



Department
for Education

Schools Financial Support & Oversight
2 St Pauls Place
125 Norfolk Street
Sheffield
S1 2FJ
<http://www.gov.uk/esfa>

Mrs. Sarah Noon - Chair of Trustees
St Ralph Sherwin Catholic MAT
St Katherine's House
Mansfield Road
Derby
DE1 3TQ

Sent via email - [REDACTED]

2 February 2026

Dear Mrs. Noon,

Notice to improve: St Ralph Sherwin Catholic MAT

We are writing to inform you, in your capacity as the Chair of St Ralph Sherwin Catholic MAT, that the Department for Education (the department) has assessed the trust's continued breaches of the Academy Trust Handbook (ATH) relating to financial management are significant enough to warrant a revised Notice to Improve on financial grounds. We understand this decision may be disappointing and want to assure you that we recognise the positive action the trust has taken to date to address the concerns.

As you know, the department has been monitoring the trust's progress towards meeting the actions set out in the Notice to Improve issued on 11 August 2023. We appreciate the trust's cooperation, the constructive engagement with officials and the improvements you have already made to strengthen accounting and internal financial controls. However, our concerns remain about the trust's weak financial position and the effectiveness of its financial management.

This letter and its annexes serve as a revised written Notice to Improve financial management and governance at the trust (Notice to Improve or "the Notice"). It reflects the weak financial position of the trust and continued concerns on governance and oversight of financial management by the Board.

The trust is required, pursuant to the provisions of the ATH and the Funding Agreement (FA), to comply with the terms of this Notice. These terms are set out in Annex A and Annex B.

Being issued with a Notice means that certain delegated authorities, as defined in the ATH, continue to be revoked. All transactions previously covered by these delegations, regardless of their size, must now be approved in advance by the department, specifically:

- special staff severance payments
- compensation payments
- writing off debts and losses
- entering guarantees, indemnities or letters of comfort

- disposals of fixed assets beyond any limit in the funding agreement
- taking up a leasehold or tenancy agreement on land and buildings of a duration beyond any limit in the trust's funding agreement
- carry forward of unspent GAG from one year to the next beyond any limit in the funding agreement
- pooling of GAG

If the trust seeks retrospective approval from the department this will be deemed a breach of the ATH. Further details of the approval process will be forwarded to the trust's Accounting Officer upon acknowledgment of receipt of this letter. These delegated authorities shall be returned to the trust once we are satisfied that the requirements of the Notice have been, and will continue to be, complied with to the satisfaction of the Secretary of State.

The department will monitor progress made towards meeting the requirements of this Notice and will keep us updated through regular case reviews. A decision to lift the Notice will be taken when we are satisfied the requirements set out in the Annexes have been met in full.

We will support the trust as it implements the required changes through regular contact and clear routes of escalation to resolve any questions or queries you might have. However, if the trust is unable to deliver the necessary improvement and fails to make sufficient progress against the original conditions, we reserve the right to issue a revised Notice and add further specific conditions. Should it become evident that the trust is unlikely to fulfil the conditions and / or requirements set out in this Notice and / or within the agreed timescales, we will explore the contractual intervention options available.

If the trust fails to meet the requirements of this Notice to our satisfaction, it will be considered to have failed to comply with the terms of the ATH. Failure to comply will be deemed a funding agreement breach and may lead to termination.

If continued non-compliance with the ATH occurs, we may also refer the case to the Charity Commission and/or Insolvency Service for further investigation, as deemed appropriate in the circumstances.

We should be grateful if you would acknowledge receipt of this letter by email within three working days of the date of this letter to [REDACTED], who will be your main point of contact related to this Notice to Improve.

In line with the requirements set out in our publishing policy, the trust has 10 working days to offer any final comments on factual accuracy to DfE colleagues before publication. The trust is required to publish the Notice on its website within 14 days of it being published on gov.uk and retain it there until the Notice is lifted.

We recognise that this may be an uncertain time for the trust and its staff. We are mindful of creating additional pressures on individuals involved. Therefore, we ask the trust to ensure appropriate provision is in place to support all its staff, as necessary. You may find the Education staff wellbeing charter (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/education-staff-wellbeing-charter>) helpful.

