

# Romero Catholic Academy Trust

## Strategy and Business Plan

2023-2026

Aspire not to have more  
but to **be more**



## **Foreword from the Chair of Directors**

Our Romero Catholic Academy Trust is now three years old and this Trust strategy comes at an important time for us as we enter a period of rapid growth, following the disruption of the Covid pandemic and its profound impact of schools. We began initially as a family of six schools and are now ten in number with more joining us in 2023. As a result of this growth, we have to carefully plan to provide the support and services our school leaders need to fulfil their mission on behalf of our pupils.

The next phase of our development, over the next 3 years, will prove to be very exciting and, as ever, challenging. This strategic plan presents the vision and direction for the Trust as we continue to pursue our mission as a Catholic family of schools to make Christ known.

All people in our schools will be nurtured by the Word of God and understand the rights and responsibilities that came from the Catholic Faith. However, we are Catholic Schools, rather than schools for Catholics and we welcome and value all our school community equally.

**Angela Ager**

**Chair of Board of Directors**

## **Introduction from the CEO**

This document sets the strategic direction for Romero Catholic Academy Trust over the next three years. Separate School Improvement Plans and budgets are prepared for each of the academies, developed in alignment with the strategic objectives outlined in this plan.

Our plan reflects the continued expansion of our Trust and our strategy for sustained and strategic growth. It focuses on helping our people achieve the best possible outcomes for the pupils we serve.

The strategy is ambitious and wide-ranging, recognising the challenges that all our schools face in terms of budgets and funding, staffing, wellbeing and accountability measures to name but a few. The strategy also reflects the emerging definition of what a good Multi Academy Trust looks like with a focus on: expert governance, the quality of education, work force resilience and wellbeing, efficiency and effectiveness of operational structures and public benefit and civic duty.

Whilst we acknowledge the need to align some of the practices and approaches as we expand, we remain committed to the two principles of solidarity and subsidiarity which take place in a spirit of collaboration. Our schools must and will maintain their unique ethos and culture.

Our Scheme of Delegation outlines our approach to the approval of these plans by our individual Local Academy Governing Boards and, as appropriate, by our Trust Board, and its Finance Audit and Resources Committee.

**Des Callaghan**

**CEO Romero Catholic Academy Trust**

## **Vision and Values of the Trust**

Romero Catholic Academy Trust is a family of Catholic schools serving the needs of children and young people in the Diocese of Salford, covering the areas of Lancashire, Blackburn with Darwen and Calderdale. Responding to the challenge of our patron saint we; *'aspire not to have more, but to be more.'* To achieve this, we will uphold four key values:

**Faith:** to nurture our belief in God

**Service:** to live out the responsibilities of our faith by serving others

**Aspiration:** to aspire to fulfil the potential of each individual, created uniquely in the image of God

**Collaboration:** to work collaboratively; sharing and fostering the strengths and expertise of all.

### **Faith**

- Inspired by the vision of Bishop John, we will provide an authentic passing-on of our Catholic faith.
- Our schools will be nurtured by the Word of God.
- Our pupils will come to an understanding of what it means to be loved by God and the responsibilities that come from loving God.
- Our schools are worshipping communities characterised by vibrant liturgy and prayer.

### **Service**

- We will always act in the service of the pupils in our care.
- In our schools we will educate our children to be the next generation of the stewards of God's creation.
- We embrace Catholic social teaching and work for the Common Good with a preferential option for the poor.
- We are outward facing, acknowledge our place in the wider educational system and accept our civic responsibility.

### **Aspiration**

- We will work to fulfil the potential of each member of our community by providing an education that develops the whole person, including high quality Religious Education.
- Our schools will have a relentless focus on achievement. The quality of education in our schools will be 'at least as academically distinguished as that in the other schools of the area.' (Can. 806.2)
- Every member of our community will be provided with the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to succeed in school and in the next stage of their lives.
- Through high quality and relevant continuing professional development, we will invest in our staff.
- Decision making will weigh up the Common Good and be made in a timely way.
- We will always focus on the solution to a problem.

### **Collaboration**

- A spirit of solidarity leads us to accept a shared responsibility for all.
- We recognise the concept of subsidiarity; that decisions will be made as locally as possible.

- Improvements across our family of schools will be secured by utilising the skills and experience in the trust
- Wherever possible, we will take care to involve and inform people in decision making.
- We believe in the importance of open, honest and positive communication.

