

“Let your light shine before others,  
that they may see your good deeds  
and glorify your Father in heaven.”

Matthew 5:16

## Report of the Diocesan Board of Education to Diocesan Synod

September 2024

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### Introduction

Through this report to Diocesan Synod, the DBE aims to reassure Synod of the work of the DBE against the DBE Measure and our part in the diocesan mission of **fruitfulness and sustainability**, particularly relating to **children, young people and families** and **servicing those in need**.

This report highlights how we have shone a light on, from and for our schools and the communities they serve.

### Our Context

The Diocese of Truro covers the local authorities of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly and within this geographic area, our 43 Church Schools sit mainly within larger families of schools; multi-academy trusts (MATs). Our 43 schools, across which there are approximately 7000 children, sit within 10 of the MATs within our diocese. Through the working partnership we have with these trusts, and others who are seeking to work with us, we have a reach of over 150 schools. These **powerful partnerships**, led with a distinctively Christian approach and by living out the Church of England’s Vision for Education, see us support their work and truly be a **‘significant partner in improving outcomes for all children in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.’**

The landscape of schools and trusts will continue to evolve in the coming years. We are working with smaller trusts to support them in navigating their next steps and supporting our remaining handful of schools who are yet to join an existing strong MAT to do so through our academisation strategy.

The landscape in our diocese sees us leading the way in many aspects of this work as others look to us to seek advice, ideas and lessons learned. We are a respected partner in this **system level leadership** and our relationships with the Department for Education (DfE), Local Authority (LA) and other partners is helping to shape and inform this continued evolution of the education landscape.

A significant part of the work we support in schools and trusts is how together we improve **educational, societal and life affecting outcomes** for our children and young people. Schools are needing to do more for their communities with less resource. **Birth rates** are falling and are set to continue to do so. A real impact of this is on **funding** and the future of some **smaller schools**. An example from this academic year has seen one of the MATs we work with have 100 less pupils enter the reception classes in its schools. This equates to around £450k less in funding which has a massive impact on the work of the schools. This, coupled with some stark facts such as Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly having almost 35,000 children living in **poverty** (31%), over 70,000 people live in the top 20% most **deprived areas** in England and over 20% of children are eligible for **free school meals**. In addition to this, 4000 children have individual, specialist plans to support their **special educational needs** and disabilities (SEND) and nearly 3,000 pupils are classified as 'children in need' by **social care**. These are all things that schools are supporting and providing for whilst of course delivering education.

It's these challenges that the DBE are acutely aware of and have shaped our plans and commitments as we seek to enable the children and young people in our diocese to **live life in all its fullness**.

## Our Strategic Commitments

Partnerships and collaboration continue to be at the centre of the DBE's work. Our strategy ensures that we fulfil and stay true to the **DBE Measure** which sets out that that the DBE:

- Promote and assist **education** in the diocese that is consistent with the faith and practice of the Church of England;
- Promote and assist **religious education** and **religious worship** in schools in the diocese;
- Promote and assist **church schools** in the diocese;
- Promote **cooperation** between itself and others concerned with education in the diocese.

Our strategic commitments speak into our aim of being a **significant partner in improving outcomes for all children in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly**.

Over this last academic year, and through 2024-25, we will continue to focus on our five strategic commitments. Below gives an overview of these and a flavour of some of the work we have achieved against them.



### Powerful Partnerships

This aspect of our work sees us further strengthen the partnership working between the DBE, multi-academy trusts and other partners such as the LA, DfE and professional bodies and organisations locally and nationally.

A key part of our work this year has focused on developing and delivering a programme to support trusts and leaders within them to deliver effective governance, RE, worship and

recruitment in a distinctively Christian manner. The **Flourishing Schools Programme** has already seen us train several colleagues across two MATs and this year will see us work with a further 4 MATs and then the remaining 4 the following year. This will lead to a continued programme of training and networking to inform and shape our shared work.



### Joining the DoTS (Diocese of Truro Schools)

This sees us ensure a meaningful connection of Church Schools both within and across MATs. This part of our plan focuses on how we connect our Church Schools with other schools locally, regionally and nationally to support them in improving outcomes and sharing best practice.

