

Frequently asked Questions

St Benet's RC Primary School is consulting with our staff, parents, carers, trade unions and the local authority on the proposal to convert to an academy and join Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust.

What are academy schools?

Academies are publicly funded independent schools, free from local authority control

So, what is different?

Academy schools operate with a range of additional freedoms and responsibilities that are not available to maintained schools. These include:

- Independence from local authority control
- Flexibility to determine staff pay and conditions
- Freedom from the requirement to follow the national curriculum
- Authority to vary the length of the school day and school terms
- Increased control over school budgets
- Freedom to manage and spend funding that would otherwise be administered by the local authority on the school's behalf

Why are the Governing Board and Leadership Team of the school considering academy status?

The Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle Diocese has expressed his desire for all Catholic Schools to be part of a stronger family of schools by becoming an Academy and joining one of the four Catholic MATs in the Diocese. We are currently in a vulnerable position as a maintained school with tight budgets. The economies of scale within a Trust would strengthen our current position. Like many other schools both locally and nationally, our school has looked at the benefits and freedoms academy status can bring and feel this is something we should explore.

Do converting schools need to have a sponsor?

Schools that are performing well, which St Benet's is, are not required to have a sponsor.

Will we have access to more money?

Academies are funded in a similar way to other schools, but the funding comes from central Government not via the local authority. In addition, the academy would also receive the funding which the local authority currently top slices from all schools to pay

for local authority services. By receiving this funding directly, this will mean that we have choice over which services to buy or not to buy, to meet the needs of our children.

Will admissions arrangements change?

The Governing Board has no plans to either increase the number of children admitted to our school or change the admissions criteria.

What happens to SEND provision?

SEND provision will remain in place as it is now. One of the benefits of joining a trust is access to a wider network of SEND expertise, training and resources. This means staff can be even better supported in meeting the needs of children with additional needs, while maintaining the school's existing inclusive ethos.

Will there be a Governing Board for the school?

Yes. A Local Governing Committee (LGC) will operate, ensuring that there is local accountability and oversight. The LGC will include parent representatives and members of the existing governance structure, ensuring continuity and strong links with the school community.

What does it mean for staff?

All staff would transfer their employment under TUPE legislation from their current employer, the Governing Board, to Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust. We are also consulting with our staff to seek their views and offering reassurance that terms and conditions would remain at least the same as they are now.

How will it affect my child's education?

The conversion to academy will not mean any changes for pupils, parents and carers. The Headteacher would have more flexibility around protecting our curriculum and ensuring that we have high level support services for all of our children.

Will the times of the school day and holidays change?

The Governing Board have no plans to change the times of the school day or term dates. Any changes in the future would be subject to extensive consultation with parents and carers.

Are academies still accountable for their performance and are performance targets set?



Like all schools, academies are in the first instance accountable to the pupils they serve and their respective parents/carers. Academies still have to meet government performance targets concerning progress of all children across all key stages and will still be inspected by OFSTED. Although Academies, at this point in time, can innovate and change the curriculum, they still must ensure students leave having achieved their full potential across a broad and balanced range of subjects.