



ST BERNADETTE CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL



FAQS ON OUR PROPOSED ACADEMY CONVERSION

SECTION 1: Academy Information

What is an Academy?

Academies are publicly funded independent schools that are not managed by a local authority but their funding and accountability is directly with the DfE (Department for Education).

Why is St Bernadette Catholic Primary School proposing to become an Academy and join ASCAT (All Saints' Catholic Academy Trust)?

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

The Strategy sets out of the reasons, benefits and structure of the Catholic Academy Trusts across the Diocese. The aim of the Diocese's Strategy is "to protect, secure and develop the Church's mission in education."

The school has also been working with ASCAT partner schools for a number of years, building trust amongst school leaders, working together on common goals and investigating the opportunities that the Diocesan Academy Strategy presents for St Bernadette's.

The school regards converting to an academy and joining the existing and successful All Saints Catholic Academy Trust as a natural extension of the collaborative approach that has already been developed and a platform for enhancing this in the future, at a time of growing pressure on schools and threats to Catholic education.

What is ASCAT?

ASCAT is a Catholic Academy Trust (CAT) under the Trusteeship of the Diocese of Westminster. It currently comprises the following schools:

- **St Joan of Arc** Catholic Secondary School Rickmansworth
- **Holy Rood** Catholic Primary School Watford
- **Divine Saviour** Catholic Primary School Abbots Langley
- **St John's** Catholic Primary School Rickmansworth
- **St John Fisher** Catholic Primary School, St Albans
- **JFK** Catholic School, Hemel Hempstead
- **St Alberts** Catholic Primary School, Hemel Hempstead
- **St Thomas More**, Catholic Primary School, Berkhamsted

The ASCAT Board is responsible for the quality of education in the schools, as well as the use of public money and the use of all Trust sites under various leases. It is the employer of the staff in all of the Trust schools.

The Trust was formed in March 2012 and its most recent expansion was in July 2023 to include St Albert the Great.

The ASCAT Board of Directors welcomes the proposal for St Bernadette to join the Trust and are keen to apply their learning and experience to the benefit of its wider group of partner schools.

Why is St Bernadette not partnering with other St Albans schools?

The Diocesan plan is for all Catholic schools that are not yet academies to eventually join one of the Diocesan CATs based on the 11 Families of Schools. In areas where schools are already served by an existing Trust, they are being asked to engage in a formal process to explore joining an allocated Trust. The Diocese is asking all St Albans Catholic schools that are not yet academies to engage with ASCAT in this process. St Bernadette is the second of the St Albans schools to undertake this, with St John Fisher already part of the Trust. The Diocese expects that in due course, all of the remaining St Albans schools, not yet academies, will engage with ASCAT in the same way. Through their work with the Trust, closer strategic links between St John Fisher and St Bernadette have already been forming, for example through a shared School Business Manager across the two schools.

Why are we collaborating with St Joan of Arc Catholic Secondary School and not with St Nicholas Breakspeare Catholic Secondary School or Loreto College?

St Nicholas Breakspeare and Loreto College are already academies and both belong to Academy Trusts that St Bernadette is not able to join.

St Nicholas Breakspeare is a member of the Diocese of Westminster Academy Trust (DoWAT). This trust has now been allocated to serve a different geographical area of the Diocese.

Loreto College is a religious order school and as such is under the Trusteeship of Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It therefore is unable to enter into a Trust arrangement with the other St Albans Catholic Schools.

Although we will not be in the same CAT, both St Nicholas Breakspeare and Loreto College will remain strong strategic partners for St Bernadette Catholic Primary School; there is a desire on all sides for our schools to continue to work closely together for the best of our shared pupils and families.

Is it expected that my child will go to St Joan of Arc or JFK for their Secondary Education?

No. A Catholic Academy Trust is not a 'through school'. Parents will continue to be able to make their own decisions about their desired secondary destination for their children. They will remain in a fortunate situation to have a number of strong options for Catholic Secondary Education in St Albans and the surrounding area.

Is St Bernadette Catholic Primary School being forced to become an Academy?

No. The Governors of St Bernadette Catholic Primary School have responded to the Diocese of Westminster Catholic Academy Trust Strategy, completed the required due diligence exercise and together submitted an application to the Regional Schools Commission to join ASCAT.

How will St Bernadette Catholic Primary School benefit from joining ASCAT?

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

We expect existing and prospective children in schools in ASCAT will benefit from:

- Enhanced collaboration, partnership and good practice sharing, bringing educational benefits leading to improved outcomes for children/attainment across the Trust schools;
- Increased accountability and performance of the school leadership through the challenge and support of a Catholic Executive Officer (CEO);
- Making limited budgets and funding go further through
 - increased savings and efficiencies at a time of growing financial pressures;
 - being able to reclaim VAT on capital/ infrastructure works; and
 - having direct access to capital funding through the Schools Capital Allocation, which is an annual grant paid directly to Trusts containing 5 or more schools and more than 3,000 pupils.
- Increased continued professional development (CPD) opportunities and career pathways for staff;
- Improved retention and development of the best Catholic teachers and leaders;
- Can reclaim VAT on capital works and have direct access to capital funding through the Schools Capital Allocation, which is an annual grant paid directly to Trusts containing 5 or more schools and more than 3,000 pupils.
- Clear, robust and effective Governance at Trust and Local Advisory Council levels;
- Secured Catholic education within the St Albans Diocese for generations to come.

