



CONSULTATION ON A PROPOSAL FOR CONVERSION TO MULTI-ACADEMY COMPANY STATUS

Introduction

This document is formal consultation to the proposed conversion of St Mary's Catholic Primary School to Academy status.

What is being proposed?

The Governing Body of St. Mary's Catholic Primary School is proposing to convert to Academy status in the 2013/14 academic year. The decision is based on our aim to achieve the best for our schools, students, staff and the Catholic community. The proposal has had the approval of the Birmingham Diocesan Education Service. We have been invited to join the newly-formed St John Bosco Catholic Academy, which currently comprises of three schools:

- Bishop Milner Catholic College, in Dudley
- St Joseph's Catholic Primary School in Dudley
- St Chad's Catholic Primary School in Sedgley.

As many of you will know, St Mary's has always enjoyed excellent working relationships with a wide number of other Catholic schools, and these strong relationships will continue. **Parents will still be free to choose the most appropriate secondary school for their children**, and the Governors will strive to ensure that the strong links we enjoy with Hagley RC School will continue, whilst also developing our links with the other schools in the MAC.

As part of the process of applying to become an Academy, the Governing Body has committed to full consultation with all stakeholders in order to take their views into account regarding the changes ahead. The purpose of this statement is, therefore, to

introduce the proposals to you and inform you how you can take part in the consultation process.

What is an Academy?

An academy is a state-funded school which operates independently within the requirements of national codes of practice for state schools, however, unlike a state school it receives its funding directly from central government rather than through a local authority.

The first academies required a sponsoring organisation and had the sole objective of raising standards within the school. Under new legislation, schools that are either 'outstanding' or 'good with outstanding features' are now also eligible to convert to Academy status together with their partner schools.

What is a Multi-Academy Company?

The Catholic Education Service of England and Wales (CES) have taken time to consider whether Academy conversion could take place whilst safeguarding the distinctive identity of Catholic schools and how schools could remain supported and not isolated. The CES, Archdiocese of Birmingham and Department for Education (DfE) have developed a model which involves a family of schools forming a 'multi-academy company' under a diocesan umbrella called the Dominic Barberi Trust.

The essential principles of the model are that no schools are left behind, it involves no external business sponsorship and there will be no change to the distinctive nature of any of the schools in the company.

What are the benefits of conversion?

The governors of the school have identified the benefits of being in a Multi Academy Company (MAC) as helping to:

- Secure and preserve the Catholic ethos and character in the schools through ecclesial communion.
- Offer quality Catholic education across the primary and secondary phase, which meets the expectations of Catholic parents, **whilst ensuring existing secondary school options remain unaffected.**
- Continue to raise the quality of education through individual schools having accountability for standards but committing to collective responsibility for

improving provision in all schools in order to promote achievement and improve pupil performance.

- Improve the quality and impact of strategic thinking and planning.
- Support governor training and development opportunities.
- Strengthen capacity through providing wider career and vocational opportunities and leadership formation.
- Extend the range and broaden the diversity of planned curriculum and extracurricular opportunities.
- Strengthen existing partnerships with other schools and providers, e.g. those with other neighbouring schools and other Catholic schools within the Archdiocese of Birmingham
- Improve the range of response to individual pupils' needs, including those with special educational needs.
- Address community cohesion and social inclusion issues particularly improving the performance of potentially higher achieving pupils and those pupils with low aspiration.
- Use the MAC as the basis for exploring improved liaison, collaboration and partnership working with any external agencies.
- Ensure effective use of new technologies to enhance teaching and learning.
- Ensure best value in the use of finance and resources.
- Improve the sharing and economies of scale regarding resources.

What will change?

Conversion to Academy Status for Catholic Schools will not be as significant as for Local Authority Maintained Schools. The governing bodies of Voluntary Aided Catholic Schools already manage their school finances and have responsibility for employment and admissions.

Under the Diocesan model Governance of our schools would remain largely unchanged as the majority of governors would be appointed by the Diocese and there would be staff and parent governors as now. The only difference would be the establishment of an overarching Multi-Academy Company Executive consisting of representatives from school governing bodies and from the Diocese.

For many years the Catholic schools in the area have worked together to ensure that Catholic education is of a high quality. We now have the opportunity to work together in a supportive Multi Academy Company. This will give us the opportunity to share good teaching and learning, join together to buy resources and develop a collaborative way of working for the benefit of all our children and families.

We have a vision for Catholic education that goes beyond individual schools and changes our perception from 'my school', to 'our schools'. The challenge for us all is "How can we share our gifts and talents to ensure all education for all of our children is 'Outstanding'?"

A number of other elements would remain unchanged. An Academy would still be bound by the statutory codes for Special Educational Needs and the Admissions criteria and catchment areas for each school would remain unchanged. There would be no change to the pay and conditions (in line with current Government policy) of staff, to the start and finish times or length of the school day and no change to the school's policy on pupil discipline or the school uniform.

All our schools will continue to offer a broad and balanced curriculum, and because an Academy is not bound by the prescriptions of the national curriculum, Governors are conscious that this freedom could offer an additional safeguard from a secular agenda which may not accord with Catholic teaching. Our commitment to wider partnership working will remain and we will work with our Local Authority across a wide range of schools in an atmosphere of mutual support.

