

Consultation Leaflet for Parents - FAQs

St Vincent de Paul Catholic Primary School

Section 1: Academy Information

What is DOWAT?

The Diocese of Westminster Academy Trust (DOWAT) is the largest Catholic Academy Trust within the Diocese of Westminster and consistently one of the best performing MATs (Multi-Academy Trusts) in the country.

DOWAT was formed in 2012 and consist of 6 Secondary and 5 Primary schools;

- Nicholas Breakspear Catholic School (St Albans)
- Our Lady Catholic Primary School (Hitchin)
- St Catherine of Sienna Catholic Primary School (Watford)
- St Claudine's Catholic School for Girls (Brent)
- St John's Catholic Primary School (Baldock)
- St Mark's Catholic School (Hounslow)
- St Mary's Catholic Primary School (Royston)
- St Michael's Catholic High School (Watford)
- St Thomas More Catholic Primary School (Letchworth)
- The Douay Martyrs Catholic Secondary School (Hillingdon)
- The Saint John Henry Newman Catholic School (Stevenage)

DOWAT's mission is "To achieve excellent in the service of the Gospel, to build a better world." Schools in the Trust are committed to working together in a trusting and collaborative manner, with integrity and transparency.

The Trust embraces the Diocese's of Westminster Catholic Academy Trust programme in which the Diocese requires all of its school to join a CAT to "protect, secure and develop Catholic education" by expanding to support schools in Hertfordshire and Hillingdon.

Which Schools are proposing to convert to Academies and join DOWAT?

The Holy Family Catholic Primary School and St Vincent de Paul Catholic Primary Schools (both in Hertfordshire) and St Swithun Wells' Catholic Primary and St Bernadette Catholic Primary School (both in London Borough of Hillingdon) are proposing to convert and join the Diocese of Westminster Academy Trust (DOWAT), which currently consists of five primary schools and six secondary schools.

St Vincent de Paul Catholic Primary School has received the consent of the Diocese of Westminster and has applied to the Regional Director (RD) for their permission to convert to an academy.

DOWAT is part of the Diocese of Westminster Catholic Academy Trust (CAT) Strategy through which all Schools in the Diocese's 11 Families (across 17 London Borough and 2 Counties) will be asked to join CATs to protect Catholic Education for future generations.

Why is St Vincent de Paul Catholic Primary School proposing to join the Diocese of Westminster Academy Trust?

The Governors have been actively considering joining a CAT with our partner schools in Hertfordshire and have investigated it thoroughly. We believe that joining a CAT is now in the best interest of our school.

Some of the reasons for this, include;

- The Headteacher and Governors believe that converting and joining DOWAT will deliver the best future for our school.
- This is the wish of the Cardinal Vincent Nichols, and part of the Diocese of Westminster wider CAT strategy to protect all Catholic school in the Diocese.
- The Headteacher and Governors believe joining DOWAT will allow the school to secure strategic school to school support and development through sharing the very best of our leadership, management, teaching and learning, pastoral and spiritual development for the benefit of all schools in the CAT.
By coming together in solidarity, we will be stronger, more robust and more resilient for the future.
- Catholic education is facing many threats both nationally and across the Diocese, in terms of declining rolls and increased financial pressures for all public services.
- With government borrowing already at unprecedented levels, prospects for an increase in school funding in the short to medium terms are extremely low.
- We face a growing need to protect, secure, and develop the Church's mission in Catholic education, working together to grow our resilience and overcome other future threats.
- Behind the scenes, very little will change for pupils, staff and parents. The changes will bring in closer working practices to Governance and back office functions.

How will St Vincent de Paul Catholic Primary School benefit from joining DOWAT?

The aim of the Diocese's CAT Strategy is to protect, secure and develop the Church's mission in education.

Prospective children in schools in CATs will benefit in a number of ways, including;

- Enhanced collaboration and partnership across the schools
- Increased savings and efficiencies at a time of growing financial pressures
- Improved teaching, learning, pastoral and spiritual development for each child through increased collaboration, challenge and support
- Increased CPD opportunities and career pathways for staff
- Improved retention and development of the best Catholic teachers and Leaders
- Clear, robust and effective Governance at Trust, CEO and Local Advisory Council levels
- Secured Catholic education across the Diocese for generations to come.

Why is St Vincent de Paul Catholic Primary School now proposing to become an Academy and join DOWAT?

The Headteacher and Chair of Governors believe the time is right to move forward after careful consideration and a thoughtful journey.

In September 2017 the Diocese of Westminster published its strategy for Catholic Academy Trust <https://education.rcdow.org.uk/diocesan-academy-strategy/>. The Diocese's Strategy sets out the reasons, benefits and structure of the Catholic Academy Trust programme.

The Cardinal has asked all schools in the Diocese to have plans in place to join their designated Catholic Academy Trust by 2025. The DfE requires all schools to become academies by 2030.

