

**Diocese of Brentwood**  
**St Bede's Catholic Primary School and Nursery**  
Canon Avenue, Chadwell Heath, Romford, Essex RM6 5RR

**Head teacher**

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Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

**Re Consultation for St. Bede's Catholic Primary School to Convert to Academy Status and join the Good Shepherd Catholic Trust.**

We write to you regarding the very important Catholic Multi Academy Trusts (CMAT) development within the Diocese of Brentwood that relates to all Catholic Primary and Secondary schools. On 9<sup>th</sup> September 2018 (Education Sunday) Bishop Alan Williams' pastoral letter told parishioners of his vision for all Catholic schools within the Diocese of Brentwood to become part of Catholic Multi Academy Trusts, grouped in geographical areas. He detailed the opportunities for staff to build upon existing networks to further support the excellent work of Catholic schools across the Diocese in delivering holistic education based upon Gospel values.

Academies, free schools, Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) and Catholic Multi Academy Trusts (CMATs) are present within the education system in our locality and nationally. This 'mixed economy' of school types and structures has been part of the educational landscape for a number of years as a direct result of government policy. The Headteachers of Catholic schools across Redbridge, Barking and Dagenham have been meeting regularly over the last 3-4 years to discuss how this may work in the future, so every school has a voice as part of a wider, more supportive group. The aim is that every school will maintain its own identity but will have the opportunity to contribute to the continued development of the excellent Catholic schools spanning this geographical area.

There are specific benefits for schools that have formed these Catholic MATs and those who wish to explore joining in the future.

The first and most obvious benefit relates to the strengthening of existing Catholic networks that Bishop Alan Williams referred to in his 2018 pastoral letter. The formation of a 'Headteachers' Leadership Group' within the Good Shepherd Trust's structure enables school leaders to plan, develop and share good practice across our Catholic schools in a more formal and effective manner than ever before. The Leadership Group of Headteachers (and Chairs of Governors) form a key advisory group within the Catholic Trust which seeks at all times to strengthen and support the Catholic identity and Catholic ethos of our unique schools.

Secondly, the schools which join the Catholic Multi-Academy Trust have the ability to source and implement shared, essential services across a number of schools. These are services which schools previously had to engage individually, often at a higher cost. The Good Shepherd Catholic Trust currently offers central services for Human Resources, Payroll, Clerking, Finance Management Software and legal support. The Headteachers' Leadership group and Trustees will continue to grow and develop this set of central services over several years and are in a strong position to secure 'best value' from each provider with the collective bargaining power that a group of 7, 10 or 14 primary and secondary schools brings. At present, schools joining the Good Shepherd Catholic Trust pay a 'partnership contribution' of 2.1% of their basic budget. This partnership contribution provides the school with access to all the core services mentioned above and conversion to the Good Shepherd Catholic Trust would also mean the school no longer has to contribute its current 'top slice' of money to the Local Authority. The 2.1% contribution to the Trust is viewed as extremely good value for a range of shared, quality services. There are other financial benefits from being part of a CMAT, too. All major building projects currently have to be part funded (10%) from a "Governors' Fund"; the School has to bid for funding from the Local Authority. This would no longer be the case. Capital funding comes directly to the Trust and School, not via the Local Authority.

Thirdly, the challenges over recent years have not just been of a financial nature for our Catholic schools and schools more generally. Recruitment and retention of good quality staff who teach and care for our children every day has become increasingly challenging. A well organised and coherent structure of Catholic Primary and Secondary schools presents new and exciting opportunities for staff to develop their careers within our group of schools, where opportunities for training, promotion and development are possible. It is part of the commitment of the Good Shepherd Catholic Trust that staff will never be moved between schools without their agreement and consent. However, the Trust will do everything possible to offer staff members who are seeking promotions or the next stage in their career, opportunities within the Trust's group of primary and secondary schools to help reduce the need for them to move further afield to other schools. We have already seen examples of this 'internal career development' within the Trust's schools over the course of the last year and the schools look forward to many more staff benefiting from this approach to retaining the best staff.

Finally, in his pastoral letter the Bishop stated that, *'over the years our forefathers fought hard to establish and maintain Catholic Education in these lands. Now it is our turn to ensure that Catholic Education is maintained and enabled to grow and develop for future generations.'*

One of the more complex drivers for the national emergence of Catholic Multi Academy Trusts across many dioceses is the ongoing, tangible threat that is being posed to the Catholic education system. Individual Catholic schools and 'stand-alone' academies have, in several cases found themselves left vulnerable following school inspections which have placed them in 'requires improvement' or 'special measures'. The aim of grouping together, sharing good practice, cross school monitoring, joint staff training and regular leadership meetings is to help ensure that schools learn more effectively from one another and benefit from the strengths we have within so many of our Catholic schools. Good and Outstanding Catholic education should be the right of every pupil, from every background attending every one of our diocesan schools and the Good Shepherd Catholic Multi Academy Trust sees this as its core purpose. Add to this the ever present threat to our Catholic system of education from groups such as the National Secular Society and Humanist UK which are seeking to dismantle it and we begin to see why strength in numbers, as a well organised and ambitious group of Catholic primary and secondary schools, is an important development for us to consider for our school.

