

St Clare Directors' Update – November 2021

Writing this update on the first Sunday of Advent seems appropriate. Throughout the Advent season we are encouraged to focus on preparation, readiness and hope. These sentiments capture well what is being asked of us all as we move towards the Bishop's vision of forming St Clare's Trust. While much time over the past few months has understandably been spent working on practical steps to prepare for the creation of St Clare's Trust, the importance of hope in our journey together should not be forgotten. Hope in the positive aspirations and ambitions that Chairs and Heads have shared for what we could collectively achieve. Hope for the positive impact that working together could have for the future of Catholic education and the life chances for children across the whole of our Hallam Diocese.

There was good discussion around the types of collaboration already yielding benefits between groups of schools within St Clare's Trust at the Heads' Forum led by Steve Davies on the 24th November. There was a desire to build relationships across all St Clare's Heads to share existing practices. Alan Dewhurst shared the feedback that he gained from a recent visit to a school in Leeds where staff discussed the positive impact that collaboration across their Catholic MAT had had for both staff and students on the ground. As a result of the forum, Steve is now developing proposals for: activities to help networking between Heads; working groups to actively take forward school improvement strategy together, and; opportunities to support vision and spirituality of school leaders. The group agreed that Steve would continue to organise monthly Heads' Forums, hold weekly Zoom drop-in sessions for Heads and to begin to visit schools to get to know communities.

We were pleased that Steve Davies was able to join Chairs and Directors at the Chairs' Forum led by Kevin Smith, held at All Saints on the 10th November. We really appreciated the opportunity to meet together in person and for Chairs to have the chance to talk directly with Steve about his experience and aspirations for St Clare's Trust. The forum provided some challenging questions and discussion, as well as ideas for how we might continue to build relationships and actively support Chairs in their vital roles leading local governance. The discussion was hugely helpful to us as Directors and we hope also to the Chairs who attended. **Our next forum will be held via Zoom at 6pm on Tuesday 14th December.** We promised that we would share information and updates as soon as we are able and the December meeting provides an opportunity to talk together about the upcoming consultation process. This is also a chance to continue to develop our relationships with each other across the family of schools, a desire that many of our Chairs have expressed. Please do ensure that your school is part of the conversation and that a Governor attends the session where possible.

At both the Heads' Forum and Chairs' Forum the groups discussed the importance of each and every business manager (or equivalent) and the particular concerns that they may have at the moment. Everyone was keen to ensure that these colleagues realise that they are

valued, essential to the success of their school and that they have an important role within the St Clare Trust. Steve Davies is working to establish a network across all of the schools' business managers so that they have an opportunity to ask questions, share concerns and ideas. Adnam (incoming CFO) will be seeking to build relationships with the business managers when he joins us in January and to engage them in the development of St Clare's Trust.

We held a St Clare's Trust Board Meeting on the 9th November. During the meeting we discussed the latest on the application to the DfE and ESFA to form our Diocese's two Catholic MATS – the authorities pushed the relevant meeting back and we await their decision. Chiming with our theme of hope, let us hope for a positive decision soon. We spent some time discussing both Director recruitment and training. We are developing a strategy to recruit additional Foundation and Ordinary Directors to help strengthen the board and add complementary skills and knowledge. We will be working together with the Schools Department and St Francis Trust to begin additional engagement and recruitment in the coming weeks. A key aim is to reach out more widely and to enhance Board diversity.

We did not receive a draft scheme of delegation in time for our November board meeting. However, we are expecting both the scheme of delegation and Diocesan protocols in time for our December Board meeting. Will share and update on these soon.

At the board meeting we also discussed the development of a Trust Capacity Fund (TCaF) bid to the Regional Schools Commissioner. The two Trusts, with the MAT development group, Schools Department and the incoming interim CEOs and CFOs are contributing to this. The aim is to secure the maximum funds possible towards the set-up of the Trust, thereby minimising costs to our schools and providing the best shared infrastructure from the outset.

As ever, we are grateful to everyone who has given up their time to attend meetings or to send feedback. Your continued support is key to making the development of St Clare's Trust a success.

St Clare Board of Directors
28th November 2021