We also believe the time is right in terms of reductions in funding and support from local authorities to join a supportive, collaborative Catholic Academy Trust.

What work has been done by governors to explore all options?

Governors have conducted a number of activities over several years to ensure we reach the best decision for our school.

These include:

- Discussions with other local schools to understand their strategy and journey.
- Attendance at specific training and information sessions for Governors research on other CATs
- Research on academisation based on information from a variety of sources.
- Presentations and Q&A from various CATs on a number of different subjects
- Presentation and discussion covering the pros and cons of all the options for the future of the school.
- Close liaison with the CEO and CFO of DOWAT to understand the implications and benefits for our school.
- Due diligence processes with the Diocese of Westminster.

Will the CAT expand to include more schools over time?

Yes, DOWAT will expand further to embrace all Catholic schools in Stevenage, Hitchin, Letchworth and Royston areas of Hertfordshire and all school in the London Borough of Hillingdon who wish to become Academies under the Diocese of Westminster CAT programme.

How will the Governance arrangements of the Diocese of Westminster Academy Trust work?

The Diocese of Westminster has nominated 5 Members who own the Memorandum and Articles and Association of the Trust, registered with Companies House.

The Members include Cardinal Vincent Nichols, the Archbishop of the Diocese of Westminster, The Auxiliary Bishop with responsibility for education, the Chair of the Education Commission of the Diocese of Westminster, the Financial Secretary of the Diocese of Westminster and the Director of Education for the Diocese of Westminster.

The Members have appointed a Board of Foundation Directors with strategic oversight for the Trust and Schools.

Each School will retain a Local Governing Body which, with the Headteacher, will be responsible for the day to day running of the school.

The Local Governing Body will have powers delegated from the CAT Board of Directors under an agreed Scheme of Delegation and are accountable to the Board.

Will the School retain its individual ethos?

Yes, the Diocese is very clear that the individual name, ethos, character and good practices of each school are retained and that all the schools operate as equals supporting each other.

Each school is seen as central to its own community with the skills of each being used in a supportive way for all the others. Every school gives and receives support from one another.

What is an Academy?

Academies are publicly funded independent schools that are not managed by a local authority, but their funding and accountability is directly with the Department for Education (DfE).

When will St Vincent de Paul Catholic Primary School become an Academy?

We would expect that the process will take approximately 8 months, work is underway and the planned conversion date is hopefully December 2024.

Why is there a consultation?

The Academies Act 2010 requires the school to consult “such persons as they think appropriate” on whether the school should become an academy.

The Governing Body of St Vincent de Paul Catholic Primary School is consulting with all key stakeholders about the proposed academy conversion including parents, staff, pupils and other schools over a 4-week period commencing Monday 29th April 2024 to Friday 24th May 2024.

Does the school need agreement from the Local Authority to become an Academy?

No. The Academies Act 2010 has removed the need for the Local Authority to approve plans for the school to become an Academy.

What form of relationship will exist between the Local Authority and the school?

This is for individual Academies or Catholic Academy Trusts to determine – there is no statutory requirement for any formal relationship between Local Authorities and Academies.

Academies are directly funded and accountable to central government (Department for Education and the Education Skills Funding Agency).

The Local Authority retains statutory duties for aspects of Special Educational Needs, admissions co-ordination and provision of home-to-school transport. Local Authorities are

also expected to play a key strategic role locally in areas such as pupil place planning admissions and sharing good practice.

The schools have good relationships with Hertfordshire County Council and will seek to maintain and cultivate this in the future.

Are Academies subject to the same Ofsted inspection regime?

Schools converting to Academies will continue to be inspected by Ofsted and the CSI in the same way they are now.

What is the process for St Vincent de Paul Catholic Primary School to join the Diocese of Westminster Academy Trust?

The conversion process includes the following key legal processes:

- Agreeing the Memorandum and Articles of Association to establish the Company and register it at Companies House.
- Putting in place a separate Supplementary Funding Agreement (SFA) for each School.
- Transferring the employment of the staff from the Governing bodies to the Diocese of Westminster Academy Trust following a statutory process (TUPE*).
- Agreeing a Commercial Transfer Agreement for the transfer of assets and contracts from the local authority to Diocese of Westminster Academy Trust.
- Arranging a 125-year lease for any land owned by the LA, and a Church Supplementary Agreement for the buildings owned by the Diocese.
- Establishing finance systems and operations procedures across the schools.

(*TUPE = Transfer of Undertaking – Protection of Employment)

Section 2: Staff Issues

Does the school have to hold a TUPE consultation with staff?

Under employment legislation the Governing Body which is the current employer will need to conduct a TUPE consultation with all staff (both teaching and non-teaching) and the relevant unions as part of the staff transfer process.

