



Proposed Academy Conversion of St Bernadette Catholic Primary School

Consultation Report for the Governing Body

November 2023

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1. Introduction

In September 2017, the Diocese of Westminster published its strategy for Catholic Academy Trusts <http://rcdow.org.uk/education/academies/>

The aim of the Diocese's CAT Strategy is to protect, secure and develop the Church's mission in education.

The Governors and Headteacher of St Bernadette Catholic Primary School have discussed the strategy, its implications and opportunities for the school and passed a resolution to submit a conversion application to the Regional Director (RD) Headteachers Board (HTB) to proceed with the next phase of the conversion process.

A first step to achieving this was to complete the Diocese's Due Diligence process, including independent Finance and Standards reports. The Diocese Project Board subsequently confirmed that the school had met the requirements and issued the Diocese Letter of Consent to convert allowing the schools to submit their application to convert in March 2023.

The Governors and Headteacher of St Bernadette Catholic Primary School have been considering the benefits of converting to an Academy for some time, and have commenced collaborative work with ASCAT (All Saints Catholic Academy Trust) to support the school.

The school embarked on the conversion process including a consultation exercise with the school's stakeholders, commencing in September 2023 and received its Academy Order from the RD in October 2023, representing DfE consent to convert.

The purpose of governance is to provide confident, strategic leadership and to create robust accountability, oversight and assurance for educational and financial performance. The Governors of St Bernadette Catholic Primary School firmly believe that they know what is best for the school and wished to invite comments from stakeholders on this proposal.

This report therefore sets out results of the consultation exercise commissioned by the Governors of St Bernadette Catholic Primary School to listen to the views of stakeholders.

A subsequent meeting of the Governing Body in December 2023 will consider the findings of this report.

2. Scope and timing of Stakeholder Consultation

The Governors devised and implemented a consultation exercise which sought the views of parents, staff, and the wider community on whether the school should become an Academy and join the existing ASCAT (All Saints Catholic Academy Trust).

The consultation period opened on Monday 25th September 2023 and ended on Friday 20th October 2023.

3. Methodology

The Governors of St Bernadette Catholic Primary School developed a consultation plan and FAQs leaflet, which identified all the school's stakeholders to be contacted at the start of the exercise and provided them with background information about the Diocese CAT Strategy and ASCAT to inform the debate.

The Headteacher wrote to all parents and staff on 25th September 2023 to start the consultation exercise, invite them to attend consultation meetings and direct them to accessing the consultation leaflet on the school's website.

Staff and parents were invited to attend consultation meetings to find out more about the proposed conversion to an Academy and ASCAT.

Emails were also sent to both officer and elected representatives of Hertfordshire County (HCC), as well as the local MP, neighbouring Secondary, Primary and Nursery Schools and other partners.

The consultation materials also contained a response form which stakeholders were invited to complete and submit by the end of the consultation period.

The Consultation Leaflet produced by Governors is attached as **Appendix A** to this report.

4. Consultation Meeting Chronology

The letters to parents and staff invited them to submit questions, and to attend the appropriate consultation meetings scheduled below:

- Staff – Wednesday 18 October at 3.30pm; and
- Parents – Wednesday 18 October at 5.30pm

The meetings were attended by the Co-Headteachers, the CEO and Director of Governance for ASCAT and the Academy Implementation Officer from the Diocese.

The staff meeting was attended by 13 members of staff and the later meeting was 3 parents and 2 Governors.

The Co-Headteachers gave a presentation to staff covering issues such as the Diocese's vision for the CAT programme, the advantages of forming a Dacorum Hub within ASCAT, why this is being considered now, the conversion process and next steps.

The full presentation given to Staff is enclosed as **Appendix B** to this report.

Attendees were then given an opportunity to ask any questions they might have.

The questions asked and answers provided at the above meetings is included as **Appendix C** to this report.

5. Completed Questionnaires

There were no completed questionnaires returned.

6. Reflections on the Consultation

The staff and parents' response to the consultation was positive and no significant concerns were identified which had not been anticipated by Governors, ASCAT and the Diocese.

Appendix C lists the questions asked and responses given to questions at the staff and parents events.

The lack of significant opposition to the proposal indicates that the St Bernadette community has been well informed on the proposed changes and benefits of forming the CAT.

7. Summary

This report summarises the findings of the genuine, open, and honest consultation exercise undertaken by Governors to ascertain the views of parents, staff, and other stakeholders on the conversion of St Bernadette Catholic Primary School to an Academy and to join the existing ASCAT.

This report evidences the comprehensive approach taken to raise awareness of the consultation exercise in the community, to provide background information on the issues and

to host staff and parents' meetings to allow stakeholders to find out about the Diocese's Strategy and ask questions.

It was disappointing that no completed questionnaires were returned. The school and Trust should continue to communicate with staff and parents to ensure the community remains informed.

However, the range of questions asked at the parents and staff meetings (and listed in **Appendix C**) was positive and show the willingness of attendees to engage with Governors and ASCAT on this matter.

8. Acknowledgements

The Governors and Headteacher of St Bernadette Catholic Primary School would like to express their gratitude and appreciation for the staff and parents who took part in the consultation by listening to the presentations, asking clarification questions and who took the time to contribute their views.

9. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Governors of St Bernadette Catholic Primary School:

- (i) Approve the contents of this report.
- (ii) Recognise that they have fulfilled their duty to undertake a Statutory Section 10 stakeholder consultation exercise on the proposed conversion.
- (iii) Publish this report on the school's website as a record of the consultation and feedback to the participants and wider stakeholders.
- (iv) Continue to share updates and engage with staff and parents on this matter; and
- (v) Proceed to the next stage of the conversion process not having identified any barriers to the schools' conversion and proposal to join ASCAT.