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Headteacher: Mrs. L. Ashton

Monday, 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021

Dear Parent or Carer,

### **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 during these uncertain and unprecedented times.

Many of you will be aware that, in December 2019, The Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle published an academy policy which stated the aim for all Catholic schools in the Diocesan region to become academies by July 2022. The resulting Diocesan “growth plan” has earmarked the target date for our school to become an academy in the Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust as 1<sup>st</sup> October 2021.

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.

Our Governing Body's priority remains to ensure that both our pupils and staff are safe and to enable the school to continue to provide an excellent Catholic education for our children. We have also been trying to provide other support to our wider community during these challenging times. Please rest assured that this will continue to be the case.

In line with Diocesan policy, and despite the ongoing challenges we are facing at this time, our Governing Body has decided that, due to the supportive nature of the Trust, we will consult with parents, carers, staff and other stakeholders to gather opinion on the plans for our school to become an academy and join the Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust.

We are commencing formal consultation today, Monday 8<sup>th</sup> March, for a period of three school term weeks. Consultation will end at 3pm on Friday 26<sup>th</sup> March 2021. Although the consultation process will be virtual and in writing, we are committed to ensuring that this will be a thorough and meaningful consultation.

### **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 Catholic Primary School, Thornley;
- St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Wingate.
- St Leonard's Catholic Primary School, Sunderland;
- St Aloysius Catholic Infant and Junior Schools, Hebburn;
- St Joseph's Catholic 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.

And the schools named below also have begun the academy conversion process:

St Mary Magdalen's RC Primary School, Seaham; and  
St Cuthbert's RC Primary School, Seaham.

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 learning opportunities 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 opinion. Due to the current Covid situation we are unable to hold face-to-face information sessions for parents however if there is demand, we plan to offer an opportunity to join a 'virtual meeting' where you can pose your questions to the MAT's CEO, Brendan Tapping. If you wish to partake in such a virtual meeting, please email [ourladyoflourdes@durhamlearning.net](mailto:ourladyoflourdes@durhamlearning.net) by Friday 12<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

We have also attached and published on our school website, a list of frequently asked questions for any parent who wishes to know more. If you do have any further questions you are welcome to send these to us by emailing [ourladyoflourdes@durhamlearning.net](mailto:ourladyoflourdes@durhamlearning.net)

Finally, we have provided a consultation response sheet attached to this letter if you wish to provide a written response to the consultation by the deadline.

Yours sincerely,  
Lisa Ashton  
Headteacher

Katherine Briggs  
Chair of Governors

### **Proposal to become an Academy and join Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust 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.....

Your written response should be emailed to [ourladyoflourdes@durhamlearning.net](mailto:ourladyoflourdes@durhamlearning.net) by no later than **3pm on Friday 26<sup>th</sup> March 2021**.

Thank you for taking the time to respond to the consultation.