

Edith Stein Catholic Academy Trust Annual Report For Stakeholders 2024-2025

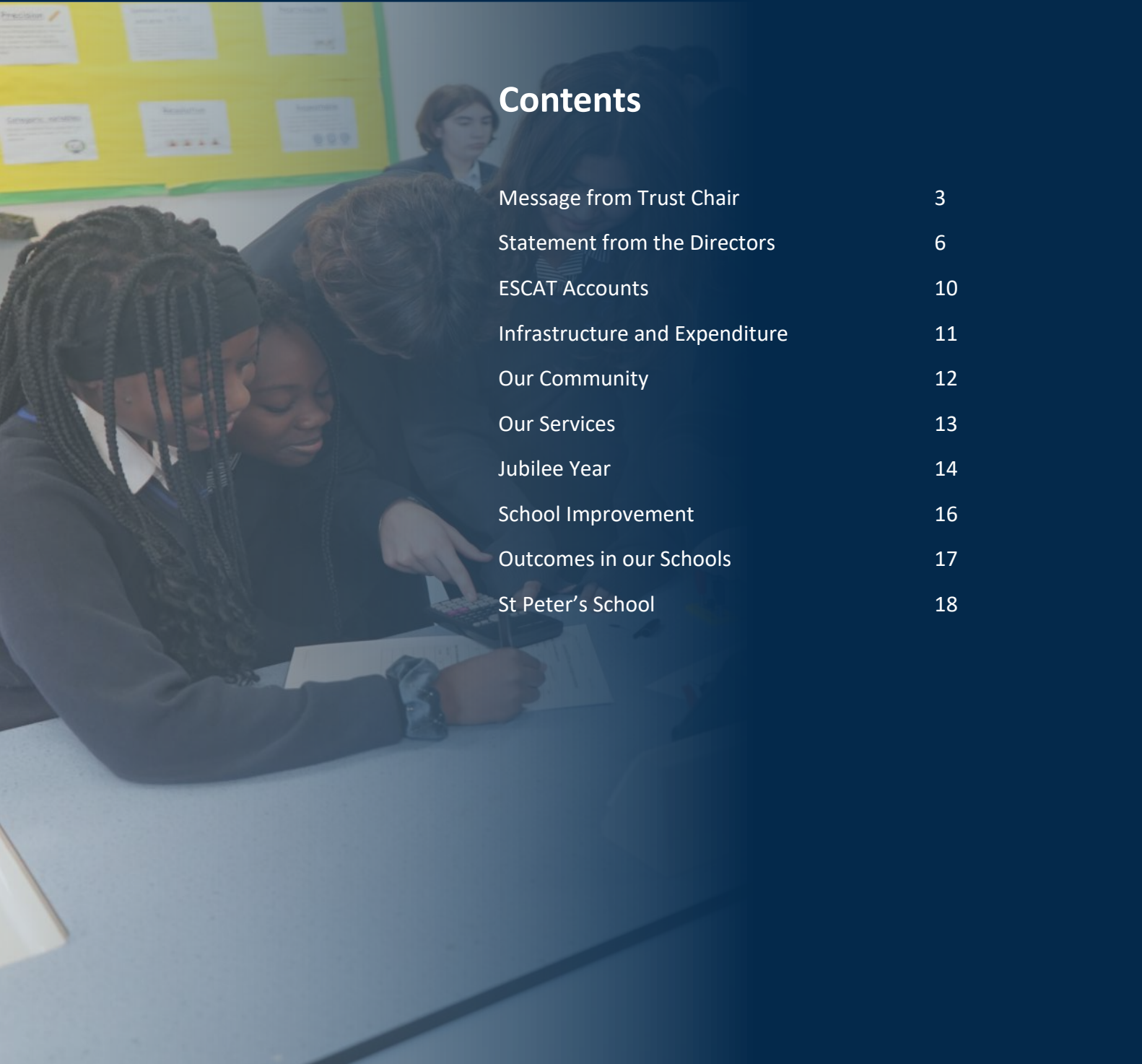


Stakeholder's Annual Report 2024-2025



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Gaynor Rennicks

Chair of the ESCAT Board

It is with great pride that I present to you the 5th Annual Report for ESCAT for the 2024-25 academic year. This is my first in the role as Chair of the Trust. I would like to start by thanking Marc Evans, the outgoing Chair, for many years of outstanding service not only to ESCAT but also as Chair of Governors. We also said goodbye to Nick Parker, another Director who finished his term of office.

This report provides not only a summary of our financial activities, but also an overview of the Trust's work and an insight into some of the activities in our schools. Our school websites provide a comprehensive overview of the achievements and activities in each school. This report shares some of the challenges we've experienced, the progress we've made in responding to them, and the achievements we've reached together within a learning environment that brings both real opportunities for growth and valuable possibilities.

This year, the expansion of the Trust has been the primary focus of our efforts. In June 2025, Bishop Philip reaffirmed that all schools under the Diocese's Trusteeship were to transition into one of two designated Academy Trusts. This vision has been further emphasised in the Diocese's Educational Strategy. With the recent release of the long anticipated government white paper, 'Every Child Achieving and Thriving', there is now a clear strategic objective for all state schools to either join or establish high-quality School Trusts. Funding expansion is challenging, it comes at a time when government expansion and capacity grants are no longer available, and school budgets are tight.

The past year has been characterised by a number of achievements and milestones. In his introduction last year, Marc Evans referred to a 'spoiler', which ultimately turned

out to be the 'Outstanding' judgment awarded to Oaklands after the CSI Inspection in November 2024. I would like to take this opportunity to formally acknowledge this significant achievement in this report, extending heartfelt congratulations to everyone who contributed to this success. Additionally, I wish to highlight the commendable progress made by Corpus Christi in securing a place on the school rebuilding program. While there are still several challenges to navigate before we see tangible developments on-site, I am grateful to all colleagues who have dedicated their efforts to this project and continue to do so. Their hard work is invaluable as we move forward.

At the end of the 2025 academic year, Ursula Clarke formally informed the Trust of her decision to step down from her role as Headteacher of Corpus Christi Catholic Primary School with effect from August 31, 2026.

