQ.



# Headteacher Meetings

A notable joy during my first term as CEO has been to visit each school and Headteacher in person and on a regular basis. I have been privileged to work with a highly capable group of supportive group Headteachers who stay in constant contact, either through our weekly bulletins, group meetings or our 1:1 meetings. Whilst Covid outbreaks have seriously hampered our meeting in person for almost two years I am hopeful that we will meet more frequently as soon as possible, if not onsite then remotely. I also hope to resume school visits as it's so helpful for me to meet parents, staff and pupils in our schools. If I've not met you yet and you are wanting to speak with me, please get in touch and I shall try and arrange to visit at a time that is convenient for you.



Back row from left to right: Mrs O'Connor (St Joseph's Waltham Cross), Mrs Keating (St Thomas of Canterbury), Mr Maloney (St Joseph's Hertford), Mr Coldwell (St Joseph's Bishop's Stortford), Miss McHugh (St Mary's)

Front row from left to right: Mrs Fusi (Sacred Heart), Mrs Walsh (St Cross), Mr Celano (CEO), Mrs Napier (St Augustine's)

## Welcome to new Heads of School!

The Trust would like to congratulate three new Heads of School who commenced their posts in the Trust this term. Firstly, Mr Maloney took up the position of acting Head of School at St. Joseph's Hertford as we said goodbye to Mrs Page at the end of the Summer Term 2021. Secondly, Mr Johnston and Miss McHugh began their role as acting Heads of School at St Mary's for at least the next two years as I have now begun my work as permanent CEO for the Trust. We wish them ongoing success in their roles – and I'm very grateful to you all for your support of these new Heads as they take on responsibility for the schools.



Miss McHugh



Mr Johnston



Mr. Maloney



## Capital Bids

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The Trust has contracted and co-ordinated our building consultants to prepare and produce at least one capital bid for each of the eight schools in its first term. These bids are complex tasks for the consultants, Trust and schools, and we're very grateful to the work of the Diocesan-approved Building Consultants (Barkers LLP) who have helped us every step of the way. Bids are not often granted, but we remain hopeful of an early success in our capital funding strategy.

## Health, Safety and Covid-19

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As the employer, all employment responsibilities amongst other things now sits with the Trust Board. With Health and Safety being one such responsibility, the Trust has completed an in depth review across all eight schools with onsite visits and reviews of leadership and governance. You might wonder why started with Health and Safety? The simple answer is because we believe that that the health and safety of everyone onsite must always be our first priority; especially keeping children safe. Local Governing Bodies, Chairs of those Local Governing Bodies, and our Headteachers have all worked closely this term with me and the Trust Board in this vital area. In respect of Covid-19 safety, early in the New Year 2022 the Heads are already making preliminary plans to meet either at the very start of term or just before to review the latest government guidance.



