



End of Year Review From The Trust Board Sept 2020 – Aug 2021

What a year we have all had, both within the Trust and across the wider communities we serve. Trust staff and volunteers worked tirelessly to ensure the highest attention to detail in conducting regular Covid risk assessments as well as adjusting ways of teaching and learning to minimise the disruption for the children and young people in our care. **We are grateful too for the support from our pupils' families, our local governors and local communities. Our pupils have been amazing and we are all very proud of them.**

Pupils and adults across the organisation remain committed to the Catholic principles upon which our Trust is founded and we continue to be *'Inspired by the life, message and example of Jesus Christ'* doing the Lord's will *"today rather than tomorrow"* for the benefit of those who learn and work in our Trust.

Amid the necessary work to mitigate the impacts of Covid, as far as possible, life in our twenty-five Trust schools has continued. As well as lessons, both online and in person, Christmas plays and concerts, sports days and parents' evenings have been part of our annual calendar, albeit taking slightly different approaches when needed.

As always, the main highlights of the year concern the children in our schools and once again this year 29 children from each of our Trust schools were presented with the St Ralph Sherwin award for



their contribution to the Catholic Life of their school community.

June saw the inaugural meeting of the **St Ralph Sherwin Pupil Parliament** with two elected representatives from each school coming together to hear more about what their role will be this coming



year. The parliament will meet formally each term, allowing our young parliamentarians to share and discuss ideas from their schools. They will then feedback to their school, supporting the implementation of ideas. It is a great opportunity for pupils from across the Trust to be actively involved in the way their schools and the Trust are run.

It was great to hear the work done in the **Action Research projects this year on raising the profile of mental health and raising the achievement of disadvantaged pupils** and seeing how these are informing future Trust policy and practice. There are four topics for Action Research this year:

- Making it stick
- Governance: Innovation & impact
- Making a Strong Recovery
- Giving Me Attitude

all of which are exciting areas of focus which we are looking forward to hearing more about as the year unfolds.

Staff have also been recognised by colleagues as part of our Trust PRIDE awards. Colleagues can nominate anyone across the Trust to receive a

PRIDE award with the nominee being presented with a certificate and badge to mark the occasion. Nomination categories are

- Professionalism
- Respect
- Integrity
- Dedication
- Excellence

and there have been 90 nominations since the initiative started.

This year we have moved a couple of



steps closer to achieving one of our aspirations which is to have a nursery for each of our twenty primary schools. In June, Bishop Patrick opened and blessed the new **nursery at St Edward's in Swadlincote** and in September we welcome the Nagle Nursery, which is on the same site as **St Joseph's in Matlock**, into the Trust.

In the middle of dealing with the Coronavirus, a devastating fire swept through St Mary's in Derby in the early hours of Saturday morning 3rd October. Within a couple of hours an emergency response meeting was held in line with our emergency planning policy and the wide arms of the Trust family wrapped themselves around the St Mary's school



community as they came to terms with what had happened. Support flooded in from too many sources to mention here and all were



gratefully received. After one day of school closure, online learning resumed for a short time before a temporary arrangement was in place with the younger children at the Mackworth NRCDES offices and Christ the King Church next door, while the older pupils were welcomed on site at Saint Benedict. Six months later the school community was reunited at St James House in Derby. Staff and children were very happy to be together again.

CPD remains a key priority for the Trust and one particular highlight this year among many great sessions was our first **Leadership Residential**. This had been postponed owing to Covid restrictions but thankfully was able to take place in June. Headteachers had been asked to nominate two senior leaders from their school to take part and the event itself was organised by a working party which included Headteachers. Fr Joe Wheat celebrated Mass for us on the first evening following a range of

“inspirational, set a fire in our bellies, entertained us, educated us & moved us”

Delegate at the Senior Residential in June

workshops on a wide range of topics including one on governance and

another on how to survive the first one hundred days as a headteacher!

Sr Judith Russi joined us, speaking with passion and enthusiasm about the world of Catholic education and the potential for us to transform lives. On the final day, we were taken on a journey through the ups and downs of our keynote speaker **Sir John Jones’** life and work in education with laughter and tears along the way. The event was a great success and plans are underway for future cohorts as well as supporting this first cohort to take their ideas forward.

In our Trust, Continuing Professional Development is important for all. As part of our commitment to developing staff and governors, we provide development opportunities for all which this year included excellent speakers such as Sean Hardman and

Nicky Morgan for our **Trust-wide INSET day** back in February this year.