Ursula has provided outstanding leadership during her tenure at Corpus Christi, guiding the school through a significant period of transformation and improvement. Through her clarity of vision, unwavering commitment to high standards, and deep care for the school community, she has been instrumental in securing strong outcomes for pupils and strengthening the Catholic ethos that underpins the life of the school. Ursula's departure will undoubtedly be felt across the entire school community. She is held in high regard by pupils, parents, staff, governors, and Trust leaders alike, and she leaves with the sincere gratitude and best wishes of all who have had the privilege to work alongside her.

The structure of the executive team has evolved to strengthen strategic leadership capacity across the Trust. Tim Finch, Chief Financial Officer, now focuses exclusively



on financial oversight for ESCAT, having previously also held the role of School Director of Finance. Similarly, Matthew Quinn, Chief Executive Officer, is now dedicated fully to his Trust responsibilities, having stepped down from headship. This revised leadership model enhances strategic focus and is the start of the process to bring additional capacity to the Trust as it expands.

All schools in 2024–2025 faced interconnected pressures spanning finance, recruitment, SEND provision, attendance, accountability, and technological change. Addressing these challenges in schools has required a sustained focus and strong leadership. Despite the challenges, our schools continue to demonstrate resilience and adaptability, playing a vital role in supporting not only academic achievement, but also the faith development and formation of young people.

Another successful CIF bid saw an investment of over £1.6m to complete overdue structural repairs to the White House and the re-roofing of the Sports Hall at Oaklands. Central government funding is the only mechanism to fund such invasive and extensive work in our schools.

As we look ahead and explore opportunities to collaborate with other schools and our sister Trust in the north of the Diocese, we remain committed to further enhancing our

educational provision, strengthening external partnerships, and building upon our existing achievements. Our focus will continue to be on ensuring that success reflects a shared Catholic experience, embraced by all students and colleagues across schools.

Finally, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to my fellow directors, teachers, support staff, students, parents, and governors. Your unwavering commitment and dedication to our vision have been instrumental in our continued success.

Gaynor Rennicks





Directors' Statement

Importance of Pastoral Care in a Catholic School

The statement, 'the Catholic school forms part of the saving mission of the Church', expresses a deeply theological understanding of education. It means that a Catholic school is not simply a place where academic knowledge is delivered alongside religious education; rather, our schools participate in the wider mission of the Catholic Church to proclaim the Gospel and bring people into a fuller relationship with God. This idea is rooted in Church teaching, particularly in documents such as *Gravissimum Educationis* from the Second Vatican Council, which emphasises that Catholic education contributes to the Church's mission of salvation by forming the whole person.



For our schools, this means pastoral care is part of the evangelising mission and it is not separate from the school's ethos. Supporting a child emotionally, socially, and spiritually is part of helping them encounter Christ's love in practical ways. Care becomes a lived expression of the Gospel, showing mercy, forgiveness, justice, and compassion.

As Directors, we look to see that pastoral care is distinctive in both its foundation and its practice. Our CEO regularly reports on strategies that recognise the inherent dignity of every human person, created in the image and likeness of God. Our Headteachers report that each pupil is known, valued, and supported not only as a learner, but as a

unique individual with a God-given vocation and purpose. Pastoral systems are therefore not merely reactive structures for managing behaviour or safeguarding concerns, but proactive frameworks for nurturing human flourishing.

We have also shown a keen interest in the relationship between pastoral care and the sacramental and spiritual life within ESCAT schools. We have seen how prayer, liturgy, and opportunities for reconciliation and reflection are woven into the daily life of ESCAT schools. Chaplaincy provision often works alongside pastoral and safeguarding teams, ensuring that emotional and spiritual needs are addressed in tandem. In this way, care is not compartmentalised; rather, it recognises that faith, wellbeing, and personal development are interconnected.

Student Outcomes

The Directors are proud of the huge accomplishments of all young people taking external examinations and assessments across KS2, KS4 and KS5. Taken together, the 2025 KS2 SATS, GCSE and A-Level results from Corpus Christi Primary School and Oaklands School illustrate a trajectory of continuous improvement and resilience across key phases of education. These outcomes reflect:

- Strong teaching and learning across all key stages.
- Effective pastoral support that enables pupils to thrive academically and personally.
- Personalised progress measures that celebrate individual growth.
- A culture of ambition balanced with wellbeing and character development.

These achievements align strongly with the Trust's mission to provide excellent education rooted in holistic care and high expectations, preparing all young people to succeed with confidence, compassion, and purpose.

We recognise that behind every academic grade and every statistic is a human story. For some, the very highest grades represent a powerful personal triumph; just as meaningful are the achievements of those whose journeys

began in the face of disadvantage, yet who have shown resilience, determination, and growth.

Directors continue to challenge schools to close the gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged students, and ensure every child progresses to the next stage with the requisite skills and qualifications

Trust Growth

From a Directors' perspective, the growth of a Catholic Multi-Academy Trust represents both a significant responsibility and a profound opportunity. Growing ESCAT is never pursued for its own sake; rather, it reflects confidence in the Trust to secure the best possible Catholic education for our students.

Conversations with schools suggest that the primary concern in joining ESCAT is financial. Predicting with any degree of confidence the financial implications of an individual school joining is inherently difficult without a detailed and transparent review of the individual schools' financial position. High-level financial summaries alone do not provide sufficient insight into underlying cost pressures, sustainability of funding, historic deficits or surpluses, capital liabilities, or the robustness of financial controls. Without a granular understanding of income streams, staffing structures, reserves, contractual commitments, and forecast assumptions at school level, any assessment of financial impact would be speculative and risk overlooking material issues that could affect both short and long-term, underscoring the importance of incorporating these issues into the partnership agreements.

We recognise that integration is as important as structure. Welcoming new schools into a Trust family requires sensitivity, respect for existing community identity, and a commitment to collaboration. From a strategic vantage point, we recognise they play a crucial role in setting the tone: growth should feel purposeful, supportive, and rooted in shared ambition. Again, the partnership agreement can play a significant role in this.

Annual Accounts

We recognise that the 2024–2025 academic year presented financial challenges for all schools nationally, and ESCAT schools were not immune from this. Against this backdrop, we recognised the strength, creativity, and resilience of school leaders and communities. While rising operational and staffing costs required careful management, schools responded with strategic clarity and

a continued commitment to delivering high-quality education and pastoral care.

