



# DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

**Rt Rev Robert Byrne CO**  
**Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle**

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Dear Chair of Governors

I am writing to share with you my thoughts about academisation in our diocese.

When I met with you at Ramside Hall on 7 October 2019, I asked for your views on whether an end date should be set by which time I would expect voluntary aided schools to convert to academy status.

I would like to thank those who were able to submit responses to me. A summary of the responses is attached to this letter. A range of views were presented, both for and against the setting of an end date for academy conversions.

I have carefully considered the responses and I have had detailed discussions with the Diocesan Board of Education and with the Diocesan Directors. It is my expectation that all voluntary aided schools in the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle will work towards converting to academy status by July 2022. The revised Diocesan Academy Policy 2019 that was approved by the Diocesan Board of Directors is attached to this letter. The names of the four base trusts are currently under review.

I know that whilst for some this move to academisation will be welcome, for others it will be disappointing. This decision has been made for the good of all schools and for the protection and development of Catholic education in the diocese. My brother Bishops in other dioceses are also considering ways to protect Catholic education and many have also adopted a strategic approach to academy development.

The move to establishing a single system in our Diocese supports both solidarity and subsidiarity. The Catholic family of schools will be strengthened. Every Catholic school will have its place so that no individual school will be left isolated or vulnerable in a rapidly changing environment. It will also ensure that the uniqueness of each individual school is celebrated and the unique contribution of each is recognised and appreciated within communities which have the teachings of Christ and his Church at the very centre.

Within the responses that were submitted, concerns were raised in a number of areas; the potential loss of autonomy, the preservation of school identity, roles and responsibilities, leadership and governance, cluster working, trust structures, schools support, finances, curriculum, staffing and the relationship with local authorities. There are valid concerns and further information needs to be shared with schools in order to allay anxieties.

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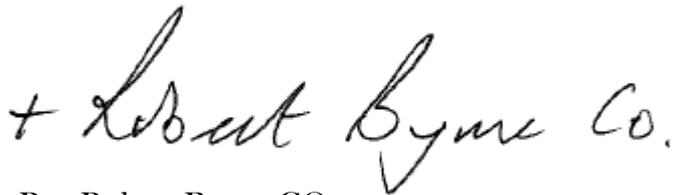
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The Diocesan Department for Education will therefore be facilitating regional meetings in the New Year to which all headteachers, chairs of governors and clergy in each region will be invited. At these meetings, the Diocesan Department for Education and the base trust will present information and there will be opportunities for discussion and questions. The revised Diocesan documentation will be shared and discussions about the process for the implementation of the revised Diocesan Academy Policy will begin. From the outset, all schools in the region will be included in the collective process of trust growth.

The decision to convert to academy status is that of the school Governing Body, which should have regard to any policy or guidance issued by or on behalf of me as your Bishop. I therefore ask that you and your fellow foundation governors work with the Diocesan Department for Education and with the regional trust to implement the Diocesan Academy Policy, thereby ensuring that Catholic education in the diocese is preserved, protected and developed for current and future generations.

Please be assured of my prayers as we embark on this significant change.

With every good wish and blessing



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