

# The Maximilian

A monthly newsletter for governors within the Archdiocese of Southwark

January 2026

## Director's Message

Dear Colleagues,

The last few weeks seem to have flown by and, as we move through January, it is a reminder that time does not stand still and nor do we have enough of it to do all that we want.

I have had a warm welcome into the seat; I have been delighted to be invited into schools and Donna is making time in my diary for as many visits as possible. Even more heart-warming, is that school leaders are letting me know of the great things that are happening in schools so that even if a visit isn't possible, we are aware of the events and opportunities that are being presented to staff and pupils across the diocese.

I have been making myself familiar with the other curia so that we can work together in order that the Diocesan offer to schools goes beyond the Education Service. The essential services programme is a document the team are collating so that you can be assured of what the Education Service role is within Trusts and schools.

As Diocesan Director of Education I am committed to doing my best for the pupils in schools by serving you. I am in no doubt that there will be things that we agree upon and things that we will compromise or disagree on however, we are all working for the same common goal: flourishing and thriving Catholic Education across our Diocese. I am in the service of Archbishop John and aim to serve him and Canon Victor well, working on their vision for Education.

My role is to ensure that those who have responsibility for decision making in Education are as well informed as possible and I can only get that information from you as leaders. Keep me informed of what is happening, directly to me or through your TRO or your CAT leaders. With my rose-tinted spectacles on I want to make sure that Catholic education in Southwark is the best it can be, so that our schools are where people want to work and parents choose for their children and that Southwark is the Archdiocese that leads the way.

There are tough times ahead for a number of reasons: school budgets, SEND provision, place planning to name but a few. In working together, we can weather all storms, united for strength and solidarity. I have a lot to learn, the last few weeks have taught me that, but the willingness is there, to serve and to represent you all as best I can. Keep me in your prayers and I will keep you updated!



Colette Doran-Hannon  
Diocesan Schools Commissioner



# Inspection of Multi-academy Trusts Confirmed

The government has confirmed that inspections of multi-academy trusts (MATs) are expected to begin as early as 2027, representing a significant development in the accountability framework for academy governance. The change will be enabled through amendments to the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, formally bringing academy trusts into the inspection system. We know through our regular conversations with our partner MATS that this is a welcome development and they see it as an opportunity to celebrate all that they do well.

Inspections will be carried out by Ofsted, using a new framework informed by updated trust quality descriptors. Ministers have framed this as part of a wider effort to increase transparency and public confidence, reflecting the growing role trusts play in shaping educational quality, workforce decisions, financial management and pupil wellbeing across groups of schools.

## Principles shaping the new approach

While detailed arrangements are still being developed, the government has set out a number of principles to guide implementation. These include ensuring that trusts are not discouraged from supporting schools in difficulty, aligning expectations between Ofsted and the Department for Education, and keeping inspection demands proportionate. There is also a clear emphasis on the need for inspectors to have appropriate expertise in trust leadership and governance.

## What inspections are likely to examine

Rather than duplicating school-level inspection, trust inspections will focus on leadership, governance and overall impact. Inspectors are expected to consider how effectively trusts improve standards across their schools, support and develop staff, use resources responsibly, and promote pupil wellbeing and inclusion. Alongside challenge, the framework is intended to recognise trusts that demonstrate strong impact or play a wider role in supporting other schools.

## Intervention and improvement

The proposed inspection arrangements sit alongside strengthened intervention powers, enabling more decisive action where trust performance is not meeting expectations — including moving schools into stronger trusts where necessary. At the same time, ministers have indicated that the system should provide clearer ways of identifying and highlighting trusts that are successfully improving outcomes for pupils.

## Implications for governors and trustees

Although implementation is still some way off, this announcement confirms the direction of travel. Trust boards should expect increased external scrutiny of how strategic decisions translate into improvement across their schools. For governors and trustees, this reinforces the importance of robust oversight, clear evidence of impact, and a shared understanding of how trust-level governance adds value for pupils and communities.

## Clerks to Governors Forum

The next date for the Clerks to Governors Forums is **Thursday 26th February 2026. 2-3pm**. Further details can be viewed here: <https://www.rcaoseducation.org.uk/clerks-to-governors-forum-topics/>



## Maximising value for pupils: guidance for schools and trusts

The Department for Education has published a new policy paper and supporting guidance setting out how schools and trusts are expected to maximise value from their resources, with a clear emphasis on ensuring that spending decisions translate into better outcomes for pupils.

