



Monday 27<sup>th</sup> September 2021

Dear Parents/Carers

## **Consultation to convert to Academy status and join Bishop Bewick Catholic Education Trust (formerly Sacred Heart Partnership of Schools)**

Prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, many of you will recall that in December 2019 the Diocesan Academy Policy was revised with the aim that all Diocesan schools will become academies within one of four Diocesan education trusts by July 2022.

It is both the view of the Diocese and our Governing Body that the plans to join the Trust should continue, and in many ways this has been brought into even sharper focus by the pandemic situation, in that by being part of a Catholic Academy Trust we will be able to jointly plan and work together to support our children, families and staff during these unprecedented and challenging times.

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 enable the school to continue to provide an excellent Catholic education for our children, whilst continuing to be at the heart of our community.

Therefore, in line with Diocesan policy, our Governing Body has decided to consult with parents, carers, staff and other stakeholders, on whether each school should become an academy and join the Bishop Bewick Catholic Education Trust.

We are therefore commencing formal consultation today, Monday 27<sup>th</sup> September 2021, for a period of three school term weeks. Consultation will therefore end at 3pm on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> October 2021.

### **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 9,000 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 is formed when two or more academies legally come together in partnership. Each school keeps its own name and it is possible for other academies to join the Trust in the future. 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.

## How can we find out more about Bishop Bewick Catholic Education Trust?

Bishop Bewick Catholic Education Trust (formerly known as Sacred Heart Partnership of Schools) was established in 2017 by Sacred Heart Catholic School, a Catholic Academy, judged to be Outstanding by Ofsted. In recent years, Sacred Heart has been ranked amongst the top state schools nationally in terms of GCSE and A level results.

The Trust was founded on clear principles, to educate the whole child, to ensure every child in its care has an excellent Catholic education and to work together to improve opportunities for all its children to succeed and be happy. The original schools came together to support a primary school that was graded inadequate by Ofsted. This school needed immediate support with leadership and to improve the quality of learning: the children and their families deserved a great education. By working together and harnessing the best leadership and teaching available, the Trust was able to transform the provision in the school within months. The staff in that school are now ready and able to work with others. However, the best Trusts are not formed simply to support schools in difficulty. Our Catholic schools are some of the best in our region, all have strengths, all have areas to develop. By coming together as a partnership of schools, we can harness the best practice within schools, and then disseminate it across the system. The Trust believes this is the single most important benefit of being part of a Trust.

Another central principle to how the Bishop Bewick Catholic Education Trust operates is how all schools maintain their individuality, uniqueness and a great deal of autonomy, so that they are able to be creative and flourish. The Trust values what makes schools different, however schools are bound together by their desire to ensure every school is supported to become the best it can in order to improve the life chances for all children in our region. When expansion is complete the Trust will be a partnership of 39 North East schools and will fully recognise that each new school joining the Trust will bring with them skills, strengths and talents that can further enhance the work of the Trust.

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

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

- Access to top quality 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 finances and the money due to schools.
- Educational benefits for students as a result of additional freedoms available to academies in terms of the curriculum we offer, and how we 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 us to target funding towards improving front line teaching and learning.
- Develop our own solutions collaboratively.
- Building on Catholic ethos and protecting Catholic education.

### **What additional responsibilities will Academy status bring?**

- Additional financial and legal responsibilities – however as Bishop Bewick 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 Academy Trust would be the employer rather than the Governing Body.
- The Academy 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 Academy 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 learn more, and how do I respond to the consultation?**

Our Governing Body would very much like to hear your opinion and we encourage you to contact Mr Sutcliffe via Class Dojo messages with any questions you might have.

If you wish to respond to the consultation, please complete the google form <https://forms.gle/3Vq7AcRinSCz9GrVA> with your feedback, and include your name and contact details by the closing date of Friday 15th October 2021.

Yours sincerely,

*D Sutcliffe*

Mr D Sutcliffe  
Headteacher

*F Swift*

Mrs F Swift  
Chair of Governors





## Frequently asked questions

### Why is the school moving into a large Trust rather than just staying as we are?

The Diocese and Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle oversee all Catholic academies/schools in the Diocesan region. The Diocese has been reviewing the organisation of its schools/academies, working with headteachers/governing bodies to consider how best to proceed in the long-term interests of all diocesan schools/academies. It has now decided on an updated policy which has been finalised under the direction of the Bishop. Its central aim is that all diocesan schools (i.e. 156 schools, educating 53,600 children) will become academies within four, regional Diocesan trusts, by July 2022. A trust is a group of academies coming together in one legal entity, to work in partnership for the good of all the academies in the trust, whilst retaining the autonomy/distinctiveness of each academy. The diocesan statement about this was circulated to parishes in December 2019, which explained that the policy implementation would happen in two stages:

Stage 1: consolidation of existing academies into the four regional trusts – completed December 2020.

Stage 2: conversion of catholic primaries to academy status within the four regional trusts – now underway

In the northern region of the Diocese, the Bishop Bewick Catholic Education Trust (BBCET) formerly known as Sacred Heart Partnership of Schools (SHPS), is the legal entity into which all northern Catholic academies will be consolidated. BBCET currently contains all five secondary schools within our region and 31 primary schools. It is led by the Chief Executive Mrs Anita Bath. The trust is overseen by a Board of Directors who have oversight of all the academies in the MAT, though each individual academy has its own Local Governing Body, Headteacher and Leadership Team, to run the individual academies.

