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Monday, 12th April 2021

Dear Parent or Carer,

Further Consultation to convert to Academy status and join Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust

We hope that you and your families continue to keep safe and well and have enjoyed a relaxing and holy Easter period.

As you are aware, our school has been working with Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, and other schools that are associated with the Trust during this time, to enable us to support one another.

Governors have met regularly throughout the process for conversion and have carefully considered relevant information at key stages. Although governors are committed to joining Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust it was agreed that the process to convert to an academy status should be temporarily paused until September 2021. The key reasons for this decision were as follows:

- Following the three-week stakeholder consultation, carried out in February 2021, governors raised concerns with the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle that this period of consultation was not a sufficient length of time to allow for all parents to effectively contribute. The consultation period was also carried out during a period of national lockdown and it was agreed that the primary focus for the majority of parents, during this time, was the delivery of 'Home Learning' and the subsequent return of pupils back to school in March 2021.
- Governors were of the opinion that all school staff should focus their immediate efforts and resources, during the summer term, on the delivery of a high quality and consistent recovery educational programme to all its pupils following a disrupted year of education. It was also felt that a much clearer national picture for the education of children would develop over the summer term 2021 and therefore school would be much better placed to proceed with the academisation process at the start of the new academic term in September 2021.
- As a responsible and caring Governing Body, who have a legal, financial and a moral obligation towards the wellbeing of its staff and pupils, the Governing Body did not wish to expose staff and pupils to further unnecessary change, particularly at this time.

The Governing Body has therefore decided to further consult with parents, carers, staff and other stakeholders, during the summer term 2021 on whether the school should become an academy and join the Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust. Governors are committed to ensuring that this will be a thorough and meaningful consultation. The consultation period will last for a total of six school weeks, beginning on w/c 26th April 2021 and will end at 3pm on Friday June 18th. A parent response form will be available (both paper based and online) on our school website throughout this period. The



online link can be accessed using the following link: <https://forms.gle/LNBHLQanxAVicNUAA> Previous parent responses will form part of this extended consultation.

Three additional consultation opportunities will be available for parents to access if they wish to speak with the headteacher or Chair of Governors personally relating to the academy conversion process. These dates are as follows: **w/c 26th April 2021**; **w/c 17th May 2021**; **w/c 14th June 2021**. If you would like an appointment to discuss or ask any questions or queries relating to the above please ring the school office to arrange – 01915813055.

Why are Catholic schools within the Diocese Academising?

Diocesan policy states that all Diocesan schools will become academies within one of four Diocesan education trusts by July 2022. Underpinning the Diocesan Academy Policy is the desire and need to ensure the promotion, preservation, protection and future development of Catholic education within the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle. The Catholic Trust model will ensure that the uniqueness of each individual school is celebrated and the unique contribution of each is recognised and appreciated. It will also mean that no individual school will be left isolated or vulnerable in a rapidly changing and complex environment. The aim is also to facilitate greater sharing, adding strength and capacity to the system and ensuring that all schools are supported.

About Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust

Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust was established in February 2016. The Trust's main aim is to ensure that all of our school community fulfil their God given potential.

The Trust has now expanded to include the following schools:

St Wilfrid's RC College, South Shields;
St Joseph's Catholic Academy, Hebburn;
St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Jarrow;
Our Lady of the Rosary Catholic Primary School, Peterlee;
St. Anthony's Girls Catholic Academy, Sunderland;
St Aidan's Catholic Academy, Sunderland;
St Godric's RCVA Primary School, Thornley;
St Mary's RCVA Primary School, Wingate.
St Leonard's RCVA Primary School, Sunderland;
St Aloysius Infant and Junior Schools, Hebburn;
St Joseph's RCVA Primary School, Jarrow; and
St Bede's Catholic Comprehensive School and Byron Sixth Form College, Peterlee.

The following schools have gained Diocesan and DfE approval to join the Trust this year:

St Patrick's RC Primary School, Ryhope;
St Bede's RC Primary and Nursery School, South Shields; and
Ss Peter and Paul RC Primary, South Shields.

The Trust's Board of Directors is ultimately responsible for all schools within the Trust and accountable to the Bishop. The role of the Board is to provide visionary strategic leadership, a focus on continuous improvement, high quality governance and a strong Catholic ethos with a caring and supportive culture.

The Trust currently has two successful Teaching Schools within it - Northern Saints Teaching School Alliance and the Beacon Teaching Alliance. This means that the professional development of staff is central to the work of the Trust and ensures that schools work to improve and provide innovation within our school system.