Particular successes this year have included our training and development offer opportunities for schools and MATs to collaborate. These have included some of our MATs contributing to national programmes and conferences including a 'small schools network' in the south west, secondary school leaders network, delivering training as part of the National Professional Qualifications (NPQ) programme from the national C of E Education Office and forming network here within our diocese.



### Community, Care and Connectedness

This work focuses on how we can support the most vulnerable and those in need. Within the last academic year, this has seen us provide support to schools across the diocese through training and resources relating to working with families and communities, engaging in the Cornwall Attendance Strategy, focusing on mental health and well-being for pupils and adults in schools and providing advice, training and support focusing on equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI).

Central to this work has been the partnership working with other teams in our diocese including Change & Renewal and Ministry in our work focusing on provision and connection with children and young people. We are delighted to have secured funding to be part of a national pilot focusing on developing worshipping communities in schools as part of the '**Flourish Network Pilot**'. A separate paper is provided to outline this aspect of our work.



### Worshipping Life

This aspect of our strategy seeks to support, resource and enable our schools in their patterns of **worship**. Our training programme has been added to this year to provide further support and advice to all schools in our diocese and we have seen a significant increase in the number of schools (including those that are not Church Schools) attending our training offer.

In addition to training, we are providing physical **resources** and **guidance** to all schools to support them in providing high quality acts of worship in line with DfE and C of E guidance.



### Creation Care

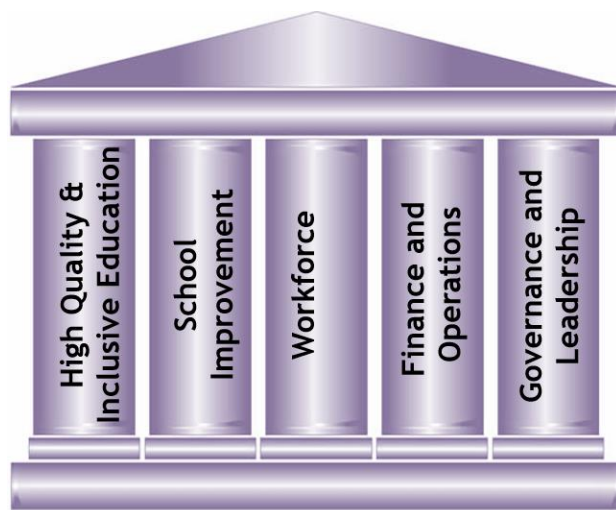
Our commitment here is to God's creation and supporting our schools, MATs and those in them in their work. A significant and highly impactful aspect of this has been the recruitment of our **Cut Carbon Officer** for Schools and our **Creation Care Officer** for Schools who partner with their counterparts serving our churches.

We have provided practical support, advice, resources, time and training to trusts and this is going to grow in the coming years. We have partnered, through these colleagues, with the Local Authority, DfE and other dioceses to collaborate in this shared mission which has included supporting with funding applications, providing curriculum and worship resources to

schools, planning and delivering community events in schools and churches and supporting schools to achieve Eco-Schools Awards.

## Operational Plan

Sitting alongside the strategic plan of the DBE is our operational plan for the Education Team. This plan is split into the five pillars of ‘what makes a strong MAT’ as defined by the DfE. Aligning the Education Team’s operational plan to these pillars has helped us better understand and reflect the work of MATs and thus ensure that our work closely aligns with areas they are working on.



Particular success this year has been on our focus on **school improvement** and the information we hold on our trusts. Having a detailed collection of data has led to a more forensic questioning of school leaders and a better understanding of the steps schools and trusts are taking to improve standards and also where we can support such as through signposting to strength in other trusts and schools.

Similarly, a greater focus on the **governance** needs of schools and trusts and aspects of compliance regarding church school buildings and leadership has supported school leaders in their roles and will strengthen further next year. To support leaders, we have developed ‘Governance in Church Schools’ and ‘Recruiting School Leaders’ handbooks to give support, guidance and make clear our expectations in these areas.

