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To Headteachers and Senior Leaders

July 2023

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

Another academic year draws to a close. To each and every one of you, I offer my profound gratitude and esteem for all that has been achieved during the past year; most notably, for all that has been done to bring our young people closer to a living relationship with the Lord Jesus.

Catholic education is a work of love. It is grounded in the truth we have received, which is then our responsibility to pass on. That's the meaning of tradition, rooted in the Latin word *tradere*. It means a handing over or a handing down; first and foremost, handing down the Lord's great commandment: to love each another as He loves us.

I pray this past academic year will have been a year of many blessings and successes in your schools. The past few years following Covid have been deeply challenging; I hope that your communities will have now settled down into a pattern conducive to the wellbeing of all, both students and staff. Despite the many challenges which remain, I know you will have focused on the young people entrusted to your care, ensuring their nurturing in the pursuit and practise of virtue, to grow in knowledge and wisdom.

This is why Catholic education is a work of love. It is our shared mission in education. It is an expression of what St Paul describes in his letter to the Philippians as *'improving knowledge'* and *'deepening perception'*, so that those whom we serve can recognize what is best, what is good, what is beautiful, and what is true. In short, so that they can come to know the living God revealed in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Thus, I am grateful for the generous expertise which you and your staff share not only amongst yourselves, but with your pupils: ensuring they remain steadfast and focused, to be ready to take on their own roles within society. Our modern society presents many challenges, not least in these times of economic hardship. A new generation of empowered and faith-filled citizens will be required to address these challenges. This is already manifest in one such expression of the work of love – *caritas* – in that following the launch of *Caritas Southwark*, many of our schools already have supported food and clothing banks in their local communities, showing a desire to work together for the common good, both now, and for the future.

For the common good of our Catholic schools, I am grateful to those of you who have considered my letter of January 2023. In that letter, I urged all of you to engage with an open heart in a conversation about what will strengthen Catholic education here in the Archdiocese of Southwark. I'm delighted to know that the model of schools moving to academies is now possible, not only by the expansion of our two existing trusts, The Kent Catholic Schools Partnership and SELCAT, but also the development of three further trusts: Christ the Redeemer; Sancta Familia; and, Saint Benedict. Whilst there may be solace in adhering to what we know and are used to, we must face up to the fact that the landscape is changing; forming trusts will allow families of schools to celebrate their successes together. As with all families, there will be the opportunity to share concerns and overcome difficult times through mutual support, too. This is a true sign of ensuring the Church's mission in education is real and impactful: allowing the work of God's love to be shared and deepened.

So, thank you, to all those headteachers and school leaders who have given unstintingly of their time to enable discernment of the way forward; indeed, my thanks to all staff and colleagues who have participated and shared insight. Challenges remain, notably financially and in terms of pupil numbers; and whilst this will remain the case for some time to come, nonetheless, it is important that we stand together to ensure no one is left behind. For those who felt unable to join the discernment process this year, I hope that in the next academic year you might feel able to engage with colleagues and contribute to the ongoing conversation about how we can arrive at a meaningful plan for education across the archdiocese, which allow your own, and indeed, all of our schools to fulfil the mission of the Church through education: to love each another as God loves us.

With renewed thanks, and with my prayers and blessing for a happy and restful summer

Yours sincerely in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Wilson', with a horizontal line underneath.

The Most Reverend John Wilson  
Archbishop of Southwark