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Mr Chris Penn
Diocesan Director of Education

Dear Colleagues,

I am delighted to be writing to you, at the start of this new school year, as I take up post as the new Diocesan Director of Education, following my appointment earlier in the year. It is a great honour and privilege to have been given this opportunity to further strengthen the work and partnership with our church schools across the Diocese of Chester, as we strive to ensure the very best outcomes for every child and young person in our care.

As we move forward, the Church of England vision for education, underpinned by the four elements of hope, community, respect and dignity will serve as an excellent basis for providing the distinctive, Christian education and the promotion of educational excellence and academic rigour that we strive to deliver for all. The vision provides a sound framework for working with others to build partnerships within the communities that we serve through our Church schools. This is something I wish to progress, seeing our schools as being at the heart of the mission and ministry of the Church of England.

I am very much looking forward to working with all our Church school leaders and governing bodies. The high-quality leadership and positive outcomes that you and your leadership teams deliver for children and young people in your care is both inspiring and impressive. It is my intention to personally visit every one of our church schools to understand the unique characteristics, strengths and challenges each individual school faces in serving your specific communities, as well as exploring how we can share the outstanding practices that exist more widely. However, do bear with me, as it is going to take some time to get around each of the 116 schools across the diocese.

This is such a key and pivotal time in education, as we continue to see major reforms in the curriculum, the revision and review of assessment, fundamental changes to national tests and the changes in governance with the continued growth of the academy programme. All of which is in the context of many schools facing increasingly challenging budgets and the potential implications of a new funding formula. Therefore, establishing effective partnerships, networks and relationships both existing and new, to provide mutual support, encouragement and challenge through informal, formal and structural arrangements, will be an important factor in preparing for the changing landscape and one in which the Diocesan Board of Education aims to be a key and integral part.

There are real opportunities for increased and enhanced collaboration with the diocese, as can be seen in current school to school support and our established headteacher networks. Through these, we look to share and build on the very best practice, high levels of expertise, innovation and creativity that exist across our schools. All of which are deeply rooted in the Christian faith that is aimed at enabling all of our pupils to achieve their fullest potential.

The Board of Education, through its education team and consultants, recognises its responsibilities in meeting the increasing expectation in brokering support to provide and deliver a service of high quality school improvement and school effectiveness. Its core purpose being to enable our schools in need to make sustained progress in driving up academic standards, providing the very best outcomes for every pupil. In a wider context, it also rigorously supports and challenges all schools to further develop their provision for the wider spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of learning, so that all pupils feel valued as individuals, have their aspirations raised and develop a sense of belonging to a community that is loved by God.

An area we hope to develop is the ability to provide a wider range of high quality professional development and training through our diocesan family of schools offer, building on the existing programme, which is both well received and well attended by schools. This includes increased access to bespoke training and support that is tailored to the needs of the individual school or cluster of schools.

As you prepare for the year ahead, I would encourage you to think about your own leadership role and how you can continue to grow and support the next generation of Church school leaders in our diocese. I believe this will be an important strategy in ensuring we have both the calibre and capacity to successfully recruit to key senior posts in the future. As a diocese, we are committed to supporting and encouraging the professional growth of our upcoming leaders. Continuing to identify the dynamic, distinctive leaders of the future and successful succession planning and leadership training will ensure high quality leadership in all our church schools.

In closing, I want to thank you for your on-going commitment and professionalism. There is much to celebrate across our church schools and despite some of the challenges that lie ahead, this is an exciting time as we look to shape church schools of the future, working in partnership to deliver a shared vision of excellence in education for our children and young people which is deeply Christian, with the promise by Jesus of 'life in all its fullness' at its heart. I look forward to continuing the conversation and working with you in the months and years ahead.

“God has made each one of us to do good things.” Ephesians 2:10

Yours in Christ,



Chris Penn

Diocesan Director of Education