Schools have always operated within a changing educational landscape and the Academies programme means that for the collective of Catholic schools to do nothing is not a viable option. It is the Government's vision that the majority of schools in England will, over time, convert to Academy status and will cease to be 'maintained' by their Local Authority (LA).

To date, funding for maintained schools has been routed through the LA who have 'top sliced' that funding to construct and deliver a set of support services such as legal advice, across all their maintained schools. Local authorities are adapting to this new climate by selling services in packages. So even remaining as we are, a Voluntary Aided (VA) school, under the LA would look different in the future than it does today.

Receiving funding directly from the DfE would mean that we could, across all the schools in the MAC, receive back up to 10% (indicative figure provided from the DfE) of the funding that the LA presently takes. There are some services which we would buy back from the Local Authority out of this additional funding. However, the remaining additional resources would provide the governing bodies with an opportunity to prioritise spending for each individual school.

In addition, the Diocesan Multi Academy Company model will enable our schools to share resources and services more effectively and to provide consistent and continuous support for children and young people in line with our ethos and mission.

What are the challenges?

As mentioned already a number of the challenges facing maintained schools converting to Academy status have already been embraced by Voluntary Aided schools. However, there are the perceptions of schools 'going it alone' and of a 'two tier' system with a disregard for disadvantaged schools and the notion of instability for staff in terms of pay and conditions.

The Diocesan model addresses all of these challenges; no school may convert on its own; all schools have the opportunity to convert as part of a family of schools and schools facing difficulties will be supported. In addition, no school can convert without the consent of the Trustees who will ensure that all schools are legally committed to converting under the same conditions, safeguarding pay and conditions for staff.

Further Information

The DES (Diocesan Education Service) Model for Catholic Schools to become Academies is as follows:

- Groups of **Catholic** schools can join together to form Multi Academy Companies (MAC's). Each Academy (school) retains a Principal (Headteacher) who will be responsible for delivering education within that school.
- **No** provision within the agreements negotiated by the DES exists for schools to form single academies, or to form Multi Academy Companies with non-Catholic schools.
- The proposed Academies do not involve any form of external sponsorship. The DES is opposed to this.
- Strategic control of this Company rests with a board of directors, a sort of 'super' governing body. The majority of the directors would be appointed by the Diocese – in much the same way that the majority of governors on the governing body today are foundation governors, in place to represent the Church's interests. The remainder would be composed of staff, Principals and parents, again very similar to a current governing body.

- Each Academy would retain its own identity and would have an Academy committee responsible for day to day issues, such as maintaining contact with the local parish, and staffing appointments up to the level of Vice Principal (Deputy Head).
- Staff currently employed by the schools would transfer to being employed by the MAC. Current staff would have their terms and conditions protected under the TUPE legislation. New staff could be employed under different terms and conditions. The view of the DES is that, whilst nationally negotiated terms and conditions exist, it would be preferable for MAC's to work within their framework.
- Locally, schools are still free to enter into partnerships and agreements with other bodies for example, use of playing fields or shared resources, or formal contracts.
- The DES has no power to force schools to go down the Academy route. However, schools judged as failing by the Office for the Schools Commissioner will be forced down the Academy route.
- The DES will act as a facilitator for groups of schools that wish to become a MAC. They will not however force schools together. This has a consequence in that, if a school later wants to join an existing MAC, the DES will not compel that MAC to accept them.

Finally

We feel it is important to emphasise the distinctiveness of the Archdiocese of Birmingham Multi Academy Company proposal. It is underpinned by a commitment to work for the good of all diocesan schools, to ensure that none are left in a vulnerable position, and our Catholic identity and ethos are maintained and strengthened. Furthermore, our four schools **will maintain their own identities**, together with their commitment to working with others within and beyond our local area for the benefit of all concerned.

The freedoms, with the resources, that Academy status will bring would be major factors in enabling our schools to continue to provide the best possible education for our young people and to serve our Catholic community.

How will the consultation work?

The consultation period for parents will commence from **Friday 15th November 2013** and close on **Friday 29th November 2013**. During this period there will be an opportunity to raise any questions or concerns relating to this proposal, including a Parental Meeting on Tuesday 26th November in school. On a wider scale, the Governing Body are consulting with all our stakeholders including:

- Parish Priests and the Catholic Community
- School Governors
- Staff and unions
- Parents and pupils
- Dudley Local Authority
- The wider local community.

Key Dates

Commence staff consultation	Friday 25th October 2013
Staff meeting with Archdiocese	Monday 4th November 2013
Commence parental Consultation	Friday 15th November 2013
Parental Meeting	Tuesday 26th November 2013
Close staff & parental consultation	Friday 29th November 2013
Full Governing Body Meeting	Thursday 9 th January 2014

How can I make my views known?

You are invited to submit your comments and views to the school by email to the following address:

smbhconsult@gmail.com

**Parents Meeting Tuesday 26th November at 7.00pm
in school.**

All are welcome

Or, by writing to Ms Anne Maher, Headteacher at St Mary's School.