Vision, Values and Ethos

The Trust's values are: Excellence, Respect, Community, Gifts, Aspiration and Celebration. Its vision: "As a family of schools inspired by Christ, we aim to enable each individual to fulfil their God given potential. Excellence for everyone through learning, respect and partnership is the heart of our Trust" means that the offer of an outstanding education ensures that every child succeeds and realises their potential.

As a Trust, they value the close working and supportive relationships they have with parents and carers and our wider community.

What are the main benefits for schools within the Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust?

- Access to high performing staff, including an "outstanding" Trust leadership team who are sharply focussed on securing excellence.
- Moderation of standards across the partnership of schools to ensure the highest quality provision.
- Greater control over school finances, as funding comes directly to school from central government.
- Educational benefits for pupils as a result of additional freedoms available to academies in terms of the curriculum offered, and how to prioritise resources.
- The opportunity to work in close and formalised partnership with other schools and share expertise and services that will benefit all of our students and staff.
- Sharing resources and expertise allows targeted funding towards improving front line teaching and learning, the facilities and teaching environment.
- Develop our own solutions collaboratively.
- Building on Catholic ethos and protecting Catholic education and values.

Governance

The Bishop Chadwick Board of Directors will provide strong and effective governance to all of the schools in the Trust including our school. Within the Trust each school has a Local Governing Committee (LGC) with accountability for the unique character and strategic direction of their own school.

Will admissions arrangements change?

Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust is responsible (in accordance with Diocesan policy) for setting the admissions arrangements for our schools. It must be stressed however the admissions criteria must have regard to the National Admissions Code of Practice. There are no plans to change the admissions criteria for our school.

What is an Academy?

Academies are state schools, funded directly from central government, no longer under the control of the Local Authority. Academy status gives schools more freedom to be innovative and creative with the curriculum, timetabling, staffing and governance. However Catholic Academies continue to be accountable to the Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle as well as the local community. All academies continue to be inspected by Ofsted and comply with the same rules as other schools on special educational needs, exclusions and admissions.

There are now over 6,000 academies in the country, including many schools in the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle and in the local authority.



An academy is part of a charitable trust run by a board of Directors. Academies are rightly expected to work with and support other schools, including lower-performing schools. Should you wish to know more about the Government's policy, the Department for Education has its own academies bookmark on <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/convert-to-an-academy-information-for-schools>

What is a Multi Academy Trust (MAT)?

A MAT or Trust is formed when two or more academies legally come together in partnership. Each school keeps its own name and it is the Diocesan Academy Policy that the 34 Catholic schools in South Tyneside, Sunderland and East Durham will all be part of the Trust by July 2022. The partnership ensures that the schools can share skills and best practice and make optimum use of resources ensuring best value for money for each school.

In many ways the children will not notice any immediate difference, they will be in the same uniform, in the same classrooms with the same teaching staff. However, in time the children will perhaps notice changes and improvements in the way that they learn for example and have greater links with each school within the Trust.

What additional responsibilities will Academy status bring?

- Additional financial and legal responsibilities – however as Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust is a well-established Trust, arrangements are already fully in place to deal with these responsibilities.
- Currently the Governing Body employs our staff – going forward the Trust would be the employer rather than the Governing Body.
- The Trust would be responsible for admissions rather than the Governing Body (although the Local Authority would still co-ordinate and ensure the Trust adopts clear and fair admission arrangements in line with the admissions law and the School Admissions Code).
- The Trust would enter into a 125-year lease for the land, usually owned by the Local Authority. We already have responsibility for the cost of maintaining the land and buildings.

How do I respond to the consultation?

Our Governing Body would very much like to hear your thoughts on this matter. We have attached a paper copy parent consultation response form for any parent who wishes to respond by the deadline of 3pm Friday June 18th. This form is also available, online, via our school website or the following link: <https://forms.gle/LNBHLQanxAVicNUAA>.

Please send your response form to us by emailing seahamstmary@durhamlearning.net If you would like to speak personally with the headteacher or Chair of Governors please contact the school office to arrange.

Yours sincerely,



Mr. L. J. Duncan (Headteacher)



Mr. L. Kerrigan (Chair of Governors)



Proposal to become an Academy and join Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust Paper Based Consultation Feedback Form

Please let us know your views regarding our plans to become an academy and join Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust.

Name.....

Contact details.....

☐ Parent/Carer ☐ Staff ☐ Other please state.....

I am happy that further time has been provided to consult with stakeholders ☐ Yes ☐ No

Comment:

Your written response should be emailed to seahamstmary@durhamlearning.net by no later than **3pm on Friday 18th June 2021**. Alternatively an online version can be completed via our school website or using the following link: <https://forms.gle/LNBHLQanxAVicNUAA>
Thank you for taking the time to respond.