Can staff pay and conditions change?

No. Whilst Academy Trusts do have the freedom to vary terms and conditions from national ones, the Diocese of Westminster Strategy binds its Catholic Trust to abiding by teachers' and support staff pay and conditions.

If the school becomes an Academy, who takes responsibility for the pension arrangements?

Teachers working in an academy fall within the scope of the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS), just as if they were employed in a Local Authority maintained school.

Non-teaching staff at schools are able to join the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS). This is administered by Hertfordshire County Council as at present.

Employees will pay the same rate as at present under both schemes, subject to any nationally imposed changes.

How will the TUPE process work and what specific responsibilities does the Governing Body have?

As the current employer, the Governing Body is responsible for informing and consulting with staff.

The Governing Body is responsible for informing DOWAT, as the new employer, of any 'measures' which will impact on their employment.

There are none planned in this case and the Diocese of Westminster Academy Trust will write to each member of staff confirming that they will transfer under existing terms and conditions.

Section 3: Finance

Will we get more money as an Academy?

Academies receive the same amount of per-pupil funding as they would receive from the Local Authority as a maintained school.

There are other financial advantages, for example VAT is recoverable on normal business activities and capital works.

The Government is clear that becoming an Academy should not bring about a financial advantage or disadvantage to a school. However, academies do have greater freedom to decide how they use their entire budget, and Multi Academy Trusts are able to identify efficiency savings from enhanced partnership working.

Section 4: Admissions

Will becoming an Academy affect our admissions arrangements?

When a school becomes an Academy, it also becomes an admission authority responsible for its own admission arrangements. As the school is joining a Multi Academy Trust – DOWAT will become the admissions authority.

Schools will continue to make decisions about their admissions arrangements at school level.

In the same way as maintained schools, all academies and their schools are required to adopt clear and fair admission arrangements in line with the admissions law and the School Admissions Code.

Will Academies have to be a part of the annual coordinated admissions scheme? E.g. when the LA needs to find places for families relocating to the area etc.

Yes - Academy Funding Agreements require them to be in local coordination. That means although the academy will apply its own admission arrangements, the LA will send out offers of places. The Local Authority also coordinates admissions for in-year applications and applications for year groups other than the normal point(s) of entry. This will not affect the Academy's right to determine which applicants have priority for admission. Academies are also required through their Funding Agreements to participate in local fair access protocols which help to ensure that no child is without a school place.

Will the Academies decide to bring in academic selection?

No, there will be no introduction of selection. Schools which already select some or all of their pupils may continue to do so when they become Academies, but schools becoming Academies cannot decide to become new selective schools.

Section 5: Special Education Needs

Will our responsibilities in relation to Special Educational Needs and exclusions change?

No. Responsibilities as an Academy in relation to Special Educational Needs and exclusions will be just the same as they are now as a maintained school.

Can a child with a statement of Special Educational Needs nominate an academy as their school of choice?

Yes. These arrangements and related processes must at all times comply with the School Admissions Code, and responsibilities as an Academy in relation to Special Educational Needs will be just the same as they are now as a maintained school.

Does becoming an Academy change the way in which exclusions are dealt with?

Academies are required by their Funding Agreement to follow the law and guidance on exclusions as if they were maintained schools. This includes reporting exclusions to the Local Authority. However, Academies do not have to consult the Local Authority before deciding to exclude a pupil and they can arrange their own independent appeals panel.

Section 6: Further Information

How do I find out more about the proposals?

The Headteacher and Chair of Governors will host a consultation meeting for Parents on Monday 13th May at 5pm.

Section 7: Response Form

If you would like to respond to this consultation you have 3 options:

1) Link to Google Response Form:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSffQW2AnojAJ3wT0r8PGx6MIF12sPz-ldN_Ike3bclo4I9LPA/viewform?usp=pp_url

2) Complete the form below, please return it by email to:

consultation@stvincent.herts.sch.uk

3) Collect a paper copy from the School Office.

Responses must be returned by 9am, 24th May 2024.

***Mr John Sloan
Chair of Governors
St Vincent de Paul Catholic Primary School
29th April 2024***

St Vincent de Paul Catholic Primary School

Academy Consultation RESPONSE FORM

1) Please tick the box(es) that best represent you?	
Parent	
Employee at the School	
Member of the Community/Local Resident	
Local Authority Employee	
Other	

2) Do you agree that St Vincent de Paul Catholic Primary School should convert to an Academy and join the Diocese of Westminster Academy Trust (by entering into a Funding Agreement with the Secretary of State)?	
Strongly agree	
Agree	
Undecided	
Disagree	
Strongly disagree	

Please give your reasons below

3) Do you have any other comments to make about the proposal for St Vincent de Paul Catholic Primary School to convert to an Academy and join the Diocese of Westminster Academy Trust