**Our Schools April 2024:**



Christ the King RC Primary,  
Burnley



Sacred Heart RC Primary,  
Colne



St Augustine's RC Primary,  
Burnley



St John the Baptist RC Primary, Burnley



St Joseph's RC Academy,  
Todmorden



St Mary's RC Primary,  
Bacup

**Primary**



Holy Trinity R.C. Primary School,  
Brierfield



St Anne's and St Joseph's RC Primary,  
Accrington



St Edward's Roman Catholic Primary  
School, Darwen



St John Southworth RC,  
Nelson



St Mary Magdalene's RC Primary,  
Burnley

ST. MARY MAGDALENE'S  
ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL  
A CATHOLIC EDUCATION FOR ALL



St Mary's RC Primary,  
Burnley

**Secondary**

All Saints RC High School, Rawtenstall



Blessed Trinity RC College,  
Burnley



Our Lady St John RCHS,  
Blackburn



St Augustine's RC High School, Billington



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# Romero Catholic Academy Trust Strategy 2023-2026

## 1. Excellent Standards in Teaching and Learning

### 1.1 DEVELOPING STAFF EXPERTISE

Developing the best teachers and pupil-facing staff in other roles is essential to fulfilling our mission. We believe that clarity of policy and practice, keeping the basic requirements simple, enables colleagues to then innovate and succeed. We encourage colleagues to be creative and adventurous in designing the curriculum but also to share the best practice with others.

Most of our staff are not teachers and we seek to be the employer of choice for staff who work in schools, utilising their skills to improve the life chances and experiences of our pupils whilst at school. The Trust seeks to ensure progression based on talent and performance within each area of expertise, in each school and across the Trust, with staffing structures that enable this.

Performance management and performance review and CPD are bespoke to individuals and teams, and induction procedures are designed to be strong. Our performance management for teachers will focus on the development of knowledge and skills, rather than pure data targets. The Trust is committed to system leadership, enabling teaching and support staff to have an impact beyond their own school and indeed beyond the Trust. It is encouraged as a means for developing expertise, which then has impact back in their home school; it is also motivating for staff and supports retention.

We will develop a wide-ranging programme of conferences, seminars, networks and meeting that improve the knowledge, awareness and confidence of our staff so that they carry their role more effectively and develop the next stage of their progression within the Trust.

### 1.2 EXCELLENT PUPIL OUTCOMES

As a Trust we recognise that education without exceptional outcomes in terms of test and public examinations does not deliver social justice and social mobility. We want all our pupils to achieve excellent outcomes, however, can only be truly delivered if we develop for our pupils as whole, well-rounded people.

#### 1.2.1 Excellence in Primary Outcomes:

We embrace the accountability placed on our schools to ensure excellent outcomes and seek the most effective ways to ensure that our pupils get the highest possible results and progress, both at external accountability points, but equally importantly at each point in their primary education. The KPIs for external assessment for reading, writing and maths, as well as other measures, are monitored closely by



school leaders, governors and the Trust. Where pupils are at risk of falling behind, resource is allocated intervene early. We celebrate with our families the achievements of all our pupils.

#### 1.2.2 Excellence in Secondary Outcomes:

We embrace the accountability placed on our schools to ensure excellent outcomes. We aim for pupils to achieve highly in terms of progress from their starting points in all subjects though key stage 3 up to key stage 4. We take the National Curriculum as our minimum requirement at key stage 3 and believe pupils should follow this full curriculum for the first three years of their secondary education. We believe the EBacc is appropriate for most, but not necessarily all pupils. However, except in exceptional cases, all pupils will have access to EBacc suite of subjects. Each school's curriculum is designed to deliver high quality outcomes for all, with a strong focus in ensuring that English and mathematics are strong enough to enable high performance across all subjects. We celebrate with our families the achievement of all our pupils. Progression to high quality employment and success in further study are key indicators of our success.

#### 1.2.3 Religious Education Outcomes:

RE is not only compulsory in our schools at all key stages, but greatly valued. RE will have at least 10% of the curriculum time. We place high expectation on the provision for RE (including salary and status of the head of RE in secondary phase and the resources allocated to the subject) but expect good outcomes in return. The Head of RE in secondary phase will be held to account for outcomes in the same way as other core subjects.