The guidance is organised around four pillars: commercial, assets, workforce, and developing capability, including digital and commercial skills. Taken together, these are intended to form a single, coherent approach rather than a checklist of separate initiatives.

The commercial pillar focuses on procurement and buying well. Schools and trusts are encouraged to use collective purchasing, comply with procurement regulations, and take advantage of national frameworks. For boards, this brings procurement squarely into strategic oversight. Trustees should expect assurance that purchasing decisions are compliant, benchmarked, and actively tested for value rather than left as an operational afterthought.

The assets pillar covers the effective use of financial and physical assets, including buildings, reserves, and cash management. This has direct relevance for board discussions about sustainability. Governors and trustees should be confident that asset decisions are aligned with long-term strategy, that reserves are held for clear purposes, and that estates planning supports educational priorities rather than reacting to short-term pressures.

Workforce is the third pillar, with a focus on strategic planning, recruitment, and reducing avoidable costs such as heavy reliance on agency staff. This links financial oversight with educational quality. Boards should be probing whether workforce structures are sustainable, whether staffing decisions are data-informed, and whether leaders can explain how workforce investment supports pupil need rather than simply maintaining historical models.

The final pillar, developing capability, places explicit weight on digital, financial, and commercial skills. The guidance signals that these are now core organisational capabilities. For governance, this raises questions about whether leadership teams have the expertise they need, whether systems are fit for purpose, and whether boards themselves have sufficient financial and digital literacy to provide effective challenge.

Overall, the guidance marks a shift from seeing value for money as a finance-only concern to treating it as a whole-organisation responsibility. For boards, the expectation is not to manage spending decisions, but to understand the framework, ask sharper questions across all four pillars, and ensure that resource use is consistently linked back to pupil outcomes and long-term resilience.

## Exemptions from the Early Years Foundation Stage

Updated [guidance](#) clarifies when and how exemptions from the Early Years Foundation Stage can be applied for, and tightens expectations around how they are used in practice. The guidance applies in England and reflects updates made in January 2026.

Exemptions relate only to the learning and development and assessment requirements of the EYFS. All other statutory duties remain unchanged, including safeguarding, welfare requirements, and staff PG 3



ratios. This is a key distinction, as exemptions are not intended to dilute expectations around children’s safety, care, or wellbeing.

The guidance sets out three specific routes through which exemptions may be granted. These are for registered independent schools, providers with established educational principles that conflict with aspects of the EYFS, and individual children where a family’s religious or philosophical beliefs cannot be reconciled with EYFS requirements. Each route has a defined process and supporting documentation, reducing scope for informal or inconsistent application.

Recent updates place stronger emphasis on proportionality and review. Exemptions are intended to be limited and purposeful, rather than blanket departures from the framework. Where exemptions are in place, providers are expected to be clear about why they are necessary, how they support children’s development, and how arrangements will be kept under regular review.

Transparency also features more strongly. Settings are expected to be open with parents and carers about what an exemption means in practice and how provision differs from standard EYFS requirements. Clear records and use of the published forms and annexes are now an explicit expectation, supporting consistency and accountability.

Overall, the guidance reinforces that flexibility within the EYFS is permitted, but only within clear legal boundaries. Exemptions are framed as a way to meet children’s needs more appropriately in specific circumstances, not as an alternative to the statutory framework itself.

## School Staff Negotiating Body

The School Support Staff Negotiating Body has been [re-established](#) as a national forum to address pay, terms, and conditions for school support staff. The intention is to provide greater consistency across the system and a clearer mechanism for negotiating issues that have historically been handled locally.

The body brings together government, employer representatives, and trade unions, with a remit covering roles such as teaching assistants, administrative staff, site teams, and other non-teaching staff. Its work is expected to influence future guidance on pay structures, workload, and career pathways.

For schools and trusts, this development signals a shift towards stronger national coordination. While local decision-making will continue, expectations around employment practice and workforce planning may become more standardised over time. Any recommendations emerging from the negotiating body are likely to have implications for staffing budgets, recruitment, and retention.

From an oversight perspective, this is something to track rather than act on immediately. Boards should be alert to how national negotiations may translate into local cost pressures or changes in practice, particularly given the critical role support staff play in inclusion, SEND provision, and day-to-day school operations.



## Digital Transformation

Digital technology and AI are increasingly shaping how schools operate, teach, and support pupils. Tools already exist that can improve assessment, reduce staff workload, support pupils with SEND, and streamline administrative processes. The challenge facing schools is no longer whether digital integration is possible, but how quickly and fairly it can be achieved.