What are the Governance arrangements of ASCAT?

The Diocese of Westminster has nominated 5 Members who will own the Memorandum and Articles and Association of the Trust, registered with Companies House.

The Members include Cardinal Vincent Nichols - the Archbishop of the Diocese of Westminster; Bishop John Wilson - Chair of the Education Commission of the Diocese of

Westminster; Mr. Paolo Camoletto, - Chief Operating Officer/Financial Secretary of the Diocese of Westminster and Mr. Peter Sweeney - Director of Education for the Diocese of Westminster.

The Members appoint a Board of Foundation Directors with strategic oversight for the Trust and Schools.

As part of the Trust's planned expansion, it is currently in the process of recruiting a number of new Foundation Directors to its Trust Board.

Our school will retain a Local Governing Body who, alongside the Headteacher, will be responsible for the day to day running of the School.

The Local Governing Body will have powers delegated by the ASCAT Board of Directors under an agreed Scheme of Delegation and will be accountable to the Board.

The Headteachers of each of the Trust schools are accountable to the CEO, who in turn is accountable to the Trust Board.

Most day to day operations of the School will be delegated to the Headteacher and the Local Governing Body which will continue to include staff, parent and community representatives.

Will the School retain its individual character, including its name and uniform?

Yes, the Diocese is very clear that the individual ethos, character and good practices of each school are retained and that all the schools operate as equals supporting each other.

There are no plans to change either the name of St Bernadette or the school uniform.

Each school is seen as central to its own community with the skills of each being used in a supportive way for all the others.

Existing schools within ASCAT are all successful Catholic schools in their own right, each with their own distinct and individual character.

Will the school day (start and end times) and term dates change?

No, how the school day is structured and the term dates will not change. These will remain the decision of the co-headteachers and local governing body.

Will the school move premises?

No, the school will remain where it is in existing buildings.

Will the school curriculum change?

No. The school will continue to make decisions about how the curriculum is taught in line with Department for Education requirements.

When will St Bernadette Catholic Primary School become an Academy convert and join the Trust?

We would expect that the process will take 6-9 months, work is underway and the planned conversion date is 1st April 2024.

Why is there a consultation?

The Academies Act 2010 requires either the school to consult “such persons as they think appropriate” on whether the school should become an academy.

The Governing Body is therefore working with the Diocese and the Trust to consult with all key stakeholders about the proposed academy conversion including parents, staff, pupils and other schools over a 4-week period commencing on Monday 25th September and closing on Friday 20th October.

Does the school need agreement from the Local Authority to become an Academy?

No. The Academies Act 2010 has removed the need for the Local Authority to approve plans for the school to become an Academy.

What form of relationship will exist between the Local Authority and the school?

This is for individual Academies or Catholic Academy Trusts to determine – there is no statutory requirement for any formal relationship between Local Authorities and Academies.

Academies are directly funded and accountable to central government (Department for Education and the Education Skills Funding Agency).

The Local Authority retains statutory duties for aspects of Special Educational Needs, admissions co-ordination and provision of home-to-school transport. Local Authorities are also expected to play a key strategic role locally in areas such as pupil place planning admissions and sharing good practice.

Our school has a good relationship with Hertfordshire County Council and will seek to maintain this in the future.

Are Academies subject to the same Ofsted inspection regime?

Schools converting to Academies will continue to be inspected in the normal way.

What is the process for St Bernadette Catholic Primary School to join ASCAT?

The conversion process includes the following key legal processes:

- Consulting with school stakeholders on the proposal;
- Putting in place a Supplementary Funding Agreement (SFA) between the Trust and the Secretary of State for Education for each School;
- Transferring the employment of the staff from the local authority to the All Saints Catholic Academy Trust following a statutory process (TUPE);
- Agreeing a Commercial Transfer Agreement for the transfer of assets and contracts from the local authority to the All Saints Catholic Academy Trust
- Arranging a 125 year lease for the land and buildings with the Diocese and/or local authority.

Who will make the final decision?

It is a decision for the Governing Body. Governors are inviting views from parents and staff on the proposal. The findings from the consultation exercise will be reported to Governors and subsequently made available on the School's website.

The findings from the consultation are one of a number of factors Governors will consider.

SECTION 2: Staff Issues

Does the school have to hold consultation with staff?

Under employment legislation the Governing Body, which is the current employer, will need to conduct a TUPE* consultation with all staff (both teaching and non-teaching) and the relevant unions as part of the staff transfer process.

*(*TUPE = Transfer of Undertaking – Protection of Employment)*

Can the school alter teachers' pay and conditions?