### **1.3 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT CAPACITY**

Our aim is to have experts in all areas of school improvement, and to have plans for succession in place. Most school improvement capacity comes from our schools, with leaders supporting colleagues within and beyond their own school. As a Trust, we will further develop a team of School Improvement Leads and subject experts who are deployed to oversee the quality and impact of the school improvement work. A key feature of the leadership of our school improvement are our Trust-wide school improvement leads who are serving practitioners These leaders, who will have access to the best practice and people from across the Trust's schools, are charged with developing the best learning experiences.

Where appropriate, the teams standardise approaches with subjects, so that leaders and teachers can seamlessly support within a different context within the Trust, be it through joint moderation, curriculum material development, or, indeed, supporting leadership where a gap has emerged, thereby mitigating standards risks across the Trust. Together, we will develop best practice and share expertise across and beyond our schools. We intend, as we grow, to develop, over the next three years, greater capacity in the School Improvement Team, whilst ensuring that this is predominantly school based.

All schools use a common SEF and headteacher's report to reduce workload and ensure consistency of reporting and evaluation.

Key areas of risk, such as Safeguarding, will be audited annually by the Trust to support school leaders in ensuring compliance.

#### **1.4 COLLABORATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE**

Quality assurance systems will be detailed across our schools, to identify areas of strength and areas where development and support may be required. We value honesty and integrity, believing that teachers thrive best when they evaluate their own and others' work with a constructive, critical eye.

The core part of our support will come from our school Improvement leads who are leaders from across the Trust. The recruitment and further training of those responsible for quality assurance will be an important part of the development ensuring that our curriculum produces to the best possible learning and outcomes at each stage of a pupil's journey.

However, we recognise that external input is also required, and we will access those who can share best practice. This includes engagement with the Research School.

Subject Networks teams are charged with ensuring our curriculum delivery is exemplary within each subject area. Our schools will design a curriculum ensures all pupils have full access to the curriculum and we engage in research from local and international best practice. Our aim is to be recognised as developing high quality creative learning experiences that generate the highest outcomes for pupils.

## **2. Strong, Sustainable Leadership and Governance**

### **2.1 RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND SUCCESSION PLANNING**

Successful, thriving schools are created through having outstanding people working in them. We aim to recruit and develop a great workforce, highly skilled and passionate about getting the very best for all our pupils. We are creative and flexible in our approaches to recruitment, ensuring we are resourceful in getting the very best talent and, indeed, people with the potential to be the very best.

Our induction procedures will be developed and carefully constructed and detailed to ensure that new staff, whatever their position and experience, get the best possible opportunity to excel very quickly within their role. From career entry through to executive headship, we seek to develop staff, through in-school CPD, cross-Trust CPD, through other partnership required to support staff in being the best they can be.

We will work with school leaders to develop staffing models to get the very best from individuals and teams, utilising information gathering from new starters, established employees and those leaving the Trust's employment.

As part of the Catholic Teaching Alliance, we will develop primary and secondary hubs to provide high quality teaching training for Catholic schools and in doing so provide for some, a pathway from graduate teaching assistants to teaching and leadership.

We will use secondment opportunities to allow our staff to develop their confidence and expertise and in doing so, support schools when their capacity temporarily reduces. This will include support staff as well as teachers and leaders.

## **2.2 EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE**

We aim to be a model of good governance across the Trust. We review our governance, utilising approved external consultants regularly. Governors will regularly self-evaluate their effectiveness through self-assessment tools or an external review of governance

Our Trust Board is set-up with a high focus on the skills of each individual, and it is non-representative of the schools. Each committee is also set up based on a skills audit. Governance will be supported centrally to ensure compliance and consistency. Our recruitment to governing boards committees is supported by the Diocese of Salford but we will review the relevant articles and schemes of delegation to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

We will work with the increasing number of LGBs to rationalise committees and agendas for the school transition from Voluntary Aided to Academy status. A training schedule is set up to support governors and ensure appropriate skills and knowledge. There are mandatory modules for all governors to support them in the statutory responsibilities.

We will continue to develop communication between the Trust Board and governors through the Chair of Governors forum and reflect how this forum can have increasing impact on our schools.

We will also support LGBs to ensure individual school websites are compliant. The Trust will offer schools the option of moving to a new website with a common framework which will assist this process, whilst allowing the website to reflect the school's unique ethos and character.

We aim to increase the number Board members to address any gaps in skill set and ensure the Board continues to be diverse and reflective of the communities we serve.

## **2.3 THE CATHOLIC LIFE OF OUR SCHOOLS**

Our Vision and Values are inspired by the shared mission to make Christ known in our everything we do in our schools. To achieve this, we provide opportunities for formation and reflection through our own conferences and training as well as joining with the diocesan professional development and formation work.

