

15 June 2020

Dear Parents/Carers,

## **PROPOSAL TO CONVERT TO ACADEMY STATUS**

We have written to all current parents to inform them of some proposed changes to our school and as a new parent, we wanted to include you the process.

The Governors have decided to explore conversion to academy status by joining the Diocese of Chichester Academy Trust (DCAT) and entering into a closer partnership with Central Church of England Academy, our neighbour and where many of our children move on to. We have committed to a full consultation before we make any final decisions, to explain the proposal in more detail and give you opportunities to ask questions of us and of DCAT colleagues. Unfortunately face to face meetings are still not possible, but we do want to move forward with this proposal, consistent with our concern to preserve the school in the light of West Sussex's School Effectiveness Strategy. This letter, therefore, sets out more detail about the proposal and describes ways in which you can find out more about it, ask questions and provide your comments. Governors are very keen to know what parents, future parents, staff and other members of the local community think about this proposal. A response form is available at <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/LancDCAT> to provide you with an opportunity to give us your views and your questions.

The Governors see conversion to academy status within DCAT, working more closely with Central Church of England Academy, as a positive way forward for the school and hope that you will agree. More detail about what this could mean for our school is set out below and in the attachments. There are also details of Zoom meetings and presentations where you will have the chance to hear more about it and to ask questions. We will also publish this information, recordings of the Zoom meeting(s) and regularly updated FAQs on the school website.

Many of you will know that the Diocese of Chichester Academy Trust (DCAT) is already responsible in this area for the March Church of England Primary School and Central Church of England Academy. We already have a good relationship with colleagues at Central and The March and we want to develop and grow this, so that together, and with the support of DCAT, we can continue to improve the opportunities we provide for your children. As local authorities have seen their government funding reduce, the support that they are able to provide schools has diminished and we believe that joining a wider network of schools and in particular creating stronger partnerships with Central and with other schools in DCAT will bring benefits to the

quality of education, across both Lancastrian and Central, and to your child's education and progress.

If we move forward with this, we see real benefit in a closer relationship with Central CE Academy. This could mean a shared name for both schools, with one being the Infant site and one being the Junior site. All of this will be the subject of consultation at a future date. We also said that if we proceed with the conversion, in the academic year 2021-22 we intend to consult on becoming a Church of England school whilst maintaining the strengths of Lancastrian including our passion for serving our community and having a very open admissions policy. You will have a full opportunity to engage in that consultation at that time.

As a small school the attraction of joining DCAT is that they have a team of staff who can provide more than we can currently afford. The quality is high and this has been validated as we have spoken to other Headteachers and governors within the Trust including those at The March. Another attraction is that our staff will have a range of opportunities for professional development and to work with colleagues in other Trust schools to develop their practice, sharing the good practice that exists in ours and other schools in the Trust.

There are other benefits and positive changes, however, if we proceed you and your children are unlikely to see any change in your day to day experience of our school. Leaders, teachers and support staff and governors will remain; times of the school day, term dates and the school's admission policy will stay the same. On conversion to academy status all staff remain in post and have their terms and conditions protected and all children in, or due to join the school, remain fully part of the school as they are now.

There will be a meeting held over **Zoom on 23 June at 5pm** when leaders from DCAT will present on the work of the Trust. The main focus of the meeting will be on answering any questions that parents have about this proposal. In order to keep numbers manageable, we are asking parents to register to attend that meeting and we will send invitations to those parents. The meeting will be recorded and published on the school website and if there is demand we will arrange further Zoom meetings so that more parents can ask questions and hear the answers. All the meetings will be recorded and published.

If you have any questions or comments about this proposal please respond on-line at <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/LancDCAT>. The survey will close on **17 July**.

If you wish to take part in the Zoom meeting on 23 June or are interested in attending a follow up meeting please register at:

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/LancZoom>

Yours sincerely

David Brixey  
Chair of Governors

Zoe Gordon  
Headteacher



## **INFORMATION ON THE DIOCESE OF CHICHESTER ACADEMY TRUST (DCAT)**

DCAT was established in 2014 and currently nine schools are part of the trust.

