

Durham County Council

## ***Our Lady & St. Thomas R.C. Primary School***

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14<sup>th</sup> September 2020

Dear Parents/Carers

### **Consultation to convert to Academy status and join Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust (formerly Carmel Education Trust)**

Many of you will recall that in December 2019 Bishop Robert announced the revised Diocesan Academy Policy with the aim that all Diocesan schools will become academies within one of four Diocesan education trusts by July 2022.

We are now in the unusual position as schools, where we are all trying to establish a "new normal" for our children, families and staff as a result of the Coronavirus. It is both the view of the Diocese and our Governing Body that the plans to join the Trust should continue, and in many ways this is brought into even sharper focus by the pandemic situation, in that by being part of a Multi Academy Trust we are better able to jointly plan and work together to support our children, families and staff during these unprecedented and challenging times.

Underpinning the Diocesan Academy Policy is the desire and need to ensure the promotion, preservation, protection and future development of Catholic education within the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle. The Catholic Trust model will ensure that the uniqueness of each individual school is celebrated and the unique contribution of each is recognised and appreciated. It will also mean that no individual school will be left isolated or vulnerable in a rapidly changing and complex environment. The aim is also to facilitate greater sharing, adding strength and capacity to the system and ensuring that all schools are supported.

Our Governing Body's priority remains to enable the school to continue to provide an excellent Catholic education for our children, whilst continuing to be at the heart of our community.

Therefore, in line with Diocesan policy, our Governing Body has decided to consult with parents, carers, staff and other stakeholders, on whether each school should become an academy and join the Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust.

We are therefore commencing formal consultation today, Monday 14<sup>th</sup> September 2020, for a period of four school term weeks. Consultation will therefore end at 3pm on Friday 9<sup>th</sup> October 2020.



## What is an Academy?

Academies are state schools, funded directly from central government, no longer under the control of the Local Authority. Academy status gives schools more freedom to be innovative and creative with the curriculum, timetabling, staffing and governance. However Catholic Academies continue to be accountable to the Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle as well as the local community. All academies continue to be inspected by Ofsted and comply with the same rules as other schools on special educational needs, exclusions and admissions.

There are now over 9,000 academies in the country, including many schools in the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle and in the local authority.

An academy is part of a charitable trust run by a board of Directors. Academies are rightly expected to work with and support other schools, including lower-performing schools. Should you wish to know more about the Government's policy, the Department for Education has its own academies bookmark on <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/convert-to-an-academy-information-for-schools>

## What is a Multi Academy Trust (MAT)?

A MAT is formed when two or more academies legally come together in partnership. Each school keeps its own name and it is possible for other academies to join the Trust in the future. The partnership ensures that the schools can share skills and best practice and make optimum use of resources ensuring best value for money for each school.

In many ways the children will not notice any immediate difference, they will be in the same uniform, in the same classrooms with the same teaching staff. However, in time the children will perhaps notice changes and improvements in the way that they learn for example and have greater links with each school within the Trust.

## How can we find out more about Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust?

Bishop Hogarth Education Trust (formerly known as Carmel Education Trust) was established on 1 March 2013 by Carmel College, a Catholic Academy, judged to be Outstanding by Ofsted. In recent years Carmel has been ranked amongst the top state schools nationally in terms of GCSE results.

The Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust Board of Directors is ultimately responsible for the schools within the partnership and accountable to the Bishop providing visionary strategic leadership, a focus on continuous improvement, high quality governance and a strong Catholic ethos with a caring and supportive culture.

Carmel College's Teaching School status and its strong links with the National College for Teaching and Leadership means that professional development of staff is central to the work of the Trust.



## Vision, Values and Ethos

The Trust's aim is to build upon the existing strengths of the partnership with our schools and to offer "outstanding" education provision so that every child succeeds and reaches their potential.

**Every child every opportunity is the foundation on which the Trust is built.**

As a Trust, we value close working support and relations with parents and carers.

## What are the main benefits for schools within the Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust?

- Access to top quality staff, including an "outstanding" Trust leadership team who are sharply focussed on securing excellence.
- Moderation of standards across the partnership of schools to ensure the highest quality provision
- Greater control over finances and the money due to schools.
- Educational benefits for students as a result of additional freedoms available to academies in terms of the curriculum we offer, and how we prioritise resources.
- The opportunity to work in close and formalised partnership with other schools and share expertise and services that will benefit all of our students and staff.
- Sharing resources and expertise, allows us to target funding towards improving front line teaching and learning.
- Joining up provision to remove barriers to learning.
- Develop our own solutions collaboratively.
- Building on Catholic ethos and protecting Catholic education.

***"Our aim is to provide a community that is characterised by joyous corridors and purposeful classrooms, where students and staff are valued and respected as unique individuals and where all are able to grow and strive to "act justly love tenderly and walk humbly..." (Micah 6) in pursuit of the common good."***

Please feel free to visit the Trust website where you can find out more details:

<https://bishophogarthcet.org.uk>

## What additional responsibilities will Academy status bring?

- Additional financial and legal responsibilities – however as Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust is a well-established Trust, arrangements are already fully in place to deal with these responsibilities.
- Currently the Governing Body employs our staff – going forward the Academy Trust would be the employer rather than the Governing Body.
- The Academy Trust would be responsible for admissions rather than the Governing Body (although the Local Authority would still co-ordinate and ensure the Trust adopts clear and fair admission arrangements in line with the admissions law and the School Admissions Code).



- The Academy Trust would enter into a 125-year lease for the land, usually owned by the Local Authority. We already have responsibility for the cost of maintaining the land and buildings.

### How do I learn more, and how do I respond to the consultation?

Our Governing Body would very much like to hear your opinion. Due to the current situation we are unable to hold face to face information sessions for parents however we encourage you to contact Mrs. A. Aisbitt with any questions you might have, and we can arrange either a telephone call or a video conference call.

If you wish to respond to the consultation:

Please email [consultation@bhcet.org.uk](mailto:consultation@bhcet.org.uk) by the deadline of 3pm Friday 9<sup>th</sup> October 2020. When responding to the consultation, please provide the name of your child's school, your name and your contact details along with your feedback to the consultation.

Yours sincerely,



Mrs. Ruth Veitch  
Headteacher



Mrs Alison Aisbitt  
Chair of Governors