Our schools and Trust must be places where prayer and reflection are natural and routine whilst our liturgical experiences are authentic and vibrant. While we regard RE as an academic subject in our schools, we recognise that high quality RE is a central part of the Catholic Life of our schools and Trust. Therefore, we give the teaching of RE in our schools a higher priority and will provide dedicated training to RE leads and teachers. We will also work with the diocesan leads for RE to add expertise and oversight. We will focus on the Curriculum Directory for Religious Education and its authentic implementation within our schools.

We will use the Catholic Schools Inspection Framework (CSI) as an additional tool to evaluate the Catholic Life of the school and aim for all our schools to be judged good or better in the CSI Inspections.

## **2.4 FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY**

Our finance team works very closely with our Directors, Governors and Headteachers to ensure savings where they can be achieved in all areas of the school's operation, to maximise investment so that we achieve our vision for education. All are clear that the financial health of our Trust relies on astute financial management and investment in the right areas. We are developing part or fully centralised teams to support our academies more efficiently where possible and ensuring finance professional in our schools are trained in the principals of accountancy to fulfil their role.

Leaders and those responsible for governance, especially those new to the Trust, will be clear about their responsibilities laid out in the Academy Trust Handbook and the Trust's own financial handbook.

Our Trust Audit Finance and Risk Committee monitors expenditure and investment carefully. Financial forecasting is projected across 3 years to identify areas of risk and opportunity. We recognise that an excellent curriculum, in the pursuit of social justice and social mobility, doesn't mean the cheapest one. We aim to invest in the right areas that will enable us to achieve our vision.

## **3. Build a strong Infrastructure**

### **3.1 AN EFFECTIVE CENTRAL TEAM TO SUPPORT SCHOOLS**

We aim to develop central service provision so that it is of sufficient capacity to deliver the next phase of growth. The projected staffing models (see attached organisational chart) have been developed so that, as growth occurs, a clear structure is being worked towards, this means that we do not put in place permanent structures that will not be fit for purpose as the Trust enlarges. Our aim is to provide an excellent centralised business service as a Trust, enabling our headteachers and staff to focus on educational provision, developing the best schools in which to learn and work.

#### **3.1.1 Finance**

The Trust will continue to develop a central finance team. Procedures are centralised, and it is an expectation for schools joining the Trust that they will migrate to the centralised software and common approach as they join the Trust.

#### **3.1.2 People (HR)**

We aim to be an employer of choice. The Trust is committed to delivering a high quality 'talent architecture' to help to recruit, develop and retain the highest quality of professionals in all of our teams across the Trust and in each school. Talent management is carried out routinely by school senior leadership teams and our Central Team, with leadership potential assessed and succession planning formally mapped.

We have strong partnership and agreement with external legal support do assist with more complex personnel issues as well as training and policy development.

### 3.1.3 Estates Management and Health and Safety

Our estates strategy combines ensuring the highest quality of learning environments and facilities for the pupils currently within our schools and ensuring that the estates are well maintained and developed for our future generations. The plan ensures that routine condition surveys identify areas of high need. Capital plans respond to school leadership proposals, with the Trust Audit, Finance and Risk Committee approving investment in the areas of greatest need across the Trust. The Trust has access to School Capital Allocation (SCA). This will to allocated to schools, subject to need and value for money following the assessment of the Estates Team.

We will consult with schools about supplementing the SCA with a schools' estates contribution to allow emergency works to be accessed quickly.

We will standardise the compliance procedures across the Trust's schools so that Board of Directors can be assured that schools are legally compliant and act to ensure compliance for health and safety if necessary.

We will also access government grants that can be used for energy efficiency and reducing the carbon footprint of the Trust and its schools, working with the diocesan environmental department to fulfil our obligations towards the environment to be stewards of creation. We will work actively towards the Diocesan target of our schools to reach carbon zero by 2038.

### 3.1.4 ICT

The Trust will develop our IT support which will deliver high quality systems across the Trust. The service is provided for all schools in the Trust, with an evaluation of the best delivery model for new schools being carried out within the first 18 months of joining the Trust. Outcomes of evaluation will result in either a maintained current service or phased integration into the Trust's service.

### 3.1.5 Risk Management

Leaders and Governors are charged with developing a culture where risk management is an active and living process. Reputational risk is the responsibility of all employees. The strategy to monitor, reduce or tolerate specific risks is managed through our integrated risk management register Schools also identify and assess. risk within their local setting. We will discuss realistic risk management with heads and report on common risks across the Trust and devise ways of mitigating these risks.

