

## Written evidence submitted Catholic Education Service

### 1.Executive summary

The CES has spoken to diocesan staff across England about the condition of school buildings and the support they have had from the DfE. A summary of the evidence:

- Huge variety in understanding among school leaders, governors, academy company directors and school staff about the condition of school buildings and what is required to maintain and repair them.
- Where school condition allocation (SCA) is provided by the DfE directly to dioceses substantial benefits such as economies of scale, emergency remedial work and long-term strategic estate maintenance and repairs have been successfully implemented.
- There is no legal difference between the Trustees of the School (“Trustees”) (for Catholic schools this will be a diocese or religious order) as the owners of the land and school buildings occupied by the school, whether a school is voluntary aided or part of a multi-academy trust (MAT) - in both cases ownership arrangements are identical.
- MAT SCA should be provided directly to dioceses to replicate the highly successful economies of scale, emergency and longer-term strategic interventions through repairs and maintenance that have been achieved with voluntary aided schools.

### 2.Introduction

The CES represents all Catholic schools, colleges and academies in England and Wales on behalf of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference, with 9% of the national total of state-funded schools. There are more than 2,000 Catholic schools in England across 19 dioceses, meaning that the Catholic sector is the second largest national provider of education and currently educates just under 850,000 pupils. Due partly to historical Catholic migration to the UK and partly due to the Catholic mission of serving the poor, Catholic schools have more pupils from deprived backgrounds than the national average, while outperforming national average GCSE English and Maths scores by five percentage points.

### 3.Does the DfE have a good understand of the condition of school buildings?

Dioceses report a huge variety in understanding among school leaders, governors, academy company directors and school staff about the condition of school buildings, and what is required to maintain and repair them. When coupled with a lack of appropriately qualified, experienced and skilled personnel, schools are unable to interpret building survey and compliance data effectively and translate that into the work required. There is a risk that they will, inadvertently but in good faith, provide incomplete and / or incorrect information to the DfE regarding school buildings’ condition.

### 4.Does the DfE have appropriate arrangements in place to allocate funding for school buildings in line with need?

The current method of allocation is not appropriate. For the last few years, SCA for Catholic voluntary aided schools (VA SCA) has been provided directly to dioceses as Responsible Bodies. Where dioceses have not met the threshold, diocesan chain arrangements enable a lead diocese to passport to others in

the chain. However, in the case of Catholic Multi Academy Trusts (MATs), the DfE recognises the academy company as a Responsible Body, with SCA for MATs provided to academy companies for allocation. This is wrong because there is no difference legally between the Trustees as the owners of the land and the school building(s) on that land, whether a school is a voluntary aided school or part of a MAT; in both cases, the ownership arrangements are identical. There is no reason why dioceses should not be recognised as Responsible Bodies for SCA, in all cases.

**5. Can the DfE give assurance that funding for school buildings is being used efficiently and effectively?**

i) SCA is currently provided to dioceses as Responsible Bodies only in relation to voluntary aided schools; for MATs within that diocese the DfE considers the MAT to be the Responsible Body and allocates SCA funding accordingly. This is wrong as there is no difference between a VA school or a MAT when it comes to the school land – all are either owned by the Diocesan Trustees or Religious Order Trustees – and MAT SCA should be paid directly to dioceses in the same way that VA SCA has successfully been administered to date. Benefits have included: increased ability to plan strategically across the estate and identify schools which may be missing out on funding; ability to fund larger projects over a longer period of time; access to skills and expertise which individual schools do not have; efficiency in terms of time and costs; economies of scale, e.g. multiple boilers being replaced and multiple roof repairs from the same contractors reducing fees, and scaffolding costs; increased / better protection for landowners and governors.

ii) Specifically, regarding economies of scale, dioceses reported benefits of the VA SCA approach have included smaller contingency sums needing to be retained; saving on fees through using fewer consultants for multiple projects; lower prices being achieved; and the resulting ability to use savings on other projects. Further, detailed examples are as follows:

iii) The Archdiocese of Westminster was able to identify through Statlog, a school estates data management system used by Catholic schools, that 5% of its schools needed roof upgrades. The archdiocese was able to coordinate with construction companies and individual projects, saving money.

iv) The Diocese of Portsmouth reported that in St Swithun, Wells, there were severe roof leaks in a school's main hall, resulting in a high-level health and safety risk. With VA SCA the diocese provided an immediate response: roof condition survey conducted, consultant appointed, swift tender process, works approved. The outcome was that initial risks were managed, and then eliminated by the replacement of a defective roof section.

v) A school in St Helens in the Archdiocese of Liverpool suffered a building collapse. Insurance paid for the reinstatement work, but with VA SCA the archdiocese was able to ensure procedures were in place to organise a rapid response to the incident and prevent prolonged school closure.

vi) The Diocese of Salford provided through VA SCA a school with a physiotherapy facility in a more appropriate location on site to meet the changing needs of pupils with SEN and physical disabilities.

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