



Camerton Church School
Camerton, Bath
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St Julian's C of E Primary School
Wellow, Bath
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Shoscombe CEVA Primary School
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July 2016

Dear Parents ,Carers and members of the local community

Academy Status

You may well be aware of the increase in the creation of Academies in our education system in recent years. Academies are state-funded independent schools, who receive their money directly from the Government, rather than through the local authority.

This letter is to inform you that our Governing Body has taken the decision actively to work towards conversion to academy status. Our Governors see this as a great opportunity, in an uncertain educational landscape, to secure the future of the school for the benefit of your children and future generations.

They have decided that they wish to explore in more depth the possibility of joining the Dragonfly Education Trust at Writhlington. There are various advantages to such a move:

- We share a vision of a comprehensive, inclusive education for all children in our area
- The opportunity to play an active role in the development of the same children from 2 to 18
- Greater opportunities for improving our school premises
- The chance to break down some of the barriers between primary and secondary schools, so that we can make that transition better for your children – wherever they go to after Church Valley Schools Federation
- The ability to share a wide range of staff expertise and facilities
- A shared commitment to continued collaboration with the local authority and with other schools

Our current position is:

- We have registered our interest in converting to academy status with the Department for Education and started talks with Writhlington
- The next step, following consultation with staff and parents, is to apply for conversion
- We are aiming for an April conversion, if discussions proceed as planned.

Please do read the accompanying Frequently Asked Questions document and we invite you to comment or raise any further questions you have with the Governors, via the Clerk, Mrs Miles, either in writing or via email to stjulians_pri@bathnes.gov.uk pri@bathnes.gov.uk Camerton_pri@bathnes.gov.uk or Shoscombe_pri@bathnes.gov.uk

We will write to you again in September, inviting you to a meeting.



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So what might *you* notice in the future? Better facilities, wider learning opportunities for your children and better transition between primary and secondary schools: those are three key objectives. At the heart of all their discussions the Governors have posed the question: 'What would that mean for our children?'

Of course not all children go on from here to Writhlington, so while we aim to make the most of any new collaboration with Writhlington, we shall be preparing your children to thrive in whichever secondary school you choose for them, which means continuing our close links with other schools, as we do now.

On a personal note, I have to say how pleased I am that the Governing Body has given this matter so much consideration and acted so decisively to move the school forwards. I feel this move provides some exciting opportunities for our children long into the future. We shall let you know how things progress.

Yours sincerely,
Jane Gascoigne
Headteacher

Optional Reading: Additional Background Information

There is a lot of uncertainty in the education world at the moment, and I recognise some of the political motives behind the academies programme nationally, but what matters is getting the best possible outcomes for our children and our school.

During the last 18 months, our Governing Body decided to investigate conversion of our schools to an academy. During the past five years, the educational landscape has changed a great deal and the local authority has strongly indicated that, with massive cuts to local government, it is not really an option in the long-term for schools to continue in their present form.

Governors considered a range of options, including keeping the current status, and concluded that the best option would be to enter into partnership with other schools in a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT). Then it was a question of which MAT – so Governors looked at the different MATs we could join and carried out a thorough process of selection.

It was vital to Governors that any decision should result in a partnership, not a merger or a takeover. We would retain the same sort of independence and status that we currently enjoy, but within a different legal and financial framework. Heads of other schools that have trodden this path already tell me that the only people in their school community that noticed a significant difference were the governors, school leaders and office staff.

JG



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PARENTS' FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is an academy?

An academy is an independent school funded by the state. Its funding comes directly from the Government, rather than through the local authority.

What is a multi-academy trust?

A multi-academy trust (MAT) is made up of different schools coming together under one umbrella trust:

- The MAT is a charitable company with liability limited by guarantee
- MATs provide opportunities to share expertise, resources, finances and governance
- Academies within a MAT retain their identity and a high degree of local control through their Governing Body
- MATs can make collective decisions about contracts and services to benefit all member schools
- Head teachers and staff in the member schools can really focus on the quality of teaching and learning

How many schools have become academies? Is this an unusual step to take?

In five years 3,420 schools nationally have converted to academy status, 54% of these being primary schools. Locally most secondary schools are academies, while an increasing number of primaries are converting. About 24% of primaries in the south-west region have converted to academies. Some schools *have* to become an academy after a poor Ofsted inspection – that is not the case with us: we are choosing it.

Is it the head teacher who decides whether our school becomes an academy?