The Trust has a clear vision which is to help every child achieve their God-given potential.

The Trust has clear aims; to be a trust in which:

- All children achieve and maximise their potential;
- All schools improve and perform above national expectations;
- All staff are supported and actively engage in continuing professional development; and
- The distinct Christian identity of each of our academies is maintained and celebrated.

Schools joining DCAT retain their own unique identity. They benefit from a range of shared services and opportunities. Individual Local Governing Bodies, including parent representatives, continue to play an important role in the life of the school.

Each academy will be welcoming to all and will serve equally those who are of the Christian faith, those of other faiths and those with no faith.

Each school benefits from additional support and capacity for school improvement with 'hands on' input from or overseen by the Trust's Head of Improvement. The Trust's CEO is on hand to provide support and challenge for each of the Headteachers. Both Executive Leaders have been Headteachers in their own right. In addition, the Trust has dedicated staff who provide strong expertise, including in the areas of finance, governance and compliance.

The Trust is part of the Diocese of Chichester which was established in 681 CE. The Diocese has over two hundred years of successful experience as a provider of schools across Sussex as part of its mission to support and serve the whole community. The Trust draws on expertise in the Diocese of Chichester and on the wider national Church of England role as the leading sponsor of academies. The Trust directors have local and national expertise to ensure every academy is well led and governed, through the Trust's Board of Directors and the Local Governing Body.

More information about DCAT is available on the Trust's website **[www.dcat.academy](http://www.dcat.academy)**

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **What is an Academy?**

Academies are charitable companies funded by the Government to provide state education free of charge. Multi academy trusts bring together several academies under a single board of trustees, who are accountable for the academies within the Trust. They are funded at the same level as schools maintained by local authorities; and have the same responsibilities for children with special educational needs, pupils in receipt of pupil premium and for admissions.

### **So why make the change?**

All schools need support to improve and we are unable to secure the support we need from the Local Authority. Joining an Academy Trust which shares our vision and values will provide greater security for our school and – by developing a partnership with Central and working in a wider network and with the support of DCAT – will support us to grow and develop. In addition, there would be access to high quality support for school improvement, the opportunity to share good practice and develop our environment.

### **Who will be the members of the local governing body?**

On conversion, current governors will remain in place as the local governing body for the school, but over time governors will be appointed by DCAT, seeking to ensure that there is a balance of appropriate skills. Our local governing body will continue to include two elected parents and one elected member of staff.

### **Is this a governor decision or is it being forced? Is the school in financial difficulty?**

This is a strategic decision that the Governors are making. The school is not in financial difficulty, though in common with all schools the finances are coming under pressure and we also face the challenge of the West Sussex School Effectiveness Strategy. We see particular advantages in being able to develop our relationship with Central CE Academy, to benefit pupils in both schools. Within DCAT the school will be supported by a strong school improvement team who will work with Mrs Gordon on our priorities and by an established and well qualified finance team and a range of other central services, including HR, payroll, legal advice and ICT technicians. Cost effective support will help to ensure that we can continue to focus the major part of the school's budget on teaching and learning. DCAT's aim is to ensure funds are focussed on the classroom and the core educational function.

### **Doesn't joining an academy trust mean that everything will change?**

No! DCAT is committed to working with its schools and supporting them to improve. DCAT will make no changes to staffing in the school and all pupils remain on roll. Term dates, school times, uniform and admissions arrangements will not change. Staff and parents at other schools who have joined DCAT have asked after the event whether it has happened – because they have not experienced change.

We recognise that information widely available on the internet and social media identifies a different approach in other cases when schools have become academies. There are Trusts who make changes when schools convert, who impose a curriculum model and ways of working, who take a higher proportion of the school's budget to spend on large and highly paid central teams. Those Trusts are in a minority. DCAT does not behave in that way – and will not do so.

**What are the risks of making this change?** We recognise that this is a significant change in the legal status of the school, but joining a Trust established by the Diocese of Chichester, which shares our commitment to ensuring all children achieve their potential and will enable a closer relationship with Central CE Academy does seem to the governors and headteacher to be a positive way forward. DCAT will work with us, will help us to sustain levels of funding for teaching and learning and will free time for Mrs Gordon and other leaders to focus on outcomes for children. The change in status does not mean changes to the school that parents, carers, children, staff, governors and the wider school community have come to trust, love and support.