## Finance

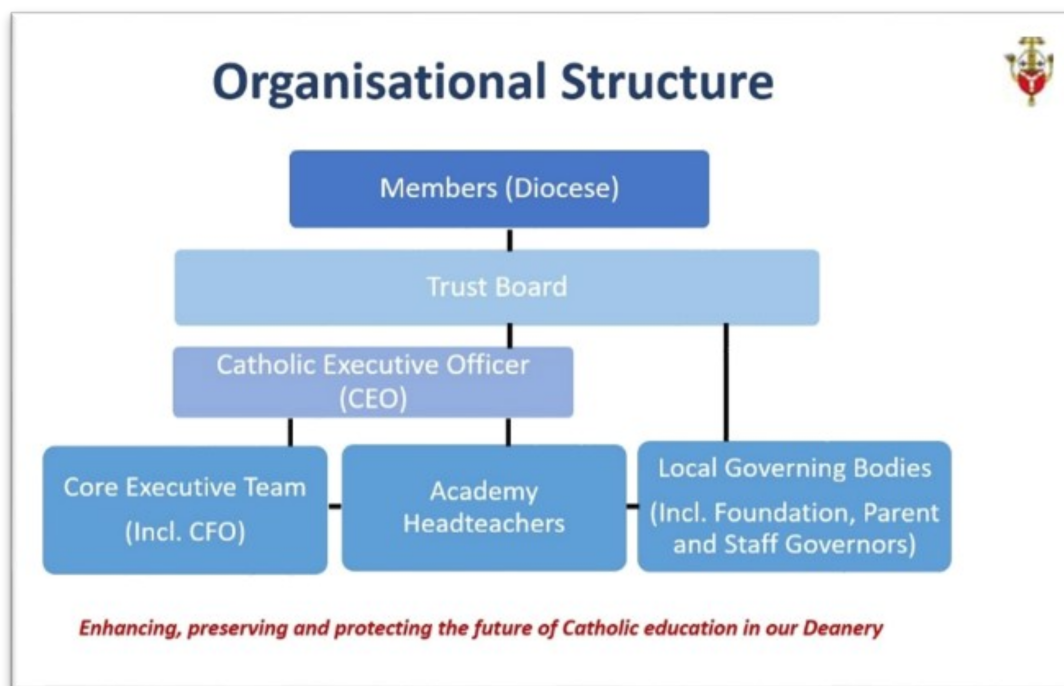
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A Trust Board is also ultimately accountable for financial viability across the organisation, and a key programme of work this term has been to ensure that school's financial operations are compliant with Academies regulations and requirements. The Trust was pleased to appoint Andrew Howard as CFO earlier this year. Andrew has successfully set up financial systems across the entire Trust, and is currently working with schools on their three year budgets. The Trust Board oversees monitoring and provides support in all areas of finance alongside value for money. By the end of next term each school should almost be ready to submit a budget for the financial year September 22 to September 23, and the first year accounts will be audited early in the Autumn Term 22/23. Financial procedures are now streamlined across all schools. Eventually, such harmonisation will pay dividends to help us become more efficient and concentrate even more funding to the classroom.

# Trust Board

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Our Trust Board is now nearly fully formed for Year One. [These individuals appointed by the Diocese are in effect](#) a 'governing body' across the Trust. An organogram shows how that fits with local governing bodies:



## Local Governing Body Chairs & Trust

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Please remember that your local Chair of Governors is your first port of call for all things Local Governance related. Please also know that the Trust Board arrange a formal meeting once a term for the Local Governing Body Chairs to meet with the Trust Board. The first of these meetings happened this term and provided a useful opportunity to ask and answer questions relating to our first term together. Although your first port of call for queries about your school and governance remain your Headteacher and Chair of Governors in the usual way, but please know the Trust Board can be approached at anytime through the policies and contacts referred to on our website.

# A message of hope this Christmas

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*The people walking in darkness  
have seen a great light (Isaiah 9:2)*

To end where I began—December is a dark time of year, but I pray that Christ(mas) will always bring a glorious and hopeful light into all our lives.

Isaiah 9 sums up, for me, what Christmas is all about - a people walking in darkness get to see a great light. I've heard some say that the last twenty two months since the pandemic began have been a bit like walking in darkness; it is hard to see the end in sight. Whilst we strive to try and imagine the pandemic will end, we know the reality for many people remains the pain of losing loved ones before their time, and as 'one extended family' we will always be sensitive to those who still keenly feel their loss.

My prayer for all of us is that Christmas provides a renewed hope for the future as we celebrate Christ's arrival on earth; God's ultimate loving act of sending His son to be a saviour for all humanity and all time. The Christmas story can provide hope and inspiration in us and for us in any number of ways – be that through the example of Mary being so courageous to accept her costly personal mission, through the way in which Isaiah's prophecies were so completely and totally fulfilled, or just through the certainty that an even better life awaits in the world after this one - may we actively embrace the hope and light that Christ's arrival on earth secured, once and for all.

I wish you all a happy and Holy Christmas, and a peaceful New Year.

**Andrew Celano**  
CEO

St Francis of Assisi Catholic Academy Trust