No. A head teacher has no power to determine whether a school becomes an academy. It is the decision of the governing body in consultation with the diocese for Church Schools.

Is the school required to consult parents about becoming an academy?

The Governing Body of the school makes the decision about the school applying to become an academy. The Government does not require the Governors to consult parents or the community about this decision. However, the Governing Body has decided to do this because they want parents to feel well informed and have a chance to voice their opinion about the decisions Governors are making, for the good of our pupils and our community.

Will the school change its name?

No. We are proud of our identity as St Julian's, Shoscombe and Camerton Church Schools (Church Valley Schools Federation). Letter headings may change slightly to reflect our participation in a multi-academy trust, but little else will change.

Will I have to buy a new school uniform?

No. We like our school uniforms – our children look smart in it – so you won't have to buy a different one.

Does this mean the school is going to get bigger?

The Governing Body has no plans to expand the schools. They have always wanted ours to be the school of choice for the local communities. We intend to maintain our current admission number and to apply the local authority's admissions policy.

Will there be additional costs for parents?

Academies are not allowed to charge fees for pupils to attend the school.

How can parents make their views known about the school becoming an academy?

Parents who wish to make their views known should contact the Governors via the Clerk, Mrs Miles, either in writing or via the school email stjulians_pri@bathnes.gov.uk, pri@bathnes.gov.uk, Camerton_pri@bathnes.gov.uk or Shoscombe_pri@bathnes.gov.uk by Friday 9th September 2016



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Will joining a MAT mean a change to the term dates and length of school day?

No, we have no plans to do so at present. We already discuss term dates in our local cluster of schools anyway, but length of day is not something we are intending to alter.

Will my child still have to do the usual tests, like the SATs and the Phonics Screening Check?

Yes, academies carry out all the same statutory tests as local authority schools do.

Will there be a change in rules about free school meals, attendance and holidays in term-time?

No. These will remain the same as now.

What impact would becoming an academy have on educational standards?

Everyone in Church Valley Schools Federation - the Governing Body, the head teacher and the staff - is committed to ensuring that all pupils receive the highest standard of education possible. This has always been the ethos behind any decisions made and will continue to be so. There is no evidence nationally that being an academy raises standards in itself, whatever the politicians might say, but the school would be committed to using its new freedoms to secure the best possible provision for all children. We will continue to work with the local authority to achieve excellence for our children.

Does becoming an academy mean that the school will get new buildings and facilities?

The Governing Body has placed a high priority on getting better facilities for your children and this has been a key driver in deciding to convert to academy status. The local authority has made it clear that it does not have the means to fund new buildings for any of our schools and the Government is focusing its funding towards Free Schools. However, becoming part of a multi-academy trust would give us access to expertise and bid-writing for funds that are not currently available to us. It increases our chances of achieving the improvements to our premises that we need. If we join the Dragonfly Education Trust, we become part of a family of schools that runs the sports facilities at Writhlington and the Sports Centre in Midsomer Norton, too. This opens up new opportunities for our children.

Will there be more money for my child's education when the school becomes an academy?

The school's overall budget would not change, but its funds would come through the MAT, rather than through the local authority. This means we will have a greater say in how our money is spent. Currently the local authority 'top-slices' money from schools' budgets to make provision across all schools for pupils with a whole range of special needs, pupil support, education welfare and school transport. This money would come to the MAT. Once the money is allocated to the school, it will make provision to replicate those important services previously provided by the local authority and to secure the best value for money.

Will there be any changes to the catchment areas or admissions?

Academies are their own admissions authority and they set their own admission policies. There are no plans to alter our catchment or admissions policies. We would be bound by the Government's admissions code in any case.

Once a school becomes an academy what can parents do if they are not happy with any decisions made?

In the first instance, as now, parents can complain to the school. However, academies are independent of the local authority, so if you are not satisfied with the outcome, any complaints about the academy would be to the MAT and ultimately to the Department for Education, very much as now.

If a school becomes an academy and wants to change back, is that possible?

Not realistically. Once a school has become an academy, it is virtually impossible to revert to being a local authority maintained school ... unless there is a change of government!

Will I notice a difference if my children's school becomes an academy?

Anecdotal evidence is that children, parents and teaching staff hardly notice the change when a school converts to academy status. Governors, head teachers and office staff do notice the difference. We are proud of our identity and our service to the communities of Wellow, Camerton and Shoscombe. The schools will continue to place your children at the heart of any decision-making in everything we do.



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