### **How can I find out more?**

We are holding a Zoom meeting on 23 June at 5pm which will provide an opportunity to hear more about the proposal and to ask questions. If you would like to attend this meeting – or register your interest in a follow up meeting – please do so online at:

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/LancZoom>

If you have any individual issues you would like to discuss please leave your name and phone number in a response at <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/LancDCAT> and someone will contact you.

### **How can I make my views known?**

We would be grateful for comments on-line at <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/LancDCAT>. If you have any comments please send them by close on 17 July.

## **Academies: Some key facts**

### **Curriculum**

Academies are required to have a broad and balanced curriculum which promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils and prepares them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life. For pupils below Key Stage 1 (i.e. reception and nursery), academies are required to follow the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The curriculum must include:

- English, maths and science;
- Religious Education; and
- relationships education and health education.

Academies are required to take part in the same pupil assessment arrangements and to report on the achievement and attainment of pupils in the same way as all other state-funded schools.

### **Inspection**

Academies continue to be subject to Ofsted inspections.

### **Staffing**

The regulations that place requirements on maintained schools do not directly apply to academies. General employment law applies to academies in the same way as to other organisations. Teachers must be suitably qualified. The Academy Trust has responsibility for setting pay and conditions. DCAT is committed to employing qualified teachers and to paying all our staff on national terms and conditions. Staff turnover at current schools is low and staff absence has reduced. Staff welcome the support they receive from the Trust and feel valued.

All teachers employed at an academy have access to the Teachers Pensions Scheme and all other employees at an academy have access to the Local Government Pension Scheme.

### **Funding**

The academy trust will receive General Annual Grant from the Secretary of State calculated as the equivalent to that which would be received by a maintained school taking account of the number of pupils at the academy. Capital funding is also available, channelled through the Academy Trust. Every academy trust must abide by the requirements of and have regard to the guidance in the Academies Financial Handbook.

### **SEND**

Academies should be fully inclusive local schools and in common with all other schools have a clear legal duty to do their best to meet the needs of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). DCAT is fully committed to every child achieving their God-given potential. DCAT meets all its statutory responsibilities for children with special educational needs and disabilities, working in partnership with Local Authorities. SENDCos in DCAT come together to share best practice, work together and develop their own training.

## **Admissions**

Academies are required to provide education for pupils wholly or mainly drawn from the area in which the academy is situated.

Academies must have admission arrangements that clearly set out how children will be admitted, including the criteria that will be applied if there are more applications than available places.

Academies are required to provide education for pupils of different abilities (i.e. they may not select pupils by ability).

## **Land**

When schools convert to academy status, the land they occupy is made available to the Trust under a lease from the local authority. The land cannot be sold off.

## **The conversion process**

There is a defined process to secure our conversion to academy status, which includes:

- Consultation with parents, staff and other stakeholders;
- Agreeing a contract with the Secretary of State to run Lancastrian Infant School as an academy within the Diocese of Chichester Academy Trust as a state-maintained school, free to all pupils and students;
- Consulting staff and their unions on the transfer to a new employer;
- Working with the owners of our site to ensure that it can be used by the Academy;
- Transferring contracts for goods and services.

A grant from the DfE will support the costs incurred, including expertise in managing the process so that your child's education is not disrupted.



**Lancastrian Infant School**  
**Academy consultation: response form**

Thank you for your interest in our school's conversion to Academy status within the Diocese of Chichester Academy Trust. Having considered the information available, do you agree that the school should convert to academy status?

Yes

No

Not sure

Please add any comments or questions here,

If you have an individual issue that you would like to discuss please leave your name and telephone number and we will contact you.

*Please add an extra sheet if necessary*

Please indicate your connection to the school

Parent/carer

Staff member

Other : Please specify

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You can complete this form on-line at <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/LancDCAT> or in hard copy to the school in an envelope marked 'Academy Conversion'. Please respond by 17 July 2020.