



St John Henry Newman
Catholic School

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1 December 2023

Dear Parents/ Guardians/ Staff and Parishioners,

Consultation to convert to Academy Status

You may be aware that the Diocese of Lancaster worked closely with the Department for Education in 2021 to form the Mater Christi Multi-Academy Trust which opened with eight Catholic primary and secondary schools in September 2021. The vision behind this initiative was set out in Bishop Paul's letter to parishioners on 14th September 2020.

After careful consideration and preliminary discussion with the Diocese and other catholic schools in our area, the Governors of St John Henry Newman Catholic School have decided that they wish to explore conversion to Academy status and, in particular, to join the Mater Christi Multi Academy Trust.

The current Trust schools are:

- Dean Gibson R.C Primary School, Kendal
- Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School, Barrow-in-Furness
- St Bernard's Catholic High School, Barrow-in-Furness
- St Cuthbert's Catholic Primary School, Carlisle
- St Cuthbert's Catholic Primary School, Windermere
- St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Lancaster
- St Joseph's Catholic High School, Workington
- St Margaret Mary Catholic Primary School, Carlisle
- Our Lady of the Rosary Catholic Primary School, Dalton
- St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Ulverston
- St Pius X Catholic Primary School, Barrow
- Our Lady and St Patrick's Catholic Primary School, Maryport
- St Gregory's Catholic Primary School, Workington

We are now undertaking consultation with staff, parents and carers, local parishioners and other local schools, both Catholic and non-Catholic, to determine whether our school should proceed with conversion and we would like to invite your views on the matter. This consultation started on Tuesday 7 November 2023 and due to circumstances outside of our control, will now be extended to conclude on Friday 19 January 2024.

At the end of the consultation, the Governing Body will consider the responses before they make their final decision.

What is an Academy?

Academies are publicly funded state schools that are independent of the Local Authority and receive funding directly from the Government. The school will still be a Catholic School under the authority of the Bishop of Lancaster and its religious designation will not change.

Why is this being considered?

Being an Academy and joining a Multi-Academy Trust with other Catholic schools will give us greater opportunities for working more closely together in the secure knowledge that we have a common purpose and ethos.

What are the advantages of conversion?

The Government is clear that the greater freedoms enjoyed by Academies are designed to allow schools to develop and to build on individual strengths in response to the needs of the community. We feel that the additional freedoms and flexibilities and the support that will be provided as part of the Multi-Academy Trust would support our school.

In addition, being part of a Trust will strengthen our Catholic identity. We will be able to pool resources, allowing us to improve teaching and management practices further. We will also achieve a greater degree of control of our finances, which will help us to safeguard these funds for the benefit of our children.

What are the disadvantages of conversion?

Greater freedoms do bring additional responsibilities, including statutory duties as a Multi-Academy Trust, but we are confident we can manage these.

Academy conversion is not a solution for all problems, and we are aware of some difference in opinion as to the effectiveness of Multi-Academy Trusts. We would encourage you to consider the arguments for and against conversion and check the accuracy of assertions that are being made.

We believe that there is greater scrutiny of academies now than for voluntary aided schools and Governors are confident that this will have a positive impact on standards and enable our school to continue to fully engage with our community.

Will any changes to the school be made as a result of conversion?

We do not intend to make any changes to the day-to-day work of the school on conversion, other than to introduce the additional governance accountability that comes with working within a Multi-Academy Trust and to bring closer working practices between the schools in the trust through school improvement planning.

Please be assured that the Catholic character, ethos and values of our school would remain unchanged should Academy conversion take place.

How to take part in the consultation process?

At this stage we are not committing to conversion to Academy status or to joining the Mater Christi Multi-Academy Trust. We are consulting with everyone associated with our school before Governors meet again to make a final decision.

We would ask that you let us have your views by emailing academy.consultation@newman.cumbria.sch.uk by 3pm on Friday 19 January 2023.

There will be a consultation meeting for you to hear more and raise any queries you may have or make comments about this. The **staff meeting** will now be held on **Tuesday 9 January** at **3:30pm** in the school assembly hall, and the **open meeting** for anyone who would like to ask questions or hear more information will be held on the same day, **Tuesday 9 January at 5:30pm**, also in the school assembly hall. We intend these meetings to be face to face, but if Google Meet is preferred we can do both.

Please let us know if you wish to attend on Google Meet by emailing the consultation email above.

Following the meetings on 9 January and at the close of the consultation, the most Frequently Asked Questions document will be updated and shared on our website to reflect any questions that are pertinent to our wider community.

Whilst we do not anticipate responding to each and every communication, we will provide answers to questions via the FAQ, and we welcome your views. Please be assured your views will be taken into consideration by our governing body when they meet to make a final decision.

The Governors will meet after the consultation period to consider how to proceed.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tina Battle". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'T'.

Miss Tina Battle
(Chair of Governors)

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John McAuley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

Mr John McAuley
(Headteacher)