

St. Joseph's Catholic High School

Headteacher: **Miss J.A. Kennedy** BA (Hons)



18th January 2021

Dear Parents / Guardians / Parishioners

Consultation to Convert to Academy Status

You may be aware that the Diocese of Lancaster has been working closely with the Department for Education over the last few months to agree a way forward for the Catholic schools in the Diocese to form a Multi Academy Trust. This Multi Academy Trust will be a group of Catholic primary and secondary schools who wish to join and work together. The vision behind this initiative is set out in Bishop Paul's letter to parishioners of 14th September 2020.

The Mater Christi Multi Academy Trust has been identified by the Diocese and the Department for Education as a suitable Trust to take forward this vision for Catholic education. After careful consideration and preliminary discussion with the Diocese and other Catholic schools in our area, the School's Governing Body has decided that they wish to explore conversion to Academy status and, in particular, to join the Mater Christi Multi Academy Trust.

There are currently 7 Catholic schools considering joining together to form the Mater Christi Multi Academy Trust. In addition to ourselves they are:

- Dean Gibson R.C Primary School, Kendal
- Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School, Barrow-in-Furness
- St Cuthbert's Catholic Primary School, Carlisle
- St Cuthbert's Catholic Primary School, Windermere
- St Bernard's Catholic High School, Barrow
- St Margaret Mary Catholic Primary School, Carlisle

We are now undertaking consultation with staff, parents and carers, local parishioners and other local schools, both Catholic and non-Catholic, to determine whether our school should proceed with conversion and we would like to invite your views on the matter. This consultation starts on 18th January 2021 and concludes on Friday 12th February 2021.

At the end of the consultation, the Governing Body will consider the responses before they make their final decision.

What is an Academy?

Academies are publicly funded state schools that are independent of the Local Authority and receive funding directly from the Government. The School will still be a Catholic School under the authority of the Bishop of Lancaster and its religious designation will not change.

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Why is this being considered?

Being an Academy and joining a Multi Academy Trust with other Catholic schools will give us greater opportunities for working more closely together in the secure knowledge that we have a common purpose and ethos.

What are the advantages of conversion?

The Government is clear that the greater freedoms enjoyed by Academies are designed to allow schools to develop and to build on individual strengths in response to the needs of the community. We feel that the additional freedoms and flexibilities and the support that will be provided as part of the Multi Academy Trust would enable the Governors to better secure the long-term future of our School.

In addition, being part of a Trust will strengthen our Catholic identity. We will be able to pool resources, allowing us to improve teaching and management practice further. We will also achieve a greater degree of control of our finances, which will help us to safeguard these funds for the benefit of our children.

What are the disadvantages of conversion?

Greater freedoms do bring additional responsibilities including statutory duties as a Multi Academy Trust, but our School is confident it can manage these.

Academy conversion is not a panacea for all ills and we are aware of some difference in opinion as to the effectiveness of Multi Academy Trusts. We would encourage you to consider the arguments for and against and check the accuracy of assertions that are being made.

We believe that there is greater scrutiny of academies now than for voluntary aided schools and Governors are confident that this will have a positive impact on standards and enable the School to continue to fully engage with its community.

Will any changes to the School be made as a result of conversion?

We do not intend to make any changes to the day-to-day work of the school on conversion, other than to introduce the additional governance accountability that comes with working within a Multi Academy Trust and to bring closer working practices between the schools in the trust through school improvement planning.

Please be assured that the Catholic character, ethos and values of the School would remain unchanged should Academy conversion take place.

How to take part in the consultation process

At this stage we are not committing the School to conversion to Academy status or to joining the Mater Christi Multi Academy Trust. We are consulting with everyone associated with our School before Governors meet again to make a final decision.

We would ask that you let us have your views by emailing academy.materchristi@gmail.com, by 3pm on Friday 12th February 2021.

There will be an open online meeting for you to hear more and raise any queries you may have or make comments about this on Tuesday 26th January at 6pm. If you would like a link, please email Julie.Gaffney@sjchs.uk.

On Friday 22nd January, Friday 29th January and Friday 5th February the most Frequently Asked Questions document will be updated and shared on our website to reflect any questions that are pertinent to our wider community.

Whilst we do not anticipate responding to each and every communication, we will provide answers to questions via the FAQ and we welcome your views. Please be assured your views will be taken into consideration by our governing body when they meet to make a final decision.

The consultation will close on Friday 12th February 2021. The Governors will meet after this date to consider how to proceed.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs J Mc Crea
Chair of Governors

Miss Jacky Kennedy
Headteacher