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Monday 26th April 2021

Dear Parents/Carers,

Consultation to convert to Academy status and join Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust

Prior to the COVID-19 situation, many of you will be aware 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 continuing to work in the "new normal" way 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 Multi 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 parents, carers, staff and other stakeholders, on their plans to become an academy and join the Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust, originally formed by Cardinal Hume Catholic School.

We are commencing formal consultation today, Monday 26th April 2021, for a period of three school term weeks. Consultation will therefore end at 3pm on Friday 14th May 2021.

About The Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust

The Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust was established in February 2012 by Cardinal Hume Catholic School, judged to be outstanding by Ofsted in 2007 and 2014. The Trust currently has the following academies working together within the Trust:

- Cardinal Hume Catholic School, Gateshead,
- Our Lady Queen of Peace Catholic Primary School, Houghton-le-Spring,
- St Anne's Catholic Primary School, Gateshead,
- St Bede's Catholic Primary School, Washington,
- St John Catholic RC Primary School, Washington,
- St Joseph's Catholic RC Primary School, Washington,
- St Michael's Catholic RC Primary School, Houghton-le-Spring,
- St Robert of Newminster Catholic School, Washington,
- St Thomas More Catholic School, Blaydon on Tyne,
- Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School, Gateshead,
- St Matthew's Catholic Primary School, Prudhoe,
- St Leonard's Catholic School, Durham,
- St Bede's Catholic Academy, Lanchester,
- St Bede's Catholic Primary School, Sacriston,
- St Cuthbert's Catholic Primary School, Chester le Street,
- St Godric's Catholic Primary School, Durham City,
- St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Ushaw Moor,
- St Joseph's Catholic Middle School, Hexham,
- St Mary's Catholic First School, Hexham,
- Our Lady Queen of Martyrs Catholic Primary School, Esh Winning.
- St Benet's Catholic Primary School, Ouston,
- St Michael's Catholic Primary School, Ushaw Moor,
- St Alban's Catholic Primary School, Pelaw,
- St Oswald's Catholic Primary School, Wrekenton,
- St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Blackhill,
- St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Stanley,

And the following schools are already progressing down the conversion route to become academies within the Trust in the near future:

- St Patrick's RC Primary School, Dipton,
- St Joseph's RC Primary School, Gateshead,
- St Augustine's RC Primary School, Felling,
- St Joseph's RC Primary School, Gilesgate,
- St Thomas More RC Primary School, Belmont.

The MAT Board of Directors is ultimately responsible for the schools within the MAT 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.

Cardinal Hume's Teaching School: Trinity North East Teaching School Alliance means that professional development of staff is central to the work of the Trust.

Vision, Values and Ethos

The Trust's aim is to build upon the existing strengths of the partnership with our schools and to offer outstanding education provision so that every child succeeds and reaches their potential.

'Every child, every opportunity' is the foundation on which the Trust is built.

As a Trust, it values the close working and supportive relationships held with parents and carers.

What are the main benefits for schools within the Bishop Wilkinson 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 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, the facilities and teaching environment.
- Develop our own solutions collaboratively.
- Building on Catholic ethos and protecting Catholic education and values.

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 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.

What additional responsibilities will Academy status bring?

- Additional financial and legal responsibilities – however as Bishop Wilkinson 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 of Practice). There are no plans to change the admissions criteria for our school.
- 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.

The Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust Board will provide strong and effective governance to all of the schools in the Trust including our school. Within the Multi Academy Trust each school will have a Local Governing Committee with specific powers delegated from the central Trust Board.

How do I respond to the consultation?

Our Governing Body would very much like to hear your opinion.

If you do have any further questions you are welcome to send these to us by emailing stpius@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,

Joanne Cruise
Headteacher

Shaun McGee
Chair of Governors

**Proposal to become an Academy and join
Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust
Consultation Feedback Form**

Please let us know your views regarding our plans for our school to become an academy and join Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust.

Name.....

Contact details.....

Parent/Carer Staff Other please state.....

Your written response should be emailed to stpius@durhamlearning.net by no later than **3pm on Friday 14th May 2021**.
Thank you for taking the time to respond to the consultation.