St Robert's will join BBCET in Tranche 4 of Stage 2 to complete the expansion of the northern trust, the expected date for conversion to take place is 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022.

### What do we gain from joining this Trust?

Underpinning the Diocesan Academy Policy, is the desire and need to ensure the promotion, preservation, protection and future development of Catholic education. The larger 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 is left isolated or vulnerable in a rapidly changing educational environment. The aim is also to facilitate greater sharing, adding strength and capacity to the system and ensuring that all schools are supported.

The larger trust will result in a local network of committed and knowledgeable partner schools all working together in the sole interests of our children. We will be able to tap into a vast reservoir of experience and support from within our schools, to continue to raise standards in the future for the good of all schools. We will gain many advantages and



benefits in terms of staff sharing expertise and collaboration, for instance, making the links between our primary and secondary schools even stronger and providing high quality school improvement support for our schools. As part of a larger trust, we will also gain enhanced financial support and funding from central government. For example, grant funding for capital projects (new buildings, building repairs etc) is currently made available automatically to larger trusts on an annual basis, whereas individual academies have to bid for capital funding as part of a highly competitive annual process. Being part of the trust, schools should, over time, be able to save money through the shared procurement of a wide range of support services.

The schools within the trust and the trust itself will remain highly accountable to both the Department for Education and Ofsted who will continue to ensure that each school is performing well and will continue to publish reports, for the benefit of parents, on the performance of each school within the trust.

### **Do we lose control over our school?**

No. Once consolidated into the larger trust, St Robert's, along with all the other academies, will continue to have its own governance, known as the Local Governing Committee (LGC), responsible for oversight of the school, as well as a Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team responsible for all aspects of the day to day operation of the school, just as we have now. Ultimately, there will be 39 academies in the expanded trust in the northern region, so it will be essential that each academy continues to have responsibility and accountability for all aspects of its day to day operations, progress and development, albeit in a closer and, hopefully, more effective partnership with all of the other diocesan academies in the northern regional trust. Indeed, as part of this diocesan strategy, it is clear that each school is expected to retain great autonomy and to ensure an outstanding Catholic education for all of its students, regardless of their faith background. An overarching Board of Directors and a central team, led by the Chief Executive, will have oversight of each regional trust and ultimate accountability for the academies within the multi-academy trust.

Although part of the larger trust, each school will retain its unique identity and decision-making options with regard to how the school is run and what is taught. Each school will continue to receive its school budget from the Department for Education, via the trust, in order to run the school and the Headteacher and local governors will work closely with the central trust each year to produce an annual budget which will be approved by the trust Board of Directors. Each school will continue to receive a small amount of capital funding based on its pupil numbers but will also potentially be able to access some additional capital funding, via the annual central trust capital grant, which is designed to support a range of building and other capital projects across the whole of the trust, based on priority needs.

### **Will the name of the school change?**

No. There is no intention to change the names of the academies in the trust.

### **Will there have to be a new uniform?**

No. There is no need to change our current uniform.



## Will there be any changes to the school day?

No. There is no need to change our current timings.

## When do you propose to make these changes?

We hope to have completed the legal procedures for Tranche 4 to take effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022.

## How will the school be accountable as part of a trust?

A trust is governed by company law as a Charitable Trust. The trust Board of Directors will work with all Local Governing Bodies of the academies in the trust to monitor the schools' overall performance and development. The Trust Board would only intervene in an individual academy in certain circumstances, to provide additional support. For instance, if results fell below floor targets or an individual academy fell into an Ofsted category of 'Requires Improvement' or lower, the trust would provide significant support to that academy and help ensure that progress and improvement could be brought about rapidly for the benefit of children in such an academy.

## Will our Admissions policy change?

No. The expanded trust will be the Admissions Authority, but there will be no change in policy or pupil admission numbers. Our catchment area and partner primary schools will remain unchanged too. We will remain a feeder school for Newminster and Chantry Middle Schools.

## Will the curriculum change?

No, not as a result of joining the trust. All schools in the trust largely follow the National Curriculum. Both children and staff enjoy the flexibility it offers. Our schools will work together to improve curriculum offer by sharing best practice across our schools. In recent years we have already undertaken work to ensure good transition between KS2 and KS3 in foundation subjects such as Geography.

## Will there be any change to Special Educational Needs?

No change. Pupils will be assessed early and will have access to appropriate support to match their individual needs as they do now.

## Will there be any changes to school meals?

No change. And free school meals arrangements remain the same.

## Will the Local Authorities have any involvement the school?

The Local Authorities will continue to provide their core statutory responsibilities of strategic planning and sufficiency of school places and provision in their areas, as well as co-ordinating admissions arrangements, together with statutory oversight of attendance, and some aspects of early years education, finance, safeguarding and special educational needs.



# St Robert's R.C. First School and Nursery

*We care, we serve, we learn together in the love and truth of Jesus*

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