It is an important feature of the Good Shepherd Catholic Trust that the structure and systems of the Trust are built entirely around the principle of subsidiarity; an approach where the central authority (the Trust) should perform only those tasks which cannot be performed at a more local level by the Headteachers and their governors. This principle is essential to the unique approach of our Catholic trust and its scheme of delegation that recognises the importance of the local school leaders and governors in retaining oversight of their budgets, staff and resources.

Please visit the Good Shepherd Catholic Trust's main website to learn more about the Trust and the work of its schools over the last few months. ([www.gsctrust.co.uk](http://www.gsctrust.co.uk))

After careful consideration and preliminary discussions with the Diocese and Governing Board, St Bede's Catholic Primary has decided that they wish to explore conversion to Academy status and, in particular to form a Catholic multi-academy trust with the Good Shepherd Catholic Trust. A period of consultation now begins and a response form is attached.

We thought it may be helpful to share a little more general information about multi-academy trusts as well, in an attempt to answer any initial queries you may have as we start this consultation process. Please be aware, however, throughout this process that there is a distinction between Catholic MATs and other more "corporate" (centralised) MATs. There is much "misinformation" in that it does not apply to Catholic MATs and more specifically, the Good Shepherd Catholic MAT of which we seek to be part.

#### **What are MATs?**

A multi-academy trust (MAT) is a single entity established to undertake a strategic collaboration to improve and maintain high educational standards across a number of schools. A group of schools form a single MAT which has overarching responsibility for their governance.

Like everything, there are very good MATs which are making a real difference to, and improving the educational outcomes of, the young people that they serve and there are those that have performed less well.

#### **What will it mean for our school?**

We are writing to you because it is crucial to all schools that they are prepared for the future and how they can continue to provide excellent education to the children whom they serve.

If the school joins the MAT there will be very little, if any, changes you will notice. The main changes will be dealt with at Governing Board level and in the 'background' services that the school engages, such as Human Resources and Payroll providers.

#### **What does this mean for you and your child?**

Essentially, everything that you signed up for when you sent your child to St Bede's Catholic Primary School will remain the same when the school joins the Catholic MAT. Your child will continue to be taught by the teachers employed by school and the same ethos and values remain in place. However, we will then be in the position of being able to share expertise and resources more effectively across a number of schools in the CMAT so that we can continue to improve outcomes for our children.

#### **The Future**

Having researched and spoken to other schools that are in Catholic MATs, it is clear that there are many opportunities and benefits of being in a CMAT. Whilst schools are able to protect their individuality, they are also able to enhance the quality of the education to the young people that they serve.

A more comprehensive list of frequently asked questions is available to view on the school website.

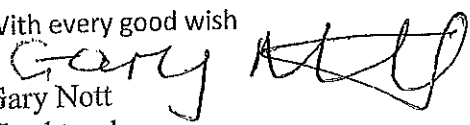
#### **How to take part in the consultation process**

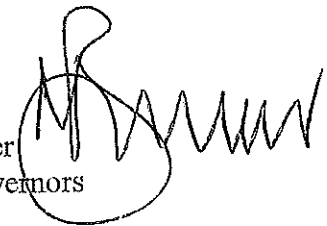
Your views are important to us, so please take the opportunity to complete the attached response form and return it to the school office in an envelope clearly marked '**Consultation Response**'. The closing date is **27<sup>th</sup> March**, after which the Governors will meet to consider all responses.

As you already know, we are disappointed that the National Education Union have felt it necessary to encourage strike action in recent days after the governors and the Trust have both given reassurance that the staff's pay terms and conditions will remain unchanged.

Many thanks in anticipation for your involvement in the consultation process and we look forward to hearing your views on this new and exciting opportunity.

With every good wish

  
Gary Nott  
Head teacher

  
Mark Butcher  
Chair of Governors

## Catholic Multi-Academy Trust Consultation Response Form

Name of School		
Name of person responding		
Please indicate the reason for your interest in the Catholic MAT consultation		
Parent/carer of student(s)		
Parent/carer of prospective future student		
Member of school staff		
Member of clergy <i>Please name parish:</i>		
Local Authority employee <i>Please name L.A.:</i>		
Other (Please specify)		
<p><b>Comments.</b> Please comment in the space below on the proposal to convert to Academy status and to form a Catholic Multi-Academy Trust and continue over the page if necessary.</p>		

Your views are important to us, so please take the opportunity to complete the attached response form and return it to the school office in an envelope clearly marked **'Consultation Response'**. The closing date for receipt of all forms is **March 27<sup>th</sup>**.