

*'Learning to love, live and celebrate as we grow in the knowledge and love of Christ'*

# St Thomas More Catholic Primary School



Consultation on the proposed Academisation of  
**St Thomas More Catholic Primary School** as part of  
All Saints Catholic Academy Trust (ASCAT)

# **St Thomas More Catholic Primary School**

## **Section 1: Academy Information**

### **What is the School proposing?**

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School together with St Albert the Great Catholic Primary School and John F Kennedy Catholic School is proposing to convert to an Academy and form the Dacorum Hub within the existing All Saints Catholic Academy Trust (ASCAT).

St Thomas More Catholic Primary School has received the consent of the Diocese of Westminster and the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) to convert to an academy.

ASCAT has received the consent of the Diocese of Westminster and the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) to welcome the 3 schools into a Hub within the CAT.

### **What is the Dacorum Hub?**

The Hub will be a group of Dacorum Catholic Schools working together within the larger ASCAT Family of schools to create a bespoke 3-19 pathway for Dacorum pupils and families, combining strong educational outcomes with the teachings of Christ and His Church at the centre.

The Hub will benefit from economies of scale, resilience and collaborations as part of a larger Catholic Academy Trust of schools in Watford and St Albans.

### **Why is St Thomas More proposing to join ASCAT?**

There are a number of reasons for this, including;

- The Executive Headteacher and Governors believe that converting and joining a Catholic Trust and forming the Dacorum Hub will deliver the best future for our school.
- The Executive Headteacher believes joining a CAT will secure strategic school to school support and development through sharing the very best of our leadership, management, teaching and learning, pastoral and spiritual development.
- Catholic schools currently work as 'islands' and by coming together in solidarity in a Hub within a wider CAT we will be stronger, more robust and more resilient for the future:
- Catholic education is facing many threats both nationally and across the Diocese, in terms of declining rolls and increased financial pressures due to Austerity.
- With government borrowing already at unprecedented levels, prospects for an increase in school funding in the short to medium terms are extremely low.
- We face a growing need to protect, secure, and develop the Church's mission in Catholic education, working together to grow our resilience and overcome other future threats.
- We face a growing need to protect, secure, and develop the Church's mission in Catholic education, working together to grow our resilience and overcome other future threats.

### **How will St Thomas More Catholic Primary School benefit from joining the ASCAT?**

The aim of the Diocese's CAT Strategy is to protect, secure and develop the Church's

mission in education.

Existing and prospective children in schools within CATs will benefit in a number of ways, including;

- Enhanced collaboration and partnership across the schools
- Increased savings and efficiencies at a time of growing financial pressures
- Improved teaching, learning, pastoral and spiritual development for each child through increased collaboration, challenge and support
- Increased CPD opportunities and career pathways for staff
- Improved retention and development of the best Catholic teachers and Leaders
- Clear, robust and effective Governance at Trust, CEO and Local Advisory Council levels
- Secured Catholic education across the Diocese for generations to come.

### **Why is St Thomas More Catholic Primary School now proposing to become an Academy and join the ASCAT?**

The Executive Headteacher and Chair of Governors believe the time is right to move forward after careful consideration and a thoughtful journey.

In September 2017 the Diocese of Westminster published its strategy for Catholic Academy Trusts <http://rcdow.org.uk/education/academies-/>

The Diocese's Strategy sets out the reasons, benefits and structure of the Catholic Academy Trusts that the Dacorum Schools would benefit from forming.

The Diocese is clearly minded to continue and increase the speed of its Academisation programme, and by choosing to join and expand a Trust under our 'own steam', we are able to shape our own future.

We also believe the time is right in terms of reductions in funding and support from local authorities; the Government white paper requiring schools to have plans to join a MAT by 2030.

### **Will the CAT expand to include more schools over time?**

Yes, ASCAT will expand to embrace all Catholic schools Watford, St Albans and Hemel Hempstead who wish to become Academies under the Diocese of Westminster CAT programme.