Throughout the year we witnessed leadership teams maintaining a clear focus on protecting the core mission of their schools: faith development, excellent teaching, strong pupil outcomes, and inclusive support for all pupils. Robust financial planning, detailed budget monitoring, and prudent decision-making ensured stability while enabling continued investment in priority areas.

Importantly, investment in pupil wellbeing and safeguarding remained a central priority. Schools recognised that academic success and personal development are inseparable, and therefore continued to prioritise pastoral systems, mental health support, and targeted interventions for vulnerable learners.

Overall, 2024–2025 has been a year defined not simply by financial constraint, but by responsible stewardship, with schools helping each other. Through disciplined planning, collaborative working, and a commitment to excellence, schools have ensured that financial pressures did not compromise their core mission of enabling every child to flourish.

Local Governing Bodies

During 24–25 we have drawn upon a range of evidence to evaluate the effectiveness of Local Governing Bodies (LGBs). This evaluation has been informed primarily through systematic review of governing body minutes and Headteacher reports, alongside structured professional dialogue between school leaders and the Chief Executive Officer and Chief Financial Officer.

This triangulated approach has enabled Directors to assess both the quality of governance practice and the strategic impact of Local Governing Bodies, ensuring appropriate levels of challenge, support, and accountability across the Trust. However, we recognise there is more to do in this area. Moving forward, ESCAT is developing a self-evaluation toolkit for LGBs, information from this will provide further insight into the support and challenge LGBs give to their schools.

ESCAT is committed to providing the highest quality Catholic education; embracing all within our community and bringing them closer to, and living their lives like Jesus Christ, while enabling everyone to fulfil their potential. In our structure, this mission is delivered not from a distant alone, but through a partnership between the ESCAT board and the LGB of each school. At its heart, this

relationship is built on a deep respect for autonomy, coupled with a clear understanding that autonomy and accountability must go hand in hand.

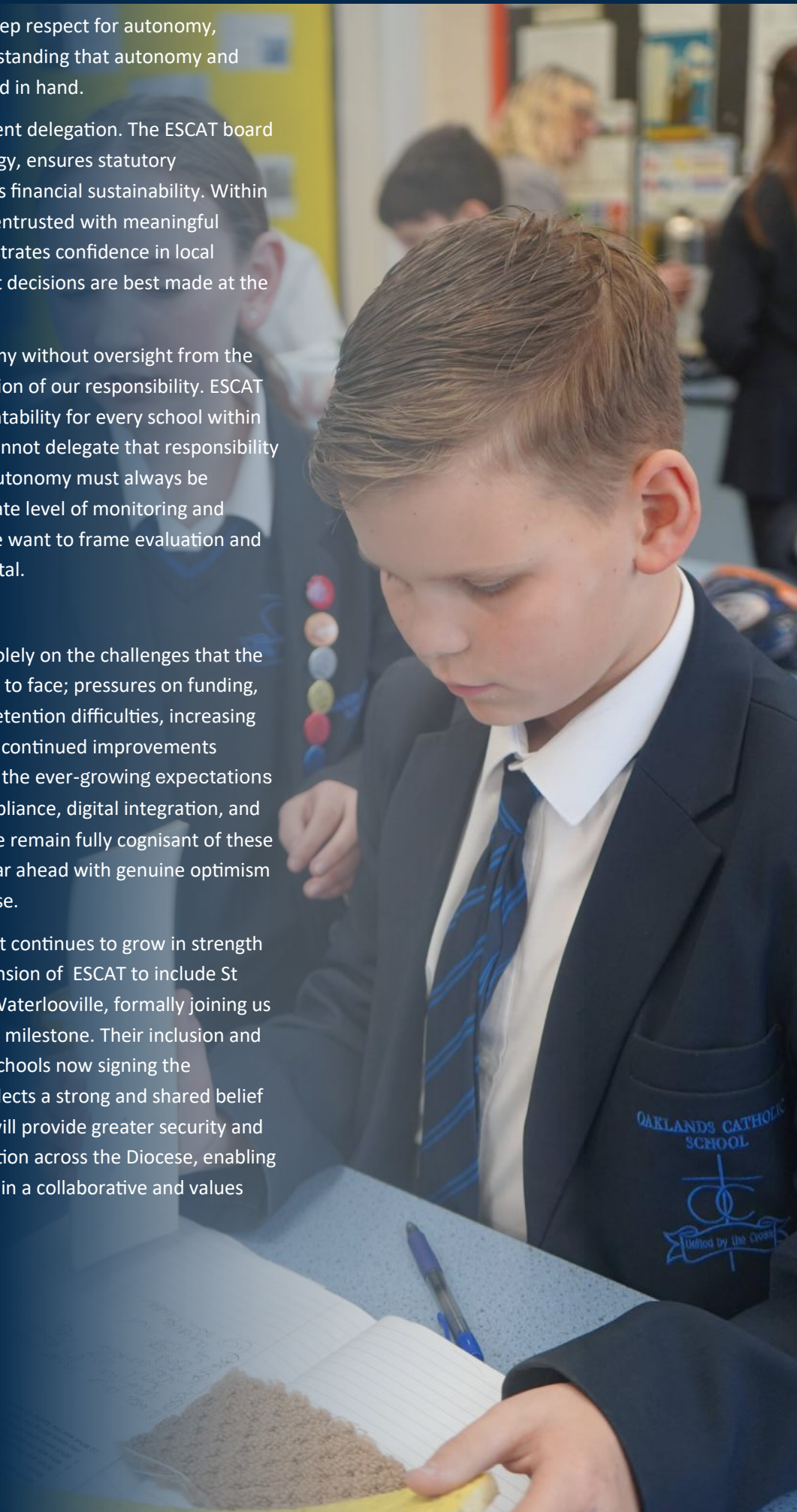
Autonomy is about intelligent delegation. The ESCAT board sets the overarching strategy, ensures statutory compliance, and safeguards financial sustainability. Within that framework, LGBs are entrusted with meaningful responsibility. This demonstrates confidence in local leadership and a belief that decisions are best made at the most appropriate level.