We will continue to keep clear and regular lines of communication open with you. As such, [redacted] will be in contact shortly to answer any questions you may have, and to discuss the next steps in more detail, including any support the trust may require to drive the necessary improvements.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



Lindsey Henning
Director, Schools Financial Support & Oversight, Regions Group, Department for Education



Jonathan Duff
Regional Director, Regional Director for East Midlands, Department for Education

CC. Kevin Gritton – Accounting Officer
Laura O'Brien, Right Reverend Patrick McKinney, Reverend Father Paul Chipchase,
Reverend Father Simon Gillespie - Members
Peter Giorgio - Diocesan Director of Education

St Ralph Sherwin Catholic MAT- Annex A

Notice to Improve

This Notice to Improve (the 'Notice') is a consequence of St Ralph Sherwin Catholic Multi-Academy Trust's (the 'trust')

- failure to approve a balanced budget, and any significant changes to it, for the financial year to 31 August 2025 as required in ATH 2.10
- failure to base budget forecasts on realistic assumptions that reflect lessons learnt and insufficient action to ensure financial viability, as required in ATH 2.11 and 2.20; and
- failure to ensure internal scrutiny in 2024/25 that met the requirements of ATH 3.15.

Conditions

1. The trust is required to comply with all conditions set out in Annex B.

Financial management and governance requirements

2. The trust is responsible for its own financial management, control and governance and is expected to take appropriate action to strengthen the weaknesses identified and return to compliance with the ATH.
3. The trust should take all appropriate actions to ensure the action plan agreed with the department is fully implemented.
4. The department must be satisfied that the trust is doing everything it can to rectify the weaknesses identified.

Monitoring and progress

5. The trust is required to submit the evidence for the specific conditions to the timescales outlined in Annex B to enable the department to monitor compliance and progress.
6. Should it become evident that the trust is unlikely to fulfil the conditions and / or requirements set out in this Notice and / or within the given timescales, the department will begin to consider and explore the contractual intervention options available.

Compliance and the end of the notice period

7. As outlined in Annex B, the trust is required to submit evidence to demonstrate compliance with the conditions of this notice, which the department will use to monitor the trust's progress. Annex B sets out the detail of the evidence required to fulfil the condition and the timescales to submit this evidence to the department.
8. When the trust meets all the conditions outlined in this Notice, is fully compliant with the most recent edition of the ATH and no other breaches have been identified, we will write to the trust to confirm that the Notice has been lifted.

St Ralph Sherwin Catholic MAT - Annex B

Table of conditions

The table below summarises the conditions that have been placed upon St Ralph Sherwin Catholic MAT (“the trust”). It sets out the evidence the trust must provide, and the timescales the trust must meet, to show that they have complied with the Notice to Improve (“the Notice”). All conditions set out in the table must be met before the Notice can be lifted.

Condition 1	The trust is required to: Prepare and submit a revised Trust Financial Recovery Plan. Financial Recovery Plan must implement SRMA recommendations, and Integrated Curriculum and Financial Planning (ICFP) findings.
Action/Evidence required from trust	The plan should be agreed by the trust board and externally validated by an independent expert. The plan must include, as a minimum: i. how the trust will achieve a balanced budget for 2026/27 and maintain this each year thereafter. This must be supported by robust budget forecasts through to 2028/29 and detail of assumptions used to support the figures. ii. evidence to support realistic pupil number forecasts contained in the plan iii. a clear efficiency and savings plan setting out specific areas where further savings can be made across the trust (applying SRMA recommendations and ICFP findings) iv. a cashflow forecast for an 18-month upcoming period. The trust must provide SFSO with details of the actions it has taken to implement SRMA recommendations and ICFP findings. The trust must also provide details of the level of savings achieved.
By when	30 January 2026

Condition 2	The trust must submit monthly management accounts, cashflow forecasts and the risk & issues register.
Action/Evidence required from trust	A copy of monthly management accounts including cashflow, copies of latest bank statement and aged creditors and debtors to be sent to SFSO. Copy of the risk & issues register, with changes highlighted. Management accounts must be compliant with the relevant section of ATH 2.18 to 2.21. The management reports must be submitted to SFSO by 10th of the month, until further notice. The frequency of reports thereafter will be determined by SFSO, based on progress against the recovery plan.
By when	Monthly, from January 2026 onwards

Condition 3	The trust must ensure all financial recovery proceeds at pace and within the agreed timeline, to ensure robust financial governance (as outlined in 1.10 of the ATH).
Action/Evidence required from trust	As part of the monthly management account submission, the trust must provide evidence it is expediting efficiencies to bring in-year savings, including staff restructuring to secure future efficiencies and budget stability to their submitted financial plan. SRMA recommendations, ICFP findings and recovery plan actions must be implemented within the planned timelines, reaching a balanced or in-year surplus by 31 August 2027.
By when	Monthly, from January 2026 onwards