### **How does the Governance arrangements of the All Saints Catholic Academy Trust work?**

The Diocese of Westminster has nominated 5 Members who own the Memorandum and Articles and Association of the Trust, registered with Companies House.

The Members include Cardinal Vincent Nichols, the Archbishop of the Diocese of Westminster, Auxiliary Bishop and Chair of the Education Commission of the Diocese of Westminster, Chief Operating Officer/Financial Secretary of the Diocese of Westminster and the Director of Education for the Diocese of Westminster.

The Members have appointed a Board of Foundation Directors with strategic oversight for the Trust and Schools.



Each School will retain a Local Governing Body which, with the Executive Headteacher, will be responsible for the day to day running of the school.

The Local Governing Body will have powers delegated from the CAT Board of Directors under an agreed Scheme of Delegation are accountable to the Board.

### **Will the School retain its individual ethos?**

Yes, the Diocese is very clear that the individual ethos, character and good practices of each school are retained and that all the schools operate as equals supporting each other.

Each school is seen as central to its own community with the skills of each being used in a supportive way for all the others. Every school gives and receives support from one another.

### **What is an Academy?**

Academies are publicly funded independent schools that are not managed by a local authority, but their funding and accountability is directly with the Department for Education (DfE).

### **When will St Thomas More Catholic Primary School become an Academy?**

We would expect that the process will take approximately 6 months, work is underway and the planned conversion date is 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023.

### **Why is there a consultation?**

The Academies Act 2010 requires the school to consult “such persons as they think appropriate” on whether the school should become an academy.

The Governing Body of St Thomas More is consulting with all key stakeholders about the proposed academy conversion including parents, staff, pupils and other schools over a 4 week period commencing Monday 21<sup>st</sup> November to Friday 15<sup>th</sup> December.

### **Does the school need agreement from the Local Authority to become an Academy?**

No. The Academies Act 2010 has removed the need for the Local Authority to approve plans for the school to become an Academy.

### **What form of relationship will exist between the Local Authority and the school?**

This is for individual Academies or Catholic Academy Trusts to determine – there is no statutory requirement for any formal relationship between Local Authorities and Academies.

Academies are directly funded and accountable to central government (Department for Education and the Education Skills Funding Agency).

The Local Authority retains statutory duties for aspects of Special Educational Needs, admissions co-ordination and provision of home-to-school transport. Local Authorities are also expected to play a key strategic role locally in areas such as pupil place planning admissions and sharing good practice.

The schools have good relationships with Hertfordshire County Council, and will seek to

maintain and cultivate this in the future.

### **Are Academies subject to the same Ofsted inspection regime?**

Schools converting to Academies will continue to be inspected in the normal way.

### **What is the process for St Thomas More Catholic Primary School to join the ASCAT?**

The conversion process includes the following key legal processes:

- Putting in place a Supplementary Funding Agreement (SFA) for each School
- Transferring the employment of the staff from the local authority to ASCAT following a statutory process (TUPE\*)
- Agreeing a Commercial Transfer Agreement for the transfer of assets and contracts from the local authority to ASCAT
- Arranging a 125-year lease for the land and buildings with the Diocese and/or local authority.

*(\*TUPE = Transfer of Undertaking – Protection of Employment)*

## **Section 2: Staff Issues**

### **Does the school have to hold consultation with staff?**

Under employment legislation the Governing Body which is the current employer will need to conduct a TUPE consultation with all staff (both teaching and non-teaching) and the relevant unions as part of the staff transfer process.

### **Can teachers' pay and conditions change?**

No. Whilst Academy Trusts do have the freedom to vary terms and conditions from national ones, the Diocese of Westminster Strategy commits its Catholic Trust to abiding by teachers' pay and conditions.

### **If the school becomes an Academy, who takes responsibility for the pension arrangements?**

Teachers working in an academy fall within the scope of the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS), just as if they were employed in a Local Authority maintained school.