Numerous workshops were available for staff to sign up for so that they could choose what was of most relevance to their development. As with so much this year, the INSET day took place online, enabling all staff to get involved either on the day, or if not working that day, then by watching recordings of the speakers and workshops.

Over the past two years through the delivery of our IT Strategy, we now have an infrastructure which can support large scale events, such as the INSET day, as well as smaller scale activities including recruitment and regular meetings. Ongoing investment in skilled IT staff will enable us to improve further, so that we can maximise the benefits of using technology to support learning for staff and pupils.

Our investment in technology also enabled us to host a spectacular **St Ralph Sherwin Awards** evening online in the Advent term. Thirty-three finalists, including eleven winners, were chosen from over 250 nominations and the whole event went smoothly on the night with our special guest speaker **David Wells** joining the fun.

Our Trust School Improvement Team has continued to work alongside school leaders this year, enabling them to make continuous improvements to the learning offered to children, in partnership with their

St Ralph Sherwin CMAT GCSE Results 2021	Number of pupils receiving results	% achieving a grade of 4 or higher in English & Maths
Saint Benedict	238	68 %
Blessed Robert Sutton	120	78 %
St Thomas More	89	80 %
St Phillip Howard	77	65 %
Saint John Houghton	146	82 %

families. Despite the additional pressures of the pandemic, schools continue to improve. Over the coming year the majority of our schools are expecting an Ofsted inspection and are approaching those with confidence knowing that they have the full support of their colleagues from across the Trust behind them.

As you will have heard, this year GCSE exams did not take place because of

the disruption to students' education caused by the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic. It would not have been fair for exams to take place in the usual way so instead, across the country, grades were determined by teachers based on a range of evidence. These were known as teacher assessed grades, or TAGs. In our five St Ralph Sherwin secondary schools, these grades were decided using an agreed Trust process, and were robustly moderated to ensure they were as accurate as they possibly could be under the circumstances.

All of our secondary schools have had very positive GCSE results and staff and pupils are delighted that their hard work has paid off, despite such a difficult year. The results this year are higher than the estimated grades that Fischer Family Trust (FFT) gave based on students' prior attainment and historical national outcomes.

Saint Benedict has a sixth form and the A-Level results, which have been quality assured by the school and the exam boards, are a great reflection of the hard work of the students and the commitment of their teachers with 97% receiving a grade C or above.



Students at Saint Benedict celebrate their A-level results

65% of students made an application to university and of these 90% of students have achieved grades for their first choice, with 95% achieving grades for either their insurance or first choice, compared with 92% last year.

Two students have been successful in gaining places at Oxford University, one of whom is visually impaired and



Declan Webster, from Saint Benedict, who is going to the University of Oxford.



Isobel Moore, from Saint Benedict, who also secured a place at Oxford.

was supported in the Enhanced Resource Base at Saint Benedict.

There were nine students in receipt of Pupil Premium funding who are among this year's A-Level cohort and four of these applied to university, with three of the four being offered their firm choice and one their insurance choice.

Over the past eighteen months or so we have become accustomed to online meetings, with all the fun that entails, as people forget to come off mute before talking (or forget to go on mute of course!) as well as occasional frozen, and sometimes very funny, pictures of colleagues as internet connections falter. However the benefits of online meetings, whether for parents' evenings, recruitment of new staff or Local Governing Body meetings, have been embraced by many. For the Trust Board, many of whom previously travelled up to two hours each way for Board meetings, online meetings have also been very welcome. Going forward we intend to have a mixture of online and in-person meetings as do many of our twenty-

four Local Governing Bodies.

Of course, it is great to see each other in person too, so we were delighted to be able to hold our annual **Trust Board Strategy Day** in person again at Matlock on Saturday 10th July. As usual, inputs from Headteachers and other senior leaders across the Trust, as well as the Executive Team, Chairs and Vice Chairs of Governors, informed our discussions on the day and in the evening meetings the Trust Board had leading up to the Strategy Day itself. This year we reviewed how far we have come as an organisation in our first three years and felt that the time was right to revise the Trust Strategic Plan. Final work is underway on the plan which will be shared in September with staff and governors. Our vision, which has served us well for three years, was also reviewed and updated.

Our Strategy Day is the time when we review our Trust Board succession plan, agree which LGBs we will each pair up with for the coming year, confirm committee memberships and our schedule of Trust Board meetings. As well as these practical aspects of the day, it also allows for wider conversations about the future to take place and for us to explore the exciting opportunities ahead for the Trust. One of the many topics of conversation that day was that we have all really missed having the opportunity to visit schools in person and are looking forward to being able to resume those visits once again this coming year.