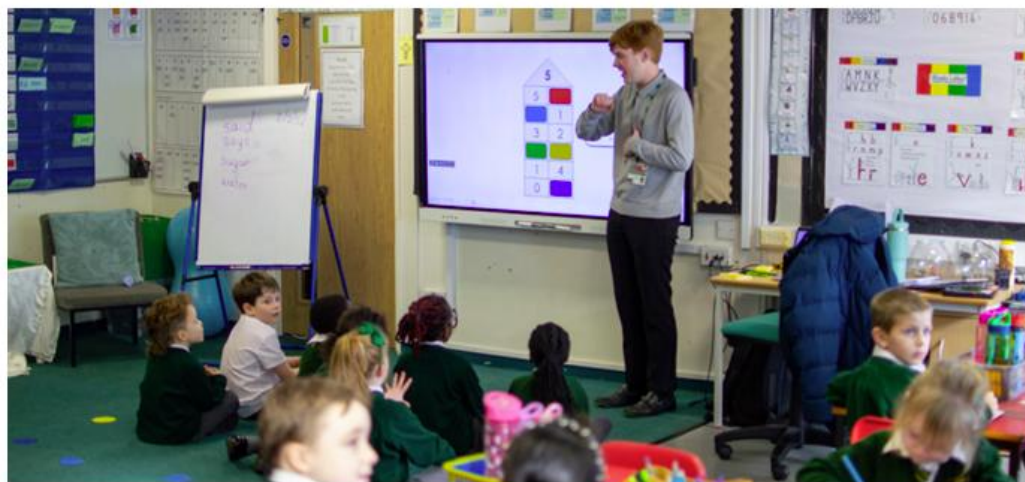
We recognise that autonomy without oversight from the Board would be an abdication of our responsibility. ESCAT holds ultimate legal accountability for every school within the Trust, and the Board cannot delegate that responsibility away. Therefore, valuing autonomy must always be balanced with an appropriate level of monitoring and evaluation of each LGB. We want to frame evaluation and monitoring as developmental.

And finally...

It would be easy to focus solely on the challenges that the education sector continues to face; pressures on funding, ongoing recruitment and retention difficulties, increasing demand for SEND support, continued improvements needed in attendance, and the ever-growing expectations around safeguarding, compliance, digital integration, and sustainability. Yet, while we remain fully cognisant of these realities, we look to the year ahead with genuine optimism and a deep sense of purpose.

We do so because our Trust continues to grow in strength and opportunity. The expansion of ESCAT to include St Peter's Catholic School in Waterloo, formally joining us in 2026, marks a significant milestone. Their inclusion and the increasing number of schools now signing the Partnership Agreement reflects a strong and shared belief in the vision. This growth will provide greater security and stability for Catholic education across the Diocese, enabling our schools to flourish within a collaborative and values driven family.





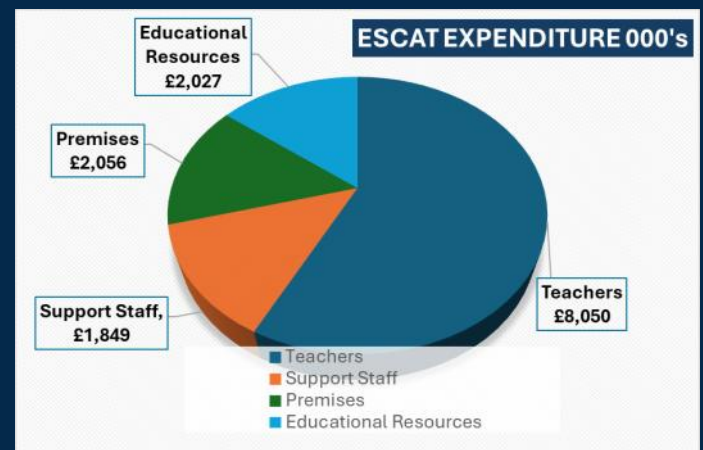
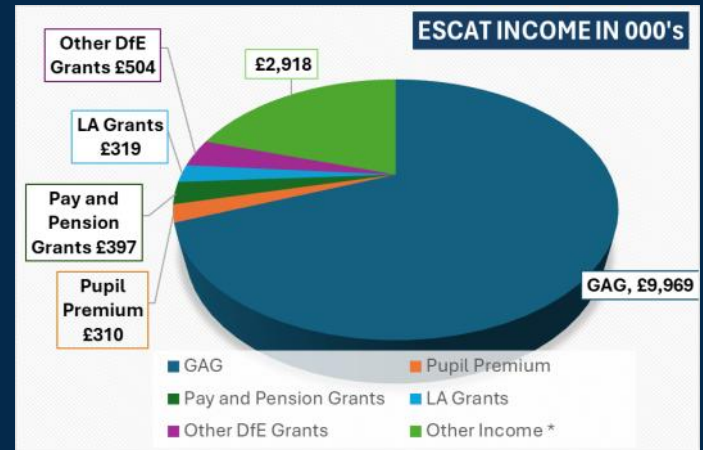


ESCAT Accounts

The annual financial accounts and statements for the Edith Stein Catholic Academy Trust are available on the ESCAT website. ESCAT auditors, HWB, have confirmed that the Trust remains an ongoing concern. Over 24-25 it was encouraging to see a fall in inflationary pressure, however the annualised rate of approximately 3.37% still presented some concerns. It is important to note that education costs do not align with the consumer price index, particularly due to the presence of several high cost items. For example, in 24-25 examination boards informed schools of a 10% increase in fees for certain subjects, costs like these cannot be avoided.

Specific pressure included

- **Teacher pay awards:** Schools faced increases in teacher pay from the 2023 and 2024 pay awards rolled into the 2024-25 year - a major cost driver alongside pay drift. This drove overall teacher pay inflation significantly above recent levels.
- **Support staff pay & National Living Wage:** Increases in the National Living Wage and support staff pay added further pressure, as did rising employer National Insurance contributions from April 2025.
- **General inflation:** Even excluding pay awards, schools' overall costs grew faster than funding. Non-staff expenditure (including energy, learning resources, and catering) increased, with utility and supply price inflation adding to budget strain.
- **Catering and meals provision:** Rising food and supply costs affected catering teams, pushing up per-meal costs in primary and secondary schools.
- **Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND):** Rising numbers of pupils requiring Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and increasing high-needs provision costs strained budgets.
- **Funding falling behind increased costs:** While core school budgets did grow in cash terms in 2024-25, analyses showed that average cost inflation outpaced funding growth — meaning real-term budget pressures and small average deficits nationally.



Benchmarking analysis conducted by the auditors for 24-25 confirms that the Trust is performing in line with, or better than, its peers across key measures. With regard to matters raised on regularity and the financial statements, ESCAT was either better or in line with the sector average. This provides external assurance that the Trust's accounting systems and financial controls are operating effectively and are well established.

