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Dear Colleague

Monday 11th May 2020

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

Prior to the COVID-19 situation, 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.

We are now in the unusual position as schools, where we are all trying to establish a new way of working for our children, families and staff. 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 is brought into even sharper focus by the pandemic situation, in that by being part of a Catholic Academy Trust we are better 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 staff, parents, carers, 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 11th May 2020, for a period of three school term weeks. Consultation will therefore end at 3pm on Friday 5th June 2020.

**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 school 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 be become the best it can in order to improve the life chances for all children in our region. Over time, the Trust will grow to 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 does becoming an academy trust affect me as a member of staff?**

Your employment would transfer from the Governing Body of this school to the Academy Trust in accordance with TUPE legislation.

TUPE stands for the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations. The main purpose of the TUPE Regulations is to preserve continuity of employment and to safeguard the employment rights of all employees whose employment transfers to an Academy Trust as a result of a relevant transfer i.e. transfer to the Bishop Bewick Catholic Education Trust

This means that your terms and conditions of employment, as set out in your Statement of Particulars are protected. This will include any specific set of terms and conditions of employment referred to in the Statement of Particulars (for example, the Conditions of Service for School Teachers – the Burgundy Book and any local agreements for support staff), the date of continuous service and any pension provision.

TUPE places a statutory requirement on the School as the outgoing employer (the 'transferor') and the new Academy Trust (the 'transferee') as the incoming employer to consult with you and your representatives. This will include all staff employed in the School and the trade union representatives for the staff.

**How do I learn more, and how do I respond to the consultation?**

Our Governing Body would very much like to hear your opinion. Due to the current situation we are unable to hold briefing sessions for staff, however we have provided a pack of information which give an overview of the process involved in achieving academy status and a list of frequently asked questions.

We will continue to update the FAQ's with any new questions, please contact the Headteacher if you have any questions you want adding to the list.

If you wish to respond to the consultation, please email consultation@olsa.org.uk with your feedback, and include your name and contact details by the closing date of Friday 5th June 2020.

Yours sincerely,

M. O'Brien

Headteacher

M. Baker

Chair of Governors