

**Consultation on the proposal for ST MARY'S CE COMBINED SCHOOL to join  
the Oxford Diocesan Bucks Schools Trust as an academy  
Consultation Period: Monday 19<sup>th</sup> February 2018 – Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> March**

The Governing Body of **ST MARY'S CE COMBINED SCHOOL** is proposing to change the status of the school from a Voluntary Controlled (VC) School to an Academy, and for the school to join the Oxford Diocesan Bucks Schools Trust, which is a Multi Academy Trust (MAT).

**Background:**

As a Church of England school with VC status, the school is currently 'controlled' by the Local Authority (LA). This means the council employs the staff, determines the admissions arrangements for the school, is responsible for maintaining the school estate, appoints the majority of governors and is responsible for ensuring the quality of education provision remains 'efficient' (duty under Education Act 1996 Section 13). As a Church school, a minority of governors are also appointed by the Oxford Diocese, which also has a statutory duty to support the school's RE and collective worship aspects.

Over recent years, LA funding has seen notable changes, including cuts to and removal of elements of education budgets. As a result, many services traditionally provided by the LA have either been reduced or phased out, or are now chargeable. Alongside this, since 2010 the government has been promoting a new way for all schools to improve standards by increasing the independence from the LA and closer working with other schools. This is achieved by changing the status of the school to an 'academy'. An **academy** is a state school that operates outside of LA control. New academies are now expected to join with other academies in a Multi Academy Trust (MAT). The MAT becomes the organisation accountable for the effectiveness and quality of the academy. Funding for the school is paid from the government to the MAT.

Schools judged by Ofsted to be 'Good' or 'Outstanding' can make a decision for themselves about which MAT they join, while schools who are considered by Ofsted as 'Requires Improvement' or 'Inadequate' are usually brokered into a MAT by the Department for Education.

The government remains committed to academisation, with a desire for all schools to "benefit from the autonomy and freedom to innovate that academy status brings" (*Schools that Work for Everyone' DfE consultation Sept 2016*) – although no date has been imposed for all schools to become academies.

**What are the options?**

As a school, judged by Ofsted to be 'Good', we have been considering whether to convert to an academy and we are mindful of the Government's view that all schools should become academies over time. In considering the various possibilities open to our school the leadership and governors have kept the following matters at the forefront of our thinking:

1. What is in the best interests of the children in our school, both now and looking ahead to those who will attend in the years to come?

2. How can we best preserve the schools' distinctive Christian ethos and continue to adhere to our vision statement?
3. Whether we will retain a significant role in running our school at a local level?

The governors (including the headteacher) have looked in detail at the options available to us including: not becoming an academy; joining a local school led MAT; starting our own school led MAT, or joining the Diocesan MAT.

### **The proposal**

The governors have agreed that becoming an academy, as part of The Oxford Diocesan Bucks Schools Trust (ODBST), would seem to offer the best solution. We are now exploring this in detail, including hearing your views through this five-week consultation period, to establish whether or not this would be the best way to safeguard the distinctive education offered by our school.

### **What would this mean in practice?**

Whilst academy status would give the school additional responsibilities (e.g. it would become responsible for admissions into the school) and provide greater freedoms (e.g. the school would be able to be more flexible with the curriculum), in terms of the day to day functioning the school will not be noticeably different compared to the school as an LA maintained school. The Governors are not proposing to change the uniform or the admissions arrangements for the school. Changes will come in the way the teachers and non-teaching staff (particularly the headteacher, governors and the Business Manager) are supported to deliver the best possible outcomes for the children in the school.

### **Who are the Oxford Diocesan Bucks Schools Trust (ODBST)?**

ODBST is a new Multi Academy Trust (MAT) launched by the Oxford Diocese in September 2017 to provide an option for strong schools across Buckinghamshire who would like to choose to become an academy. There are five schools already in the Trust: Chesham Bois CofE, Thomas Harding Junior, Great Horwood CofE, Padbury CofE and St John's CofE Lacey Green, and a further school with permission to join.



Schools in ODBST continue to make decisions at the local governing body level and are supported through a combination of high quality school improvement support and partnership working across the Trust.

ODBST academies teach a broad and balanced curriculum within national guidelines. Focusing on core skills, this is designed to ensure that all pupils reach their academic potential and seeks to enrich their experience along the way. Pupils are enabled to succeed in an atmosphere of high expectation, aspiring to educational excellence with a firm commitment to Christian values.

The Trust is motivated by Christian values to serve local communities, but they do not impose those values: admissions policies are open, and priority is normally given to children in the local area. ODBST welcome those of all faiths and none, and are proud of the ethnic diversity within their academies.

ODBST is a charitable company. No one can make any money from the company. The company is limited by guarantee. It does not pay dividends and makes no profit. The company is linked to the Diocese of Oxford through the appointment of its Members, who are all volunteers, acting as the 'owners' of the company.

**We believe this is a good idea:**

As Governors we believe that the best way to serve the future of this school is to join ODBST as an academy because we will be able to help the school to continue to improve. Feedback on the support and services from schools in the sister MAT (ODST) is very positive; ODBST will provide a safe and secure home for our school in times of very considerable change in the education field; it enables the local governing body to continue to run the school locally (with accountabilities to ODBST) and it will preserve the Christian character of the school. We are also aware that there are other schools in the area, both Church of England and non-Church of England Schools, that are exploring this possibility and we will therefore have not only the ongoing Diocesan support but that of ODBST and neighbouring schools.

Schools will be supported in the Trust to enable school staff to concentrate on continuing to deliver the highest standards of teaching and care to all pupils. This support is given through central services which are funded through a central service charge from the academies income. ODBST academies will automatically be provided with support regarding the curriculum, school improvement, HR advice, finance software, training and advice, governance, premises and admission appeals.

**How can you find out more?**

There are some Frequently Asked Questions available on our website and in the school office. If you have any further questions, please email them to:

[office@st-marysylesbury.bucks.sch.uk](mailto:office@st-marysylesbury.bucks.sch.uk)

There will also be an information session for parents and the community on **Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> March at 6:30pm** in the school hall, where questions can be asked in person to the Governing Body and representatives from ODBST.

**Next Steps**

This consultation will last for five weeks and will conclude on **29<sup>th</sup> March 2018** After this, the governors will consider the questions and points raised by parents and interested parties and consider whether to continue with the process. If the decision is to proceed, the Secretary of State for Education will need to approve the conversion, and ODBST will also need to approve our school to join the Trust. If everyone is agreed, the project to change the school to become an academy takes between four to nine months, which will be managed by ODBST.