The terms and conditions of staff are protected on transfer under TUPE regulations. Academies do have the freedom to vary terms and conditions from national ones but the Diocese Strategy commits the Trust to abiding by Teachers' pay and conditions and Support Staff pay and conditions.

The Diocese, ASCAT and the School are committed to maintaining national terms and conditions for teaching and support staff in order to continue to attract and retain the very best teachers.

If the school becomes an Academy, who takes responsibility for the pension arrangements?

Teachers working in an academy fall within the scope of the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS), just as if they were employed in a Local Authority maintained school.

Non-teaching staff at schools are able to join the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) administered by Hertfordshire County Council, as at present.

Employees will pay the same rate as at present under both schemes, subject to any nationally imposed changes.

How will the TUPE process work and what specific responsibilities does the Governing Body have?

As the current employer, the Governing Body is responsible for informing and consulting with staff. The Governing Body is responsible for informing the All Saints Catholic Academy Trust as the new employer of any 'measures' which will impact on their employment.

There are none planned in this case. The All Saints Catholic Academy Trust will write to each member of staff confirming that they will transfer under existing terms and conditions

SECTION 3: Finance

Will we get more money as an Academy?

Academies receive the same amount of per-pupil funding as they would receive from the Local Authority as a maintained school. The Government is clear that becoming an Academy should not bring about a financial advantage or disadvantage to a school. However, academies do have greater freedom to decide how they use their entire budget, and Multi Academy Trusts are able to identify efficiency savings from enhanced partnership working. It is also true that on becoming an Academy, a Voluntary Aided school, such as our own, will be able to claim back VAT on all capital works – something the school is unable to do if it remains Voluntary Aided. This will provide additional flexibility for Governors with regard to its use of the school budget and building funds.

SECTION 4: Admissions

Will becoming an Academy affect our admissions arrangements?

When a school becomes an Academy it also becomes, as it already is as a Catholic School, an admission authority responsible for its own admission arrangements. As the school is joining a Multi Academy Trust – ASCAT will become the admissions authority.

In the same way as maintained schools, all academies and their schools are required to adopt clear and fair admission arrangements in line with the admissions law and the School Admissions Code.

Each Academy will be able to retain its own admissions arrangements and oversubscription criteria.

Will Academies have to be a part of the annual coordinated admissions scheme? E.g. when the LA needs to find places for families relocating to the area etc.

Yes - Academy Funding Agreements require them to be in local coordination. That means although the academy will apply its own admission arrangements, the LA will send out offers of places. The Local Authority also coordinates admissions for in-year applications and applications for year groups other than the normal point(s) of entry. This will not affect the Academy's right to determine which applicants have priority for admission. Academies are also required through their Funding Agreements to participate in local fair access protocols which help to ensure that no child is without a school place.

Will the school decide to bring in academic selection?

No, there will be no introduction of selection. Schools which already select some or all of their pupils may continue to do so when they become Academies, but schools becoming Academies cannot decide to become newly selective schools.

SECTION 5: Special Education Needs

Will our responsibilities in relation to Special Educational Needs and exclusions change?

No. Responsibilities as an Academy in relation to Special Educational Needs and exclusions will be just the same as they are now as a maintained school.

Can a child with a statement of Special Educational Needs nominate an academy as their school of choice?

Yes. These arrangements and related processes must at all times comply with the School Admissions Code and responsibilities as an Academy in relation to Special Educational Needs will be just the same as they are now as a maintained school.

Does becoming an Academy change the way in which exclusions are dealt with?

Academies are required by their Funding Agreement to follow the law and guidance on exclusions as if they were maintained schools. This includes reporting exclusions to the Local Authority. However, Academies do not have to consult the Local Authority before deciding to exclude a pupil and they can arrange their own independent appeals panel.

SECTION 6: Further Information

How do I find out more about the proposals?

St Bernadette Catholic Primary School is holding consultation events as part of the conversion process.

Come along to the consultation meeting being held for parents of pupils at the School at 6.00 pm on 11th October in the school hall.

A separate meeting will be held for staff.

Please complete and return the questionnaire page below in person or by post to the School office by Friday 20th October.

If you would prefer to complete it and return it by email, then please send to consulation@stbernadette.herts.sch.uk

***Catherine Turton and Jane Williams
Co-Chairs of Governors
St Bernadette Catholic Primary School
September 2023***



St Bernadette Catholic Primary School Academy Consultation Questionnaire

1) Please tick the box(es) that best represent you?	
Parent	
Employee at the School	
Member of the Community/Local Resident	
Local Authority Employee	
Other	

2) Do you agree that St Bernadette Catholic Primary School should convert to an Academy and join ASCAT (by entering into a Funding Agreement with the Secretary of State)?	
Strongly agree	
Agree	
Undecided	
Disagree	
Strongly disagree	
Please give your reasons below	

3) Do you have any other comments to make about the proposal for St Bernadette Catholic Primary School to convert to an Academy and join ASCAT?

