



England's Chief Education Officer says that Multi Academy Trusts can

Diocese of Guildford

We have much to learn from the African concept of Ubuntu which outlines how an authentic individual is part of a larger and more significant relational, communal, societal, environmental and spiritual world, **writes Revd Canon Nigel Genders**

It's a concept which is at the heart of the Church of England's approach to education which sets out our commitment to educating for life in all its fullness through a broad and rich curriculum that enables children and young people to truly flourish. Such an education, with its focus on hope and aspiration, is vital in the light of a pandemic which has impacted massively on children's mental health and wellbeing.

Today's Government White Paper has stepped up momentum for schools to become academies, with the Government setting a clear aspiration for all schools to join a strong multi academy trust by 2030.

Since the beginning of the Academy programme, I have always spoken of the need for interdependence rather than an approach to the school system which has been driven by individualism and autonomy. Our work on rural and small schools has highlighted the need to work together and for schools to embrace change through formation of structural collaborations and partnerships, so I am delighted to see this emphasis in the White Paper.



Diocese of Guildford

The leadership practices which lie at the heart of our work as a national provider of National Professional Qualifications and are underpinned by our Church of England vision for education, are based on the three core concepts of being called, connected and committed, and it is that connectedness which is vitally important for the future of our school system. For us, the purpose of connection and collaboration is not simply the economies of scale or the benefits of sharing practice across a group of schools (important as they are) but it is fundamentally about doing better for the children we serve and the desire for us to move from being a network of schools and leaders who share a common vision to being a powerful movement for transformational education for the common good. It's a movement which needs to work for the small rural schools (of which the Church of England provides the vast majority across the country) as well as the large urban schools (where the majority of our 1 million children learn).

The White Paper recognises the vital role the churches have played over the last 200+ years in this country and sets out how that role needs to continue to be enabled in the future development of the school system.

The move towards the fully academized educational landscape set out in the White Paper requires two key things:

1. Significant investment of resource to make that transition possible. The Church of England is the largest provider of academies, with 1535 of our schools having already converted - but that still leaves two thirds of our schools to become academies and this will require time and resource for the conversion process as well as new strong trusts to be formed to enable that transition. The recognition that MATs must grow to a sustainable level of about 7,500 pupils means thinking carefully and strategically about the small rural schools and how a funding model can work for them which enables their vital education to remain at the heart of communities across our land.
2. Legislation to ensure that the statutory basis on which the dual system of Church and State as partners in education (which has been in operation since 1944) securely translates into the contractual context in which academies are based so that the sites on which are schools are situated can continue to be used for the charitable purposes for which they were given.



The Church of England

I have always spoken of the need for interdependence rather than an approach to the school system driven by individualism and autonomy.

Nigel Genders

The assurance in the White Paper that these things will be addressed and secured means that we can approach this new future with great confidence. Such structural changes are not embraced for their own sake, but because we believe they will strengthen our ability to build our movement for education positively and proactively, ensuring that every school benefits from being a member of this strong family of schools, because in doing so they will be able to deliver quality education for the good of the children and young people we serve.

Those structural changes will only make a difference if they are underpinned by excellent leadership development through our continued provision of NPQs and wider support for school leaders at every stage of their journey and they will require focus and commitment at local, diocesan, regional and national levels.

We look forward to playing our part in the development of the school system for the future in the sure knowledge that as children and young people are nurtured in our schools their formation will lead to the transformation of the world.

As the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu said while speaking of Ubuntu, to be open and available and affirming of others, and with a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that they belong in a greater whole.

More information

- [Government White Paper on Education \(Gov.uk\)](#)
- [Church of England Schools and Academies](#)