Directors recognise that the financial models must be resilient enough to withstand future uncertainties consequently, they remain committed to working with LGBs to ensure that each has sufficient contingency to maintain a sense of autonomy. Directors were content to fund in year deficits, supporting this from reserves, particularly with forecast indicating schools will reach Planned Admissions Number (PAN) in future years with buoyant numbers in the Oaklands Sixth Form.



School Infrastructure Income and Expenditure

The primary source of capital funding for major improvements is the Department for Education (DfE) Capital Improvement Fund (CIF). Access to this funding is secured through a competitive bidding process, in which the needs of individual schools are assessed against those of others within a defined funding allocation set by the DfE.

ESCAT has been successful in securing over £10 million in CIF funding. The Trust was successful again in achieving substantial funding for urgent structural work to buildings at Oaklands. This sits alongside the ongoing rebuild of Corpus Christi.

CIF funding is intended to address significant building condition needs that are critical to the safe and effective operation of schools. Typically, this includes works related to heating systems, roofing, water ingress, health and safety, and statutory compliance. Without access to this funding stream, the Trust would face considerable challenges in maintaining its estate to the required standard. As the Trust grows funding for capital improvement will move to

School Condition Allocation (SCA), where funds are allocated to schools on a per pupil basis.

In preparing CIF bids and preliminary application for rebuilding, ESCAT continues to work closely with Kendell Kingscott Building Consultancy, a multi-disciplinary practice with extensive experience in the education sector.

Staffing costs represent the majority of the Trust's total expenditure. Benchmarking indicates that ESCAT's staffing expenditure remains broadly in line with comparable academies.

During the 2024/25 financial year, ESCAT received a total income of £14.4 million. The majority of this income was derived from public funding sources, including the General Annual Grant (GAG), Pupil Premium, SEND funding, and other grants, all of which are largely driven by student numbers. These figures are consistent with those reported in the Trust's audited annual accounts.

Total expenditure for the same period amounted to £14 million, with the majority allocated to staffing costs.



The White House, Oaklands iconic building, was constructed circa 1820 on the site of Stakes Farm. This three-storey Georgian residence was acquired in 1851 by General Sir Charles James Napier. During his ownership, a number of significant alterations were undertaken. These included the addition of the flag tower, the lodge, and the glass corridor connecting the front entrance to the carriage sweep.

Napier later sold the property to the Collins family. The house was vacated by them during the second world war during which time it served a variety of purposes, including accommodation for evacuees, a guest house, and, briefly, a Red Cross hospital. Over this period, the building fell into a state of disrepair.

In 1946, the Sisters of the Cross purchased the house along with 90 acres of land. Further modifications were carried out to adapt the property for use as a school. In the early 2000s, the caretaker's flat within the building was removed to allow for the creation of additional classrooms.

Since 2020 increasing concerns have arisen regarding integrity of the White House, including significant cracking to the external walls, movement within the staircases, and deterioration of internal structural elements. Structural engineers implemented a programme of temporary internal propping to support both staircases and key supporting beams. These measures have remained in place pending a permanent solution.

Funding secured through the 2025 Condition Improvement Fund is now being utilised to address these significant structural issues and ensure the long-term stability of the building.



Our Community

Both ESCAT schools continue to be highly popular choices for families, leading to significant oversubscription year after year, and 24-25 was no exception.

Recent admissions data shows that Oaklands Catholic School remains one of the most sought after secondary schools in the wider Havant/Waterlooville area where in 24-25 there was surplus capacity in other schools. Similarly, Corpus Christi Catholic Primary School in North End has a longstanding history of being oversubscribed. The last Ofsted report noted that the school ‘serves an inner-city residential Catholic community and is regularly oversubscribed,’ reflecting its strong reputation and the high level of interest from families seeking admission.

Together, these two schools demonstrate the sustained demand for Catholic education for Catholics, other Christian denominations and other religions, with both schools attracting more applicants than available places due to their established reputations and community trust.

The proportion of Catholic students at the school broadly reflects the demographic distribution of Catholic families in the surrounding area, suggesting that the school’s intake closely mirrors the Catholic population in its immediate locality rather than a wider regional catchment.

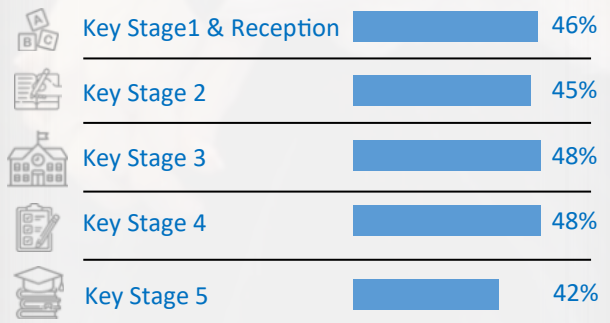
Most of the Corpus Christi children walk from the surrounding area. North End is densely populated with a significant number of EFL students. Oaklands has been affected by the “travel to learn” factor. In recent years the school has observed a noticeable decline in Catholic families willing or able to travel longer distances to access Catholic education. This is particularly evident among families living more than 3-4 miles from the school, where travel times and transport arrangements are acting as a barrier for Catholic education. The school has seen a fall-off in Catholic enrolment from areas west of Portchester and East of Emsworth, where the Catholic population is already sparser. As a result, the school’s Catholic intake increasingly reflects those families living within a closer and more practical travel distance. Like Corpus Christi, Oaklands is becoming more of a local school for local children.

