DYNAMIC : PROVEN : EFFECTIVE

Shaping Governance®

HOLY CROSS CATHOLIC MULTI ACADEMY COMPANY

External review of governance for Holy Cross Catholic MAC

About Holy Cross MAC

Holy Cross Catholic Multi-Academy Company (MAC) was formed in September 2019 when seven Catholic schools in Coventry joined together. Holy Cross Catholic MAC has more than 4,000 pupils and over 450 staff across its two secondary and five primary schools.

The background

The Department for Education (DfE) has said all MACs and MATs (multi-academy trusts) should have an external review of their governance. Traditionally, external reviews focus on the trust/company board, its governance, and how it works with its individual school boards. These reviews don't usually look specifically at local governance.

But at Shaping Governance we do things differently. We know we can make the biggest impact when we start by looking at governance at local school level. In other words, we use a 'school-up' process, rather than 'top-down'. Our CEO, Su Turner, was commissioned to use Shaping Governance to carry out an external review of governance across the Holy Cross Catholic MAC. Her work with the multi-academy company began in January 2022, and she's providing two years' support for the MAC.

Why Shaping Governance?

Holy Cross chose Su over a different governance organisation because of her flexible approach and her background in supporting Catholic trusts. Jos Parry, Project Manager for Holy Cross Catholic MAC, said "Su was happy to tailor her support to what we wanted, whereas the other provider offered more of an 'off-the-shelf' package."

The challenge

Holy Cross wanted its individual governing bodies to feel more connected to the whole MAC. It was looking to grow good governance for all aspects of the MAC, with an emphasis on supporting its local governing bodies.

Marina Kelly, Catholic Senior Executive Leader, said: "We wanted to give our governors the chance to give feedback about the work of the MAC and how we could improve their relationship with it.

"We were keen to find out what we could do to work together better. We also wanted our governors to understand what their role was and how we could support them in fulfilling their role better."

What Su did

Su ran Shaping Governance sessions for each of the seven schools, helping the local governing bodies to learn, share, and identify where improvements needed to be made.

Su said: "I used the insight gleaned from these sessions to build a picture of governance at each school. I identified the strengths and the areas in need of development.

"I then interviewed the directors of the MAC and ran a special session with them. I shared my recommendations for how governance could be improved and how they could work better with the local governing bodies. "The key feature is that this process involved everyone; it was very inclusive."

The results and impact

The review brought the local governing bodies together and helped them to feel part of Holy Cross Catholic MAC. Su said: "Everyone felt 'energised' by the process, and I'm delighted Holy Cross has asked me to continue working with them. They've also recommended me to another MAC, which I've now started working with."

Holy Cross has received "excellent feedback" about the review from the MAC's local governing bodies.

Jos said: "It's given them an opportunity to get involved in what governance should be; they're having a say."

Each of our seven schools had its own review, and the sessions have provided the governors of each school with a development plan for next year. Su has identified areas where they lack confidence and areas where they're more confident."

"It feels like some of the barriers between the individual governing bodies have melted. They now see themselves as part of one organisation: Holy Cross Catholic MAC."
Holy Cross expects to see more of the review's impact in autumn 2022, when it starts putting Su's recommendations into action.

Marina said: "We highly recommend Shaping Governance to other MACs or MATs that are looking to review their governance. It's a very supportive and productive process."

As part of Su's work with Holy Cross, there will be a follow-up next year to look at the impact of the improvements and how governance has changed across the MAC.

Holy Cross has also asked Su to expand her work. So, as well as continuing with Shaping Governance, Su will be working to support aspects of the improvements that were identified. She'll also be working with middle leaders and other staff to help them understand governance. Marina added: "Su is incredibly professional. The process has exceeded our expectations."

July 2022