In terms of our finances, I am pleased to confirm that the Trust overall remains solvent and compliant in line with requirements of the ESFA and other agencies. For the first time this year the Trust Board approved the setting up of a **Hardship Fund**, managed locally within schools, and providing financial assistance to families with items such as food vouchers and uniform costs.

Earlier this year, the ESFA (Education

& Skills Funding Agency) sent an SMRA (School Resource Management Advisor) to review the Trust. Her findings were very positive and in particular her report mentioned that the **“level of ICFP knowledge of Directors is impressive”** (ICFP is Integrated Curriculum and Financial Planning) and **“the current trustees work hard and are highly vigilant and robust in their challenge”**. I would like to thank my fellow Directors for taking part in this review as well as for their diligence throughout the year, to ensure that our limited funds are allocated in the best way possible for the benefit of our pupils.

The Members commissioned an **External Review of Governance** this year for all four CMATs in the Diocese. This involved a large number of interviews with key stakeholders, a review of reports, agendas and minutes, as well as exploring our plans going forward. The feedback was very positive with many areas of strength identified including good relationships between the Trust Board, LGBs and Exec Team. Sherri Medcalf, our Governance Manager at the time, was noted as being **“highly valued by Chairs and Governors across the Trust”** and **“a source of support and guidance for Governors.”**

Last year our income was around £45m. The majority of this comes from our General Allocation Grant (GAG) and as before around 75% of this was spent on staffing costs, with a further 20% on the learning environment in schools as well as learning materials. The Trust’s Central Team continues to provide a wide range of services for schools including HR, Finance, Chaplaincy, Estates, School Improvement and Governance. Over the past year our Bid Writer has secured many smaller amounts of money for schools to provide additional books, for example, as well as securing larger amounts of funding for the Trust. One successful bid for £90k enabled us to assess our carbon footprint and, based on this assessment, to secure around £400k

in additional funding to implement changes such as new distribution boards and LED lighting, reducing our carbon footprint and bringing down longer-term, ongoing costs too.

Each year we agree on an overarching theme for our Trust and this year it is **“Growing stronger together in faith within our global community”**, which builds on themes from our earlier years. You may recall that as a new Trust in 2018 we started with *Building Community*, then expanded that to *Building Community; Growing in faith Together* the following year and then last year, in the midst of the pandemic *Serving Our Community, Growing In Faith Together*. The broadening of our theme to focus globally aligns

“Growing stronger together in faith within our global community”

with a number of activities across the Trust such as our **Environment Sustainability Working Group** and the ongoing and amazing work done by all our schools fundraising for dozens of charities. Pope Francis also reminds us that we all have an important role in taking care of our environment and **CAFOD** helped us deliver our Pupil Conference in July, to members of our Pupil Parliament, focussing on **Global Citizenship** and the role young people have to play in this.



During the course of the year there have been changes to the composition of the Trust Board. In March we

were joined by two new Foundation Directors, Gillian Sewell and Charles Archer, each bringing a new and different perspective to the Board. Further details about them and other members of the Trust Board can be found on our Trust website www.srscomat.co.uk

In May we bid farewell to Izzy Winton. Izzy was one of the original Foundation Directors, joining in 2018, and has provided robust challenge and considerable support for the Trust Executive as well as clear leadership of the Curriculum and Standards Committee since then. In her role as Vice Chair over the past two years I have really valued her counsel and support.

Looking ahead to September, we are delighted that Sarah Noon is joining our Trust Board. Sarah is also currently Chair of the St Thomas Aquinas CMAT in the Diocese of Nottingham and will be continuing in that role alongside her role on the St Ralph Sherwin Trust Board.

As we enter the fourth year as Trust family, we reflect back over the past three years and in particular the period since March 2020 when all our worlds were turned upside down. **We give thanks to all of those who have helped us to keep going through the challenges that we faced in school, at home and individually.** We keep in our prayers those colleagues, friends and family members who are no longer with us as we emerge from the pandemic into what we hope will be an exciting year ahead for our Trust. On behalf of the Trust Board, thank you for all that you do every day as a parent, pupil, governor, parishioner or member of staff to help our Trust schools to be their best. It is a privilege for us to work with you.



Jacqueline Rodden
Chair, St Ralph Sherwin Catholic Multi Academy Trust Board