309 Primary Students
1159 Secondary Students
208 Sixth Form Students

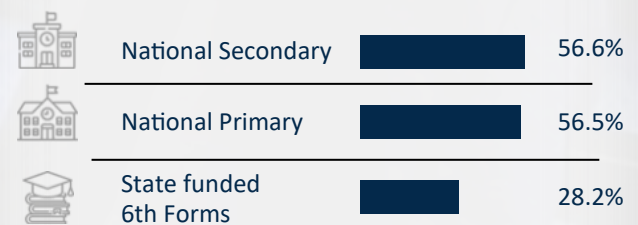


98 Support Staff
109 Teachers

Catholic children at each stage ESCAT



Catholic children National



Staffing profile





Services Offered by ESCAT 24-25

CORE SERVICES

Central Support



CEO, CFO, COO Salary Costs
 Admin Support to above
 Governance Clerk Costs to Board of Trustees
 Head of Trust HR and Payroll
 Trust Finance Manager

HR Support



Employment Law advice and independent support
 (Mentor)

HR Processes and Procedures
 First Line Support and Advice
 Support with Occupational Health Issues
 DBS Check Co-ordination
 Social Media Checks
 Access to Apprenticeship Levy Scheme

Payroll



Co-ordination of Outsourced Managed
 payroll provision (Data Plan)
 Payroll Processes and Procedures
 First Line Support and Advice
 TPS EOYC Assurance Report
 LGPS

Finance



IRIS Financial Licences
 IRIS Financial Helpdesk
 IRIS Financial Planner (Budgeting)
 Financial Reporting - Consolidation
 Finance Processes and Procedures
 External Auditing Services
 Internal Verification Services
 VAT returns and Distribution of Refunds
 VAT Inspection Protection Service

OPTIONAL SERVICES

Insurance



Negotiation/co-ordination of
 commercial provision where RPA is not used or
 fully suffices

Energy



Negotiation of kWh charges
 Provision of Regular Cost & Consumption Reporting

Term Contractor - Mechanical and Engineering



Negotiation of Contract including Tendering
 Common Standard of Servicing and Testing
 Bespoke Scope for each School

Facilities Management



Coordination of Long Term Maintenance plans
 Coordination of Capital Improvement Fund grants
 Access to professional building services

IT Support



Audit of IT Provision
 Provision of 1st and 2nd Line Support
 IT Project Management

Health Safety and Legal



Provision of H&S Advice
 Provision of H&S Auditing
 Common approach to H&S Policy & Standards
 Legal Support



ESCAT and the Jubilee Year of Hope Celebrating Faith Across our schools

In 2025, Pope Francis invited the global Church to celebrate the Jubilee Year of Hope, calling all Catholics to become 'Pilgrims of Hope'. Across our Trust, both Oaklands Catholic School and Corpus Christi Catholic Primary School embraced this special year with joy, creativity, and a renewed commitment to faith and service.

Oaklands Catholic School – Walking Together in Hope

Oaklands marked the Jubilee by weaving its themes into prayer, worship, and community action. The school formally took part in the global Jubilee of Families, encouraging students and families to celebrate unity, hope, and faith.

Students also deepened their spiritual journey through pilgrimage, prayer, and reconciliation. Year 7 pupils embarked on a pilgrimage experience, echoing the call to live as Pilgrims of Hope, while reconciliation opportunities and a community Mass during the Jubilee period allowed the whole school to gather in prayer.

Living out the Jubilee spirit, Oaklands strengthened its work in Catholic Social Teaching, empowering students through the CST Ambassadors programme and continuing global outreach to St John's Korogocho Mission in Kenya. Students also supported Operation Christmas Child, demonstrating generosity and solidarity with children in need.

School-wide celebrations such as Culture Week, St John's Week, and a pilgrimage to Medjugorje further brought the theme of hope to life, inviting students to explore faith more deeply.

Corpus Christi Catholic Primary School – A Community of Young Pilgrims



Corpus Christi Primary embraced the Jubilee Year with whole school activities designed to help children understand and live out Christian hope in meaningful ways.

One of the most powerful moments was the creation of a Jubilee 'Door of Hope', where pupils decorated a symbolic Holy Door with their own prayers of hope, inspired by the ancient Jubilee tradition.

Collective worship throughout the year centred on the theme of hope, inviting children to reflect on how they can bring God's love to others. With CST Ambassadors and Mini Vinnies leading service focused initiatives, the school embodied the Jubilee invitation to live with deep faith, lively hope, and active charity.'

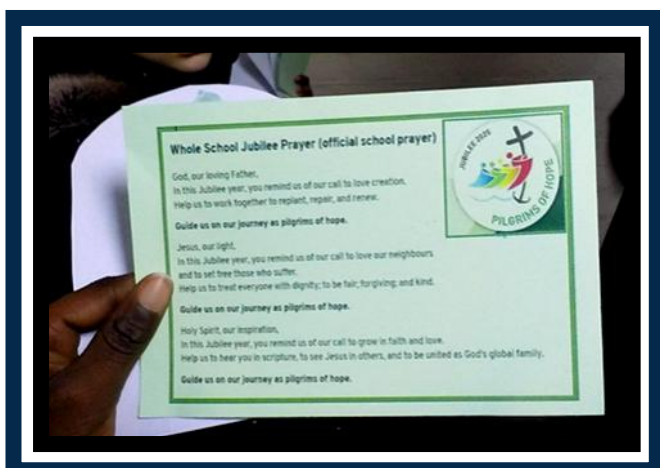
Across both schools, the Jubilee Year of Hope was a time of renewal, prayer, creativity, and action. Whether through pilgrimage, worship, outreach, or shared celebration, our communities embraced this special moment in the life of the Church.

Together, Oaklands and Corpus Christi showed what it means to walk forward in faith—united as Pilgrims of Hope.

ESCAT Students at Flame

Flame is one of the largest gatherings of young Catholics in the UK, bringing together thousands of young people for a day filled with faith, music, inspiration, and community. Held at the iconic Wembley Arena, the event is a powerful experience that celebrates the vibrancy and unity of the Catholic faith.

On 15th March 2025, an incredible 10,000 young Catholics from across the country, including students from Oaklands



Top 5 Beneficiaries from School Fundraising



came together to take part in this unforgettable day. The atmosphere was electric, filled with uplifting music, thought-provoking drama, and inspiring talks designed to deepen faith and encourage young people in their spiritual journey. Oaklands students had the unique privilege of hearing from world renowned adventurer Bear Grylls, who shared his experiences of resilience, faith, and overcoming challenges. They were also inspired by Isaac Harvey MBE, an extraordinary speaker who shared his story of perseverance and determination, demonstrating that faith and inner strength can help overcome even the toughest obstacles.

Throughout the day, students engaged in moments of reflection and prayer, deepening their connection with their faith. The event culminated in a powerful time of praise and worship led by the One Hope Project, filling the arena with a sense of unity and devotion. The highlight of the evening was a profoundly moving Adoration led by Cardinal Vincent Nichols, where thousands joined together in prayer, creating an atmosphere of peace and reverence.