## Academisation Strategy

Using a frame from the national education office, we have set out our strategy for academisation in our diocese. This strategy makes clear that we commit to all of our schools joining strong MATs by 2030 and within this, we have set out how we define a strong multi-academy trust.

This strategy, with our processes, expectations and vision clearly set out, has been well-received and has been used as an example to other dioceses. The strategy is available [here](#) on our website.

## Religious Education

A core function of the DBE Measure involves the promotion and provision of RE within our diocese for all schools.

A significant part of our work here is regarding the part we play within the **Standing Advisory Committee for Religious Education (SACRE)**. This committee has representatives from across the LA, elected members from other organisations and representatives from the DBE and Church of England within the Local Authority.

Within the next academic year, the current **syllabus** for Cornwall (our locally agreed syllabus) will be reviewed. This is a core function of SACRE and we will play a central role in this.

The **DBE measure** makes clear the role and responsibility of the DBE in this area and we have used the last academic year to recruit new members to SACRE (as terms of office end) and outline

how we can support this through effective communication with all schools, providing high-quality training and resourcing.

## Education Team Developments

With a new Diocesan Director of Education (DDE) in post, we took the opportunity to review the work and structure of the Education Team.

Roles continue to be reviewed as we continue to ensure that we meet the needs of our schools and trusts and reflect their own ways of working and structures. The **Flourishing Schools Programme** will inform a significant part of this. This will lead to a reduced need for 'school based leads' who are seconded to the Education Team as the function of their roles will sit within trusts with trained colleagues focusing on RE, worship, recruitment and governance to name but some areas. These newly trained colleagues will be supported through on-going networking and training and enable us to embed our work securely in MATs.

Similarly, we have identified other areas where we can support our schools and trusts and this has led to our Governance Officer's role developing to a Governance and Operations Officer role in line with the requirements of the DBE Measure which sees us support compliance in areas such as land and buildings, admissions and policy.

## Evolving the Work of the DBE

We have identified that to ensure the continued strength of the DBE as it meets the changing educational landscape in our diocese and ensure strong governance, the structure and working procedures of the DBE and AV need to evolve.

This evolution sees us respond through '**turning up the volume**' regarding the expectations the DBE has of schools and multi-academy trusts (MATs), revisiting and reminding of our **function and purpose** with trusts and also to consider how to ensure a more focused, **trust-like** way of working.

Our work here has focused on ensuring clarity of **roles, responsibility and reporting** and to further strengthen our partnership working. We have completed a skills and partnership audit to ensure that we have the right people at the table and considered carefully the timings of meetings within the year to allow for effective and timely reporting.

A key change will be, from the start of the next triennium, the introduction of '**portfolio holders**' where each member of the DBE, using their skill, experience and interest, will hold a portfolio relating to our work. These are:

- Quality of Education - focusing on standards, inspection, outcomes, RE and small schools;
- Governance and Compliance - with a focus on the delivery of the DBE Measure, governance, admissions and stakeholders;
- Inclusion - attendance, EDI, SEND and disadvantaged pupils;
- Finance, Asset and Risk - land and buildings, risk management, financial oversight and budget planning;
- Mission - wider diocesan links, church and parish links, Creation Care, chaplaincy and environment;
- Partnerships - links with professional bodies, institutions and organisations;
- Safeguarding.

Within the evolution planning of the DBE, is also that of **Askel Veur**. Askel Veur (AV) has a diminishing role with regards to its function of approving schools academising and joining trusts as only five of our schools are now yet to either academise or join an existing strong MAT.

Within this triennium, we will explore how the core functions of AV can sit as a committee of the DBE. This is being explored with the support of our Governance and Operations Officer and a consultant to the DBE.

### **Next Steps and Thanks**

For us, our next steps are to continue to work on the five strategic commitments and embed these further. As this year continues, we will revisit the Strategic Commitments ahead of next year to ensure that our work meets the needs of our schools and MATs and aligns with the continued work of our diocese.

We are grateful to trustees and officers of the DBE and Askel Veur for their continued commitment, support and challenge. We of course give huge thanks to all those in and around our schools who work to enable their pupils, staff and communities to flourish.