St Ralph Sherwin
Catholic Multi Academy Trust

20.11.26

Dear parents, carers and families

I hope that you are managing to keep warm as the nights draw in and the car defrosting routine begins for some! I managed to dig out last year's gloves and hat from my wardrobe this week and I was rather surprised to feel quite comforted by the presence of winter attire again. There is something about November that I find strangely reassuring; I think that it's the thought of bowls of soup, cold hands wrapped around cups of tea and seeing house lights go on early. Perhaps it is the promise of Advent, just around the corner, and the imminent birth of a baby?

Of course, not all of us have warm clothing and shelter and for some, the winter is a real struggle. Soaring energy prices mean that heating and lighting may have to be rationed in some homes. This is why I am delighted that our trust has entered into a partnership with a wonderful local charity called, '**Lifting Children's Hopes'** where all 25 of our trust schools have signed up to participate. This is a wonderful charity which runs seven programmes to improve the lives of children in the East Midlands. For example, at present, the charity is donating winter coats to schools so that any child without may be able to find one that is suitable. Please do have a look at their website here: Lifting Children's Hopes - Leicester Children's Holidays

Please do consider supporting your school in their work with this charity; it would be wonderful to see it really take off as a trust-wide initiative, where we all work to a common purpose in line with our Catholic life and mission. You can also support the charity directly in a variety of ways; do mention your child's school and the St Ralph Sherwin CMAT if you contact them.

Mobile Phones

You will be well versed in the adverse mental health impact upon our children from social media and mobile phones. It is so important that all of our children and young people are given the opportunity to look after their digital health and welfare by having a complete break from mobile phone usage at school. Whilst all of our schools have a 'no mobile phone' protocol, whereby as a minimum, phones are not seen or heard, I was interested to hear that the Department for Education has stated that they would like guidance for schools to be tighter than it currently is. You can read the BBC article here: Phones to be banned from pupils' bags or pockets under new rules - BBC News

I welcome this further guidance and hope that the good intention is supported with resource. That said, I have asked our schools, particularly our Secondary schools, to look into how they will respond to the guidance. This can be a heated topic, and I ask you to give school leaders space to plan for the most sensible option for your children but please rest assured that we take this issue seriously for the health and welfare of all of our pupils.

Catering

When you talk to adults about their school days, one of the things that is usually a core memory is to do with the food! This term, the trust has gone out to tender for our schools' catering service and we are hugely

excited about the appointed providers, 'Aspens'. In time, we will roll out a completely new menu across all of our schools so that your children can be assured of a nutritious and enticing offer. As you can imagine, a catering service change across 25 schools will take time and careful planning, but we are confident that your child will be hugely impressed by the new offer. Individual schools will communicate with you when each is onboarding, but in the meantime, have a look at their website: Home – Aspens Services

Local Governing Bodies

This term, I have been attending local governing body meetings. I find that this is a hugely useful way of finding out about our schools, their strengths and their areas for further improvement. Just today, I listened in to the local governing body meeting at **Saint Mary's New Mills**, and I heard about the passion that the children there have for the environment. I also heard about the wonderful work that the children are doing to improve their oracy. I remain so grateful for the work of our local governors and I can see the hugely positive impact that this has on our schools. If you would like to become a governor, please do contact our governance lead, Emma Kealey ekealey@srscmat.co.uk at the trust.

Falling birth rates

You may have seen on the news that a national low birth rate has meant that there are surplus school places in the education system across the UK, particularly in the Primary phase. Whilst I am thrilled that our Catholic families have always had access to the very best education through our Catholic schools, I wonder if other families that you know might not be aware that our **Catholic schools are for everyone** and not just Catholic children. We welcome children of all faiths and of no faith; this is because we are Catholics – we respect and love all of our neighbours. So, whilst we are blessed that our schools remain hugely popular, if you know of a family that might be considering a Catholic school for their child, or maybe their child might not have settled well at their current school, please do get in touch with your local Catholic school headteacher. Even if you are not a Catholic, you are so welcome and you will feel the warmth and love of a Catholic family school as soon as you step inside.

St Margaret's Catholic Voluntary Academy

A special 'shout out' to St Margaret's in Glossop. I was talking to their Headteacher, Mrs Beaumont, only today and she was telling me all about their exciting plans for celebrating the nativity. I was thrilled to accept her kind invitation to attend their nativity service in December where I also hope to meet some of the school's parents and carers. St Margaret's is a very special school, it is stronger for its small size and I encourage anyone locally to contact Mrs Beaumont if you would like to view the school for your child. I would describe the education there as 'inspirational' where every child receives a bespoke education tailored to their needs, talents and gifts. I look forward to working with this wonderful school over the coming years.

Eternal Rest

Finally, during November, we traditionally remember those who have died. I wanted to let you know that whilst I do not know your individual stories, I have been keeping your loved ones in my prayers this month.

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Thank you once again for all that you do to support your child's school and the trust. I continue to feel honoured and blessed to serve your communities.

With my very best wishes,



Lisa Walton
Chief Executive Officer