

## Frequently asked Questions

St Benet's RC Primary School is currently undertaking a statutory consultation with staff, parents, carers, trade unions, the local authority and wider stakeholders on the proposal to convert to academy status and join Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust (BCCET). This period will run from 5 May until 9 June 2026.

### 1. What is academisation?

Academisation is the process through which a maintained school converts to become an academy and joins a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT).

As an academy, the school remains state-funded and continues to be free for all pupils to attend, but responsibility for running the school transfers from the local authority to the academy trust. The Trust then provides governance, strategic oversight and support services to the school.

For St Benet's, the proposal would involve joining Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust as part of the Diocese's wider vision for Catholic schools to work collaboratively within strong Catholic Trusts. Whilst some operational responsibilities would transfer to the Trust, the school would continue to serve its local community, maintain its Catholic ethos and identity, and focus on delivering high-quality education for its pupils.

### 2. What are academy schools?

Academies are state-funded schools that receive their funding directly from central government and are run by an academy trust. They do not charge fees and remain part of the state education system.

Academies are inspected by Ofsted and must follow the same rules as other state schools in relation to admissions, special educational needs and disabilities, and exclusions. Pupils also sit the same national assessments and exams.

Academy trusts are not-for-profit organisations. They employ the staff and are overseen by trustees, who are responsible for the performance and governance of the schools within the trust. Some trusts run one school, while others run a group of schools.

Academies have some additional freedoms, such as greater control over curriculum design, term dates and how funding is used, while still being accountable for standards, safeguarding and outcomes.



### 3. Why is the school undertaking a statutory consultation?

A statutory consultation is a required part of the academisation process. It provides an opportunity for parents, carers, staff, trade unions and other stakeholders to understand the proposal, ask questions and share feedback before any final decision is made.

The Governing Board and school leadership team are keen to hear the views of the wider school community throughout this process. Feedback received during the consultation period will help inform discussions and support careful consideration of the proposal before any decisions are taken.

#### 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

### 4. 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.

### 5. 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.

### 6. Will the school lose its identity, unique ethos or values.

No. Protecting the unique Catholic ethos, values and community identity of St Benet's is a key priority. Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust is itself a Catholic Trust and works closely with schools to preserve and strengthen their individual character and mission.

Bishop Chadwick is proud to be a family of schools, where collaboration is valued but uniformity is not expected. Each school brings its own history, strengths and community, and the Trust's role is to help schools flourish while retaining the qualities that make them distinctive.

The aim of joining the Trust is not to create identical schools, but to enable schools to work together, share expertise and support one another while continuing to serve their own communities.

### 7. Who makes the final decision about academisation?

The Governing Board is responsible for considering the outcome of the statutory consultation alongside advice from the Diocese and the Department for Education before making any final decision about whether to proceed with academisation.

Feedback from parents, carers, staff and stakeholders forms an important part of this process and will help inform the Governing Board's consideration.

### 8. How long does the academisation process take?

Academisation is a detailed legal and operational process and timelines can vary. If approved, the process typically takes several months and includes legal transfer arrangements, staffing processes, financial due diligence and system planning.

### 9. How quickly would changes happen?

There are no plans for immediate significant changes to the day-to-day experience for pupils or families. Any future developments would be carefully planned and introduced gradually to minimise disruption for staff and pupils.

### 10. Will admissions arrangements change?

The Governing Board has no plans to increase the number of children admitted to St Benet's or to change the school's admissions criteria.

If the school joins Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, it will continue to fully adhere to the national School Admissions Code. Further information on the [School Admissions Code](#) is available on the Department for Education website, and the school's admissions policy will continue to be available on the school website.

### 11. 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.

## 12. 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.

## 13. 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.

## 14. What support does the Trust offer for staff wellbeing and retention?

BCCET places significant emphasis on staff development, wellbeing and professional support. Being part of a wider Trust can provide access to professional networks, training opportunities, leadership pathways and shared expertise, helping schools recruit and retain high-quality staff.

## 15. 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.

## 16. 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.

## 17. 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

## 18. What are the financial implications of joining Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust?

Like many schools nationally, St Benet's is operating in a challenging financial environment, with increasing pressures on staffing, SEND, premises and wider running costs.

Joining Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust would provide access to a wider financial and operational support structure. This includes shared expertise in finance, HR, safeguarding, estates, IT, governance and school improvement. Schools within the Trust make an agreed contribution towards these central services, which helps ensure that essential functions are delivered efficiently, consistently and with appropriate specialist support.

The purpose of this model is not to remove funding from pupils, but to ensure that schools receive the support they need while reducing duplication and improving value for money. Individual school budgets remain carefully monitored, and spending decisions continue to be focused on the needs of pupils, staff and the school community.

Academisation does not automatically mean significant additional funding. However, being part of a larger Trust can create opportunities for stronger financial planning, shared purchasing, access to specialist advice and greater long-term sustainability. The aim is to help St Benet's remain secure, well-supported and able to continue providing high-quality Catholic education for its pupils.

## 19. 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, academies within Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust follows the national curriculum.

## 20. Who will be responsible for financial and operational decisions if the school joins the Trust?

As part of a Multi-Academy Trust, certain strategic responsibilities, including finance, compliance, estates and governance, sit with the Directors (Trustee) Board. Day-to-day leadership of the school remains with the Headteacher and school leaders, who continue to make decisions about the operation of the school and the needs of its pupils. The Trust works closely with school leaders to ensure decisions are informed by local context and priorities.

## 21. How will parents and the local community continue to be represented if the school joins the Trust?

Parents and the wider school community will continue to play an important role in the life of St Benet's. The school will remain part of its local community and will continue to engage with parents through its established communication channels, meetings and events.

If the school joins Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust, a Local Governing Committee will provide local oversight and help ensure that the views of parents, pupils and the wider community continue to be heard. Further information about the Trust's governance arrangements and key documents can be found on the Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust website: <https://bccet.org.uk/key-documents>.

## 22. Will the complaints process change?

As part of the academisation process, due diligence will include a review of current school policies and how these align with Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust's trust-wide policies.

If the school joins BCCET, some policies and procedures may be adapted to align with Trust arrangements. This would include ensuring that there are clear routes for raising concerns and that complaints continue to be managed fairly, appropriately and in line with relevant guidance.

Further information about BCCET's key policies and governance documents can be found here: <https://bccet.org.uk/key-documents> .

Updated 02/06/26