Flame was truly a remarkable experience, leaving all who attended feeling uplifted, inspired, and strengthened in



their faith. It was a day of joy, community, and spiritual renewal - one that will surely be remembered for years to come.

Celebrating diversity

On Thursday 20th June 2025, school staff, parents, parishioners, and children came together to celebrate the diverse cultures and traditions within our school community. The event was a wonderful success, bringing everyone closer and creating a strong sense of unity and belonging. It was truly inspiring to see so many people come together to share and appreciate the richness of our different backgrounds.

A special thank you goes to all the families and parents who made such a tremendous effort to support the event. Your time, creativity, and generosity played a huge part in making the day so memorable and enjoyable for everyone involved.

Children and their families had a fantastic time exploring artefacts from different countries, learning about various traditions, and taking part in a range of fun activities. There was plenty of dancing, singing, and games, along with the opportunity to taste a delicious variety of foods from around the world.

We are also incredibly grateful for the generous donations received. Thanks to your kindness and support, the school successfully raised £280.00, which has been donated to Portsmouth City Sanctuary.





Ursula Clarke

School Improvement

“Most Headteachers would attest that, school improvement isn’t a mysterious process involving clipboards, jargon, and people whispering “Ofsted”. It’s something far more grounded and much more collaborative. It’s about a family of schools working together to give every pupil, from age 3 to 18, the very best Catholic education possible.

At the heart of our mission is a belief that partnership strengthens us. And importantly, ESCAT understands a fundamental truth that every teacher already knows: no two schools are the same. One size fits all might work for ponchos, but it has never worked for education. Every ESCAT school comes with its own character, strengths, quirks, and history we intend to preserve that. Our role is not to make everyone identical, but to ensure everyone thrives.

School improvement across ESCAT grows from three connected strands: school-to-school support, Trust support, and external expertise. A bit like a three-legged stool sturdy, balanced, and unlikely to topple unless someone leans on it too enthusiastically. ESCAT is very keen that the detail in these three ‘domains’ is developed from the ground up. Of course there will be a few areas, particularly around compliance where the Trust central team will take a lead.

Last summer, I was given the baton to lead on developing a school improvement model for the Trust. What started with three schools has now grown to contributions from seven schools from each cluster.

We’ve already trialled school-to-school support across three schools, and it’s proving something we suspected all along: teachers learning from each other works extremely well. Peer reviews focusing on areas of each school’s improvement plan have helped staff share good practice, compare approaches, and occasionally say, ‘Oh! Why didn’t we think of that?’. It’s uplifting, energising, and reassuring, not to mention cheaper than consultants.

Across the clusters, headteachers have contributed their local knowledge, which continues to be invaluable. Discussions are also underway with external providers to provide support that complements the strengths we already have.

Next comes the exciting part. We are planning an ESCAT-visioning day for all schools to explore how issues such as school improvement align with our shared vision and values.

It’s scheduled for Summer Term 2 — just before the point in the year when everyone starts asking, ‘Is it the holidays yet?’. This day will be more than a meeting. It will be a chance for leaders to shape the direction of travel together.

We are also encouraging schools to nominate staff, departments, or even external partners who have practice worth sharing. We know those pockets of brilliance exist. Our job is simply to create the structures that let everyone benefit from them. Meanwhile, RE clusters will continue rolling out RED, strengthening the Catholic identity that sits at the core of our mission.

Using the feedback gathered, ESCAT will shape a core School Improvement offer: clear, reliable, and responsive. Consistent where it should be, flexible where it needs to be, and always respectful of each school’s identity.”





Outcomes in Our Schools

Corpus Christi Catholic Primary School continues to demonstrate its strength as an aspirational learning community. Its context is challenging, with above average number of students with EHCPs and above average numbers of EAL pupils. The school's latest Key Stage 2 results show that 66% of pupils achieved the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Maths.

Despite low starting points, not only are children achieving well, but many are excelling and reach the higher standard in core areas, demonstrating that the school is successfully stretching and challenging its most able learners.

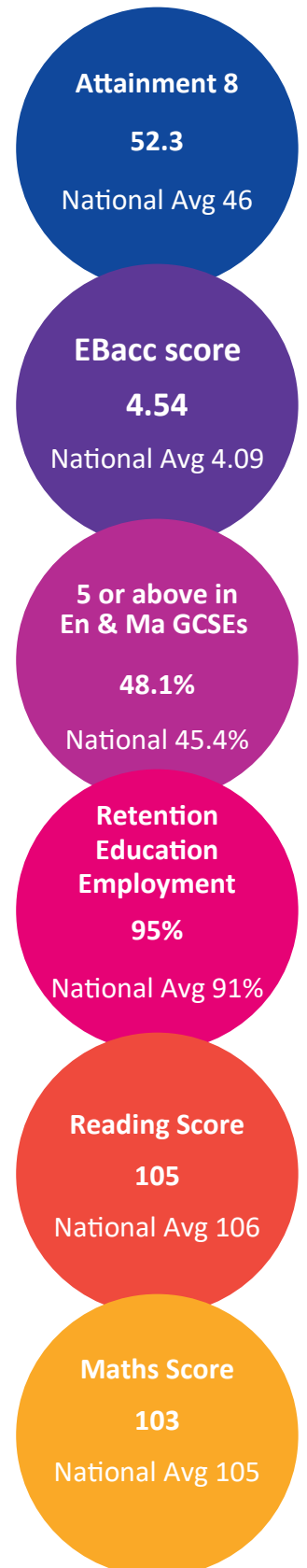
Reading scores are above the LA average and broadly in line with national data. Many students are confident and competent readers. In maths, pupils achieved an average score of 103, only slightly below the national subject level average, yet still demonstrating secure understanding across the cohort.

The school's performance is further reflected in its strong standing within the city. Corpus Christi is ranked 6th out of 28 primary schools in Portsmouth, placing it firmly within the top fifth of all local primaries. While not an official Department for Education ranking, this independent measure offers valuable reassurance to families about the school's comparative strength across the city. This positive reputation is echoed in the school's ongoing popularity. Corpus Christi is consistently oversubscribed, with more families applying than the number of available places; clear evidence that the wider community recognises the school's quality, ethos, and strong academic outcomes year after year.

