

An Introduction to 'Plymouth CAST'

What is it?

Plymouth CAST (from 'Catholic and Anglican Schools Trust') is a company set up by the Diocese of Plymouth to create a more secure environment for the constituent schools so that they can better serve the mission of their Catholic and Anglican dioceses. At a constitutional level, the formation of the Plymouth CAST represents, firstly, a change from 'Voluntary Aided' (VA) status for each of the schools to a legal status known as 'Academy'. Secondly, it means that the schools become part of a new single legal entity (referred to as a 'multi academy trust') rather than being separate legal entities. The new legal entity is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee.

What are the advantages of being a multi academy trust?

In summary, the advantages are as follows:

1. The schools will have more support to focus on their core vision and remember that they carry pastoral and mission priorities that cannot always be seen in academic performance tables. This is because Plymouth CAST is given both the funding for each school's budget but also the funding to support vulnerable schools and the school improvement resources. Thus, we can ensure that those who give support to our schools understand their wider mission.
2. The schools are less vulnerable individually and collectively. Plymouth CAST retains the operational control of each school's governing body but adds in direct support from a dedicated school support officer, a shared expectation to support school improvement among the local Catholic schools and top level monitoring via the Board of Directors. As a result, if there are any difficulties in a school around standards, finances or anything else, the system is geared to pick these up early and direct resources in response. At the same time, economies of scale make all the resources go further.
3. There is increased collaboration between the schools in identifying development issues, designing solutions and securing professional resources. Head Teachers across each local area will meet each term to assess what their collected data and 'intelligence' is telling them about how they need to, or can, improve. As this work is done collaboratively and with the support of dedicated advisers who know the schools intimately, all schools' benefit from the combined knowledge and experience rather than being limited by their own internal know-how. School to school professional support is identified and brokered through the same collaborative mechanisms.

What difference does the formation of Plymouth CAST make to parents and children?

The legislation that allowed CAST to come into existence (Academies Act 2010) allowed academies to change quite a few aspects of the day to day running of their school, for example, the timing of the school day and terms, their curriculum provision, their staffing arrangements and so forth. Also, many schools used a change to academy status to re-brand themselves and change things like their school name and uniform.

For CAST, however, these have not been the reasons to move to academy status and, as a result, there is no reason to make such changes. The difference that CAST makes is that it allows our schools to be better at doing what they are already striving to do. It is not about changing for the sake of it but fulfilling our mission more effectively. In all likelihood, parents and pupils will not experience any changes at all in the day to day life of the school other than, over time, an improvement in the education given to the children.

What difference does the formation of Plymouth CAST make to staff?

In much the same way as explained above, CAST was not formed in response to concerns about staff and so it does not require changes to the way staff are employed. It is the intention to honour nationally negotiated pay and conditions for current and future employees, so as to ensure that they are not made any less secure. The dignity of the individual and pastoral care are fundamental Christian principles and they have to apply to the adults in our schools as much as to the children and their families.

More importantly, it is hoped that the greater financial security of the organisation as a whole will give more security to all employees. At the same time, the collaborative mechanisms give employees more opportunities for personal and professional development; recognising when individuals have developed skills by giving them options to support other staff. In addition, as part of CAST, the schools simply have more flexibility to respond to staff requests for re-deployment within the organisation, either temporarily or permanently, to support their professional and personal development aspirations.