## **3.2 FUNDING REVIEW**

To enable comprehensive, high-quality services for our schools, we will review the management fee and how the public money received by the Trust is allocated. This will involve options including increase in

the management fee from its current rate and research and consultation on other methods of finance allocation. This review will balance the principles of subsidiarity with solidarity.

Any increase in the management fee will be accompanied by a detailed growth plan for the Central Team with clear roles and lines of accountability that focus on improving schools and the experience of the pupils within our schools.

### **3.3 MAT GROWTH**

By 2030, all the schools in our geographical 'footprint' will have joined (or being the process of joining) the Trust (See attached Growth Plan). Our plans and rationale are outlined in the Strategic Growth Plan. This will result in a MAT of approximately 60 schools of which 9 will be high schools. There are no special, AP or sixth form provision within the MAT.

To achieve this ambitious growth, we work with the Diocese, local authorities and the DfE. It will require a due diligence conversion team, led by the growth development lead, to prepare schools for conversions and ensure the schools transfer without any adverse impact on pupils' education and staff wellbeing. We also aim to remove any anxiety from school staff, governors, parents and pupils by providing clarity of information and direction.

We aim to receive schools into the Trust in a strategic way. This means, schools joining usually in geographical clusters with a balance of strong schools and those that might need more support. This identification of schools' relative strengths is not limited to their Ofsted and CSI grading, but includes issues of current standards, staffing, governance, estates and finance. Where possible, the Trust will work with schools prior to joining the Trust and in some cases enter into a Trust Partnership Agreement via the DfE.

## **4. Pupil and Staff Wellbeing**

### **4.1 EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND WELLBEING**

Working in schools is rewarding, but also, challenging. We believe that by listening to our staff, we can enhance the rewarding side of the job and seek to minimise the negative element of challenge. We provide online support for all our staff which they can access free of charge and confidentially. We will review our occupational health provider to ensure that our staff receive added value and support. We will ensure 'on-board' and 'exit' interviews for all colleagues, and we annually survey our staff and share the results with headteachers and the staff as well as Governors and Directors.

We will provide supervision for key staff particularly those dealing with pupil casework (e.g., Designated Safeguarding Leads, Family Support Worker) as well our headteachers.

In terms of staff well-being, we believe in the power of celebrating achievement and engagement. We recognise that teaching is a stressful job. We seek to minimise stress where we can, being mindful of individuals' work-life balance. We also recognise that career progression, professional growth and

learning are integral to staff well-being. By providing opportunities for staff to work with colleagues in other Trust schools, the Trust enables staff to be outward facing whilst encouraging supportive.

#### **4.2 ENSURING EXCELLENT WELLBEING AND SUPPORT FOR ALL PUPILS**

Our schools take great pride in supporting all students so that they can be the best they can be. We believe that academic excellence is much more likely achieved through excellent pupil support. We have excellent of our pastoral systems. We are passionate about supporting the pastoral needs of all pupils as truly inclusive schools. We aim to do all we can for individuals or groups of pupils, of all abilities, special educational needs and disabilities, pupils with mental health issues, or whatever the need. We believe inclusion and effective pupil support are about 'deeds, not words' and we expect our staff to support each other in 'going the extra mile' to support our pupils.

We are especially mindful of ensuring high quality transition arrangements at key points. Each school in our Trust has its own vision and values, in line with our Trust vision and values, but unique to the community that the school serves. Local Governing Body members and the school leadership are expected to develop a strong ethos, underpinned by the values of the Trust and the school. For our young people to be successful citizens, they need to have developed their own strong set of moral value which must include respect, tolerance and openness to difference.

Ensuring pupil emotional well-being is a major contributor to academic achievement, success and satisfaction in later life. Our schools recognise that excellence in pastoral care is non-negotiable. We are focused on ensuring that our pupils are happy, developing a respectful, tolerant attitude to life, being able to develop strong relationships and friendships with others. Our schools develop provision, monitor and intervene systematically to do all that they can to ensure each young person's wellbeing. We believe that mental health and wellbeing programmes in school, can lead to significant improvements in children's mental health and social and emotional skills. Our staff teams are also at the forefront of developing effective mental health provision in school.

We will put in place wide-ranging training for staff to support good mental health and wellbeing for our pupils and headteachers and Trust leaders.