Oaklands continues to demonstrate a strong standard of academic success. The school's GCSE outcomes consistently exceed both national and local averages, reflecting its strong commitment to high-quality teaching as well as a culture in which students are supported to achieve their full potential. Beyond GCSEs, Oaklands excels in preparing young people for life beyond secondary education. The school's post-16 progression rates are exceptionally strong, with significantly more students moving on to higher level study than is typical nationally. This achievement highlights the school's ability not only to develop academic understanding, but also to provide the guidance, ambition, and character formation needed for students to take their next steps with confidence.

Oaklands is again placed among the top 20 secondary schools in Hampshire for overall academic performance, taking into account GCSE results.

Taken together, the evidence paints a compelling picture: Oaklands Catholic School stands as one of Hampshire's stronger comprehensive schools, combining high academic achievement with a strong culture of care, character, and aspiration. The Sixth Form continues to attract a mixed ability intake, and demonstrates its ability to support students through A-Levels. Consequently, Sixth Form attainment sits slightly below national averages. The exceptional destinations data shows that Oaklands successfully equips its students with the skills, confidence, and qualifications needed to thrive in further education, apprenticeships, and beyond. Students at Oakland are regularly being offered Oxbridge places.





Richard Cunningham

Headteacher, St Peter's Catholic Primary

“St Peter's Catholic Primary School in Waterlooville (not to be confused with its Diocesan namesakes in Winchester or Bournemouth) has been on a process towards joining ESCAT that has been carefully managed over several years. Our story is one of calm leadership, thoughtful decision making, and a long-term vision for the future of Catholic education.

There is still a reputation in the teaching profession that Multi-Academy Trusts seek to take over, reshape, and alter beyond recognition schools that join them. This is clearly not the ESCAT mantra. Here at St Peter's we worked hard to ensure the uniqueness of a Catholic academy was known to all by approaching everything with transparency, professionalism, and composure. Staff were informed of Diocesan plans for academisation in September 2023, and updated April 2024 with measured and reassuring written communications long before any formal process started. This approach built trust, strengthened confidence, and ensured that the school staff community understood not just what was happening, but why. It was made clear to staff that the Bishop's vision reflected the national direction of Catholic education, meaning that a strategic decision made with clarity, reflection and purpose would best serve pupils, staff, and families at St Peter's for many years to come. At the same time, with academisation being a standing item on governor meeting agendas, governors were kept abreast of developments and so able to question and understand the local and national context of Catholic Academy Trusts.

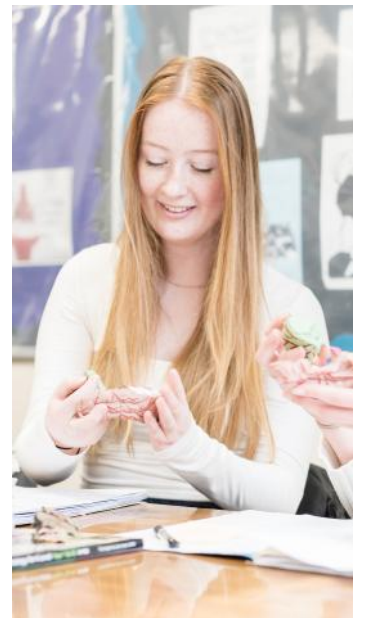
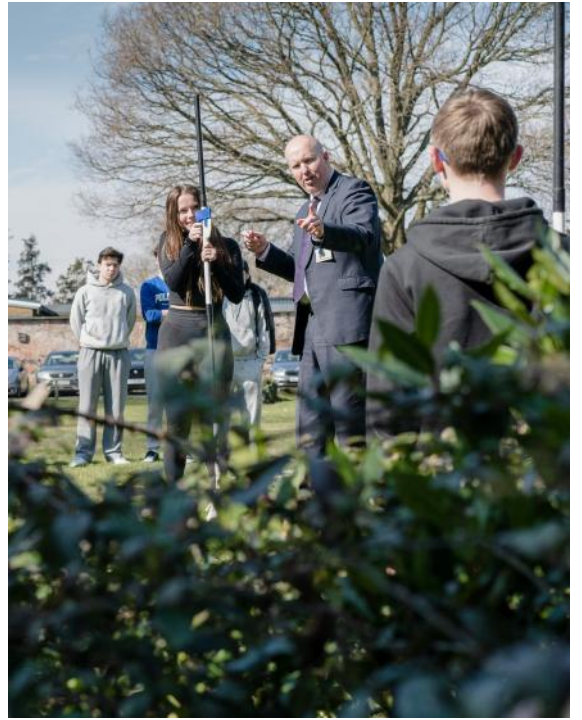
When the formal process of St Peter's joining ESCAT got properly underway in the Autumn Term of 2024, it was clear that they would be joining from a position of strength. St Peter's brings to ESCAT a successful track record of strong academic outcomes (especially for the disadvantaged), robust safeguarding practices, a culture of high expectations, a deeply rooted pastoral ethos, and staff who believe in collaboration, not isolation. Joining the Trust is not simply an organisational move for St Peter's — it is a contribution to the strength and shared expertise of the entire family of Catholic schools in the Diocese of Portsmouth. This fact was shared with parents, carers and the local

community when the consultation period on academisation was opened in the Summer Term of 2025. The strong position and excellent reputation of St Peter's went a long way towards the very positive response the school got from its own stakeholders when the plans to join ESCAT were shared.

Reassuringly, the school leadership team and the governing body retain a meaningful and influential autonomous role. St Peter's keeps its identity, character, and mission, what changes is the support structure around it. Some functions are delivered at Trust level — but these are areas that already involve oversight from the Diocese, the Local Authority, the DfE, and various compliance bodies. The Trust model simply streamlines processes that were already happening, reducing duplication and freeing up school leaders to focus on what truly matters: children, learning, and the Catholic mission.

By joining now, St Peter's becomes part of shaping the long-term future of Catholic education in the South of the Diocese. It positions the school to influence structures, priorities, and strategy for the next decade and beyond. Whilst academy conversion requires planning and time, approaching it with care and collaboration when interacting with staff, parents and the community contribute to a calm and well-managed process. The journey ahead is exciting, purposeful, and full of promise.”





Edith Stein Catholic Academy Trust

Stakes Hill Road, Waterlooville, Hampshire, PO7 7BW

Company Registration Number 7721932

02392 259214

www.escat.org.uk