Progress across the sector remains uneven. Schools with greater financial and staffing capacity have generally moved faster, while others struggle to balance immediate pressures with the investment needed to modernise. This raises concerns that digital capability could become another driver of inequality rather than a means of addressing it.

Common barriers include limited time and expertise to trial new tools, inconsistent access to devices for pupils, and varying levels of staff confidence with digital systems. Where these obstacles are addressed systematically, digital approaches have shown potential to deliver clearer insight into pupil progress, reduce reliance on supply staff, and lower long-term costs.

An evidence-led approach is emphasised, focusing on piloting and scaling tools that demonstrably improve outcomes. Alongside this, curriculum design is identified as critical to ensure pupils develop the skills to use digital technology safely, confidently, and critically as they move into further education and employment.

## Falling Rolls

Falling school rolls are increasingly affecting schools well beyond London, driven by sustained declines in birth rates since 2012. While the issue first became visible in the capital, where housing costs and migration patterns accelerated the trend, councils across England are now reporting significant surplus capacity in primary schools.

The impact on individual schools is already substantial. Lower pupil numbers reduce funding, limiting schools' ability to maintain staffing levels, class sizes, and targeted interventions. Even schools judged good or outstanding are having to cut posts, reduce support, and reconsider enrichment and specialist provision as budgets tighten.

Local authorities are responding in stages. Initial measures include reducing published admission numbers, which can lead to mixed-age classes but offers some financial realism. Where this is insufficient, schools are encouraged to merge, federate, or join multi-academy trusts to achieve economies of scale, particularly at leadership level. Closure remains a last resort, but is increasingly being consulted on and, in some cases, approved.

Repurposing surplus space is being explored, including opening nurseries, creating SEND provision, hosting community services, or developing post-16 offers. However, councils caution that these options will not absorb surplus capacity at the scale required, especially where demographic decline is long term rather than temporary.

The financial risks extend beyond schools themselves. Closures can leave councils absorbing



accumulated deficits, redundancy costs, and ongoing estate liabilities. At the same time, pressures from SEND demand and years of real-terms funding constraints compound the challenge.

The issue is expected to move into secondary schools over the next few years as smaller cohorts age through the system. Trust leaders increasingly identify falling rolls as one of the most immediate threats to financial sustainability, particularly for larger trusts managing surplus capacity across multiple sites.

## Courses & Events

Details for our upcoming courses and events for this academic year are available on our website. <https://www.rcaoseducation.org.uk/governor-cpd/>

### **Handling Complaints for Governors**

Thursday 5th February 2026. 5.30-7pm  
Zoom

### **Governors' Gatherings**

Wednesday 25th February 2026. 4-5pm  
Zoom

### **Effective Support and Challenge for Governors**

Wednesday 4th March 2026. 5.30-7pm  
Zoom

### **Directors Training Day**

Wednesday 11th March 2026. 1-4pm  
Zoom

### **Induction for New Foundation Directors, Governors and Clerks**

Tuesday 17th March 2026. 5.30-7pm  
Zoom

### **Aspiring to Governance**

Wednesday 25th March 2026. 5.30pm-6.30pm  
Zoom

### **What Should you Expect from your CEO Reports**

Thursday 26th March 2026. 5.30-7pm  
Zoom





# Kent Catholic Schools' Partnership



'Academies in Christ'  
of the Archdiocese of Southwark



## KCSP GOVERNANCE CONFERENCE 2026

JOIN US

**17 MARCH 2026: ST SIMON STOCK CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL, MAIDSTONE, ME16 0JP**

**Session 1:** CSI Inspections, Catholic Education, and the updated Religious Education Directory (RED) - KCSP

Chair of the Trust Board Q&A

**Session 2:** Supporting disciplinary panels and the legal requirements - HR Connect

**25 MARCH 2026: ST ANSELM'S CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL, CANTERBURY, CT1 3EN**

**Session 1:** SEND strategy and the changing landscape - KCSP

Chair of the Trust Board Q&A

**Session 2:** The new Ofsted framework and its implications for governance - NGA

Book your place [here](#) or via the QR code



Agenda for both events:  
  
Arrival from 16:30  
  
Session 1 starting at 17:00  
  
Networking at 18:00  
  
Chair Trust Board and LGC Chair Q&A at 18:15  
  
Session 2 starting 18:30  
  
CSI / Ofsted Q&A 20:00  
  
Finish 20:30