Non-teaching staff at schools are able to join the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS). This is administered by Hertfordshire County Council as at present.

Employees will pay the same rate as at present under both schemes, subject to any nationally imposed changes.

### **How will the TUPE process work and what specific responsibilities does the Governing Body have?**

As the current employer, the Governing Body is responsible for informing and consulting with staff.

The Governing Body is responsible for informing the ASCAT, as the new employer, of any 'measures' which will impact on their employment.

There are none planned in this case and the ASCAT will write to each member of staff confirming that they will transfer under existing terms and conditions.

### **Section: Finance**

#### **Will we get more money as an Academy?**

Academies receive the same amount of per-pupil funding as they would receive from the Local Authority as a maintained school. However, at present, Hertfordshire County Council withhold a portion of the school's funds as a contribution to council budgets. That would not happen as an Academy, so the total overall funding for the CAT would be higher than the sum total of present funding distributed to each school. There are other financial advantages, for example VAT is recoverable on normal business activities and capital works.

The Government is clear that becoming an Academy should not bring about a financial advantage or disadvantage to a school. However, academies do have greater freedom to decide how they use their entire budget, and Multi Academy Trusts are able to identify efficiency savings from enhanced partnership working.

### **Section 4: Admissions**

#### **Will becoming an Academy affect our admissions arrangements?**

When a school becomes to an Academy it also becomes an admission authority responsible for its own admission arrangements. As the school is joining a Multi Academy Trust – All Saints CAT will become the admissions authority. Schools will continue to make decisions about their admissions arrangements, and a CAT could propose changes in the same way a school currently can.

In the same way as maintained schools, all academies and their schools are required to adopt clear and fair admission arrangements in line with the admissions law and the School Admissions Code.

#### **Will Academies have to be a part of the annual coordinated admissions scheme? E.g. when the LA needs to find places for families relocating to the area etc.**

Yes - Academy Funding Agreements require them to be in local coordination. That means although the academy will apply its own admission arrangements, the LA will send out offers of places. The Local Authority in Hertfordshire also coordinates admissions for in-year applications and applications for year groups other than the normal point(s) of entry. This will not affect the Academy's right to determine which applicants have priority for admission. Academies are also required through their Funding Agreements to participate in local fair access protocols which help to ensure that no child is without a school place.

#### **Will the Academies decide to bring in academic selection?**

No, there will be no introduction of selection. Schools which already select some or all of their pupils may continue to do so when they become Academies, but schools becoming Academies cannot decide to become new selective schools.

### **Section 5: Special Education Needs**

### **Will our responsibilities in relation to Special Educational Needs change?**

No. Responsibilities as an Academy in relation to Special Educational Needs will be just the same as they are now as a Voluntary Aided school.

### **Can a child with a statement of Special Educational Needs nominate an academy as their school of choice?**

Yes. These arrangements and related processes must at all times comply with the School Admissions Code, and responsibilities as an Academy in relation to Special Educational Needs will be just the same as they are now as a maintained school.

### **Section 6: Exclusions**

#### **Does becoming an Academy change the way in which exclusions are dealt with?**

Academies are required by their Funding Agreement to follow the law and guidance on exclusions as if they were Voluntary Aided schools. This includes reporting exclusions to the Local Authority.

However, Academies do not have to consult the Local Authority before deciding to exclude a pupil and they can arrange their own independent appeals panel.

### **Section 7: Further Information**

#### **How do I find out more about the proposals?**

The Executive Headteacher and Chair of Governors will host a consultation meeting for parents at 6:30 pm on Monday 28<sup>th</sup> November. A separate meeting is being held for staff.

**Please complete and return the questionnaire page below to the School office**

**If you would prefer to complete it online, return it by email to:  
[academyconsultation@stmore.herts.sch.uk](mailto:academyconsultation@stmore.herts.sch.uk)**

***Mr David Swarbrick  
Chair of Governors  
St Thomas More Catholic Primary School  
November 2022***