Condition 4	The trust must accept a further SRMA deployment in 2026.
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Action/Evidence required from trust	Follow-up SRMA deployment to focus on all efficiencies and monitor implementation of progress with previous recommendations. SFSO would then expect the trust to action any recommendations raised in this deployment.
By when	30 September 2026

Condition 5	The trust must ensure both the trust board and finance committee meet 6 times a year until further notice.
Action/Evidence required from trust	SFSO receives notice of all board meetings, the agenda, and minutes (in particular, all information relevant to the trust's financial or governance position). Copies of the approved minutes along with associated reports submitted to SFSO no later than 5 working days after approval.
By when	As soon as available. Minutes within 5 days of approval.

Condition 6	The trust's members assure themselves they are effectively holding the trust board accountable for its performance and governance.
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Action/Evidence required from trust	Trust members should set out how they uphold the principles of effective governance by actively fulfilling the statutory responsibilities of a member, ensuring the academy trust operates in accordance with its charitable objectives and maintains high standards of accountability and performance. This evidence should include coverage of, but is not limited to: • how they contribute to the annual general meeting • review and challenge the trust board's performance through scrutiny of annual reports, financial statements and governance reviews • exercise powers to appoint or remove trustees where necessary to uphold strong governance • ensure the trust's articles of association remain fit for purpose and initiate amendments when needed • maintain independence from the trust board to provide objective oversight • keep informed of relevant changes in education policy, charity law and governance best practices • record and reflect on decisions made and their impact on the trust's strategic direction.
By when	31 March 2026
Condition 7	The trustees assure themselves suitable arrangements are in place, whereby the trust board has the appropriate skill set and processes in place to challenge and hold to account the Accounting Officer, Chief Finance Officer and other members of the executive management team and evidence this.

Action/Evidence required from trust	The trust board must comply with the external review of governance commissioned by the Department to deliver a comprehensive, external, and independent skills audit, which must include: • Assessment of individual trust board members. • Evaluation of the board as a whole. • Review of financial management and governance within the trust. The Department for Education must approve the Terms of Reference (TOR) for all independent audits and departmental approval is also required prior to the appointment of any individual or organisation conducting these audits. The trust board must provide clear evidence that it has sufficient skills and capability to retain oversight of the trust and deliver financial improvements. The trust board submits evidence of terms of reference and scheme of delegation that evidence the clear lines of accountability, details of performance management arrangements such as who on the board reviews CEO performance, who sets KPIs and who sets salary/agrees any performance awards and bonuses. Evidence demonstrating the board is providing the right balance of challenge and has the skills necessary to carry out its duties effectively should be evidenced in the trust board meetings minutes.
By when	31 March 2026

Condition 8	The trust must include new independent trustees on the trust board, with suitable skills and experience, subject to DfE approval.
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Action/Evidence required from trust	The trust must provide evidence of new independent trustees to be included on the trust board, with suitable skills and experience. This follows the governance review in item 7. Trust to provide access to all relevant information for the trustee to oversee financial recovery.
By when	31 March 2026

Condition 9	The trust must commission an independent review of its budget setting and monitoring process in 2025/26 and 2026/27.
Action/Evidence required from trust	Independent review to establish lessons learnt and recommendations for improvement. The terms of reference of the review and the outcome must be shared with SFSO within 5 days of receipt. The trust must commit to action any recommendations from the review and provide evidence that they have been actioned within 3 months.
By when	31 March 2026

Condition 10	The trust is required to request approval from SFSO, in advance, for any actions under the revoked freedoms in Part 6.19 of the ATH.
Action/Evidence required from trust	The trust must submit a request for approval for any actions relating to the delegated freedom revoked under the terms of the Ntl. Retrospective approval will be deemed as a breach of the ATH.
By when	Until the Ntl is lifted.

Condition 11	The trust must ensure the following support structures are fully operational: i) active mentoring support is agreed with Regions Group and in place for the trust's CEO and Chair ii) mentoring arrangements agreed and confirmed with SFSO for the incoming CFO upon their start in January 2026.
Action/Evidence required from trust	These measures must be demonstrably contributing to improved leadership, governance, and accountability. Evidence may include: • Mentoring agreement or confirmation email • Schedule of mentoring sessions or outline of mentoring arrangement • Summary of mentoring objectives Quarterly progress reports submitted to Regions Group that are agreed by the mentor and mentee
By when	For the CEO and Chair, arrangements in place and first meeting taken place on 28 November 2025. For CFO, initiated upon their start in January 2026.