



# *St Bernadette's Catholic Primary School*

## *'Doing our best for God'*

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15<sup>th</sup> January 2024

Dear Parents/Carers/ Parishioners,

### **Consultation to convert to Academy status and join the Blessed Edward Bamber Catholic Multi Academy Trust**

You may be aware that the Diocese of Lancaster has been working closely with the Department for Education over the last few years to agree a way forward for the Catholic schools in the Diocese to form or join existing Catholic Multi Academy Trusts. These Multi Academy Trusts will be developed by groups of Catholic primary and secondary schools who wish to join and work together. The vision behind this initiative was set out in Bishop Paul's letter to parishioners ( parents/ carers were copied in) on 14th September 2020.

The Blessed Edward Bamber Catholic Multi Academy Trust has been identified by the Diocese and the Department for Education as a suitable Trust to take forward this vision for Catholic education in the Blackpool and Fylde Coast area. After careful consideration and preliminary discussion with the Diocese and other Catholic schools in our area, the Governing Body of St Bernadette's Catholic Primary School has decided that they wish to explore conversion to academy status and, in particular, to join the Blessed Edward Bamber Catholic Multi Academy Trust (BEBCMAT) during the Autumn term 2024.

The Bishop's vision is that all Catholic schools in the Blackpool and Fylde Coast area will join BEBCMAT by 2026.

The rationale behind the Bishop's vision for academy Trusts is to make sure that we protect, preserve and promote Catholic education in the Diocese of Lancaster.

The Catholic Multi Academy 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 enable greater sharing, adding strength and capacity to the system and ensuring that all schools are supported.

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

Therefore, in line with Diocesan policy, our Governing Body are undertaking consultation with staff, parents and carers, local parishioners and other local schools, both Catholic and non-Catholic, to determine whether ***St Bernadette's' Catholic Primary School,*** should proceed with an application to convert to become an academy and join BEBCMAT. We would like to invite your views on the matter. This consultation starts on Monday 15<sup>th</sup> January 2024 and concludes on Friday 9<sup>th</sup> February 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 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.

The School will still be a Catholic school under the authority of the Bishop of Lancaster and its religious designation will not change.

All academies continue to be inspected by Ofsted and comply with the same rules as other schools on special educational needs, exclusions and admissions.

An academy is part of a charitable trust run by a board of trustees. 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.

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 the school to continue to fully engage with its community.

## **How can we find out more about the Blessed Edward Bamber Catholic Multi Academy Trust ?**

The mission of the Trust is for all Catholic schools in the area to work together to develop excellence, build strong communities with Gospel values at the heart. The core principles of the Trust are to educate the whole person, aiming for excellence and working together for the Common Good. Through collective responsibility, united in our Catholic faith, the Trust worked to enable each school to thrive spiritually, academically and financially so that all of the children and young people can 'belong, engage and become' – reach their full potential and realise their God-given talents.

The Trust works in partnership as one family of schools whilst maintaining and celebrating the uniqueness of each individual school which serves its own distinct community. We are values-driven and our core values of Trust, Respect, Faith, Hope and Service are our hallmarks. These values underpin all of our relationships; between staff, pupils, families and our wider parish and local communities.

To find out more about BEBCMAT, there is more information available on the Trust website at: [www.bebcmat.co.uk/joinus](http://www.bebcmat.co.uk/joinus)



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### **What are the main benefits for schools within the Blessed Edward Bamber Catholic Multi Academy Trust ?**

The benefits of joining a Catholic Multi Academy Trust are many and varied. As the Bishop of Lancaster states, Catholic MATs are a secure way to protect, preserve and improve Catholic education across the Diocese.

Being a member of BEBCMAT means all of the schools in the Trust working together to provide a first-class Catholic education, valuing staff and pupils, investing in their future, working in true collaboration and partnership with others.

Working in partnership, all of the schools in the Trust work closely together to create a sustainable model of high-quality education for all pupils. We believe that sharing ideas that work, learning from each other and allowing leaders and staff to focus on the core purpose of education enables us to move forward as a family of schools. As a Trust, with shared central services, schools can also benefit from economies of scale when purchasing and commissioning external contracts. The work of the central team at the Trust will free up leaders to focus on school improvement and enhancing the academic, spiritual and lives of pupils. The Trust can provide great opportunities for staff recruitment and retention and professional development.

### **What additional responsibilities will Academy status bring?**

- Additional financial and legal responsibilities – however as BEBCMAT 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 become the Admissions Authority rather than the Governing Body however the Governing Body will continue to set the Admissions Policy for the school (although the Local Authority would still co-ordinate and ensure the Trust and school 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.

### **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 following conversion, other than to adjust the governance arrangements and accountability that comes with working within a Multi Academy Trust and to bring closer working practices between the schools in the Trust

Please be assured that the Catholic character, ethos and values of St Bernadette's Catholic Primary school would remain unchanged should the proposals be agreed.

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

At this stage we are not committing the school to conversion to academy status or to joining BEBCMAT. We are consulting with everyone associated with our school before Governors meet again to make a final decision.

Helen O'Neil (CEO), will attend a parents meeting, in school, on Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup> January @ 2.40 pm for you to hear more and raise any queries you may have.

Throughout the process and particularly during the Autumn term, the FAQs 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 FAQs 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.

If you wish to respond to the consultation, please email your feedback to:

**[consultation@st-bernadette.blackpool.sch.uk](mailto:consultation@st-bernadette.blackpool.sch.uk)**

Please include your name and contact details by the closing date of 3pm Friday 9<sup>th</sup> February 2024. The Governors will meet after this date to consider how to proceed.

Yours sincerely,

*Alexis Satterthwaite*

Head Teacher

*John Ismay*

Chair of Governors