

**Proposed Academy  
Conversion of St Vincent  
de Paul Catholic Primary  
School**

**Consultation Report for  
the Governing Body**

June 2024

**Document Control Sheet**

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**APPENDIX A – ST VINCENT DE PAUL CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL CONSULTATION FAQ**

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**APPENDIX C – QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FROM THE CONSULTATION MEETINGS**

## 1. Introduction

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In September 2017, the Diocese of Westminster published its strategy for Catholic Academy Trusts <http://rcdow.org.uk/education/academies-/>

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

The Governors and Headteacher of St Vincent de Paul Catholic Primary School (SVPCPS) have been considering the benefits of converting to an Academy for some time and have thoroughly researched the implications and benefits of converting for the school, including commencing collaborative work with The Diocese of Westminster Academy Trust (DOWAT).

A first step to taking this further was to complete the Diocese's Due Diligence process, including independent Finance and Standards reports. The Diocese Project Board subsequently confirmed that the school had met the requirements and issued the Diocese Letter of Consent to convert allowing the school to submit their application to convert and join DOWAT in December 2023.

In parallel to this, the Governors and Headteacher of the school passed a resolution to submit a conversion application to the Regional Directors (RD) Headteachers Board (HTB) to apply to become an Academy within DOWAT.

The school is awaiting the outcome of its application to the Regional Director submitted in March 2024.

The school embarked on the conversion process in February 2024 including a consultation exercise with the school's stakeholders in April and May 2024.

The purpose of governance is to provide confident, strategic leadership and to create robust accountability, oversight, and assurance for educational and financial performance. The Governors of SVPCPS firmly believe that they know what is best for the school and wished to invite comments from stakeholders on this proposal.

This report therefore sets out results of the consultation exercise commissioned by the Governors to listen to the views of stakeholders.

A meeting of the Governing Body in July 2024 will consider the findings of this report.

## 2. Scope and timing of Stakeholder Consultation

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The Governors devised and implemented a consultation exercise which sought the views of parents, staff, and the wider community on whether the school should become an Academy and join DOWAT.

The consultation period opened on Monday 29 April 2024 and ended on Friday 24<sup>th</sup> May 2024.

## 3. Methodology

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The Governors of SVPCPS developed a consultation plan and FAQs leaflet, which identified all the school's stakeholders to be contacted at the start of the exercise and provided them with background information about the Diocese CAT Strategy and DOWAT to inform the debate.

The Headteacher wrote to all parents and staff on 29 April 2024 to start the consultation exercise, invite them to attend consultation meetings and direct them to accessing the consultation leaflet on the school's website.

Staff and parents were invited to attend consultation meetings to find out more about the proposed conversion to an Academy and DOWAT.

Staff had previously received regular updates from the Headteacher on the Governing Body's research into the benefits of Academisation over many months at regular staff meetings and had the opportunity to ask questions.

Emails were also sent to both officer and elected representatives of Hertfordshire County Council, as well as the local MP, neighbouring Secondary, Primary and Nursery Schools and other partners.

The consultation materials also contained a response form which stakeholders were invited to complete and submit by the end of the consultation period.

The Consultation Leaflet produced by Governors is attached as **Appendix A** to this report.

#### 4. Consultation Meeting Chronology

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The letters to parents and staff invited them to submit questions, and to attend the appropriate consultation meetings scheduled below:

- Staff – Monday 13 May at 3.30pm; and
- Parents – Monday 13 May at 5 pm

The meetings were attended by the Headteacher, Governors, and Director of Primary Improvement for DOWAT and the Academy Implementation Officer from the Diocese.

The staff meeting was attended by 14 members of staff and the parents meeting was attended by 9 parents.

The Headteacher gave a presentation covering issues such as the Diocese's vision for the CAT programme and the advantages of joining DOWAT, why this is being considered now, the conversion process and next steps.

The Director of Primary Improvement for DOWAT explained the vision, values, and approach of the CAT.

The full presentation is enclosed as **Appendix B** to this report.

Attendees were then given an opportunity to ask any questions they might have.

The questions asked and answers provided at the above meetings is included as **Appendix C** to this report.

#### 5. Completed Questionnaires

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14 completed questionnaire was returned

- 2 stakeholders (14.3%) 'Strongly Agreed' with the proposal
- 6 stakeholders (42.9%) 'Agreed' with the proposal
- 1 stakeholder (7%) was undecided about the proposal
- 5 stakeholders (35.7%) 'Strongly Disagreed' with the proposal

## 6. Findings from the Consultation Questionnaires

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### **Respondents were asked to consider the proposal that St Vincent de Paul Catholic Primary School should convert to an Academy and join the DOWAT**

Respondents offered the following comments:

- “I would need to be better informed/”
- “Logical step to join DOWAT, especially considering links to JHN who are members of same academy trust. Collaborative working within schools in the trust will only strengthen over coming years.”
- “1. The number of hours/directed time can be increased and teaching staff may be required to work outside/more than the current 1265 hours because they will no longer be obliged by statute to follow those rules, so it can change at the whim of whoever is in charge in the future.  
2. There is no statutory obligation to follow the National School teacher pay provisions.  
3. Unqualified teaching staff can be hired to replace qualified teachers making our qualifications irrelevant and cheaper to hire than qualified teachers.  
4. Academies can go bust and can be transferred to /or can be transferred to another MAT.  
5. Once you become an academy it is currently irreversible.  
6. The Teaching unions oppose academisation.  
7. Research shows that joining an academy does not necessarily improve academic attainment.  
8. Financially in the long term we will not be better off as Academies tend to spend less over time on teaching staff and educational support than LA maintained schools.”
- “To allow more access to funding”
- “It sounds like a good option for the school and wider catholic community now and in the future.”
- “Over time, the terms and conditions that we currently enjoy will deteriorate for example I believe that TA's that retire/leave will not be replaced due to costs.”
- “It seems beneficial for the school.”
- “Over time our terms and conditions will deteriorate over time.”
- “I understand what it means to join a multi academy trust, as required by the Diocese and the government.”
- “Because there could be some benefits of being part of a CAT with other local Catholic schools.”

## 7. Reflections on the Consultation

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The majority of respondents (57%) ‘Strongly Agreed’ or ‘Agreed’ with the proposal.

Some of the questions submitted using the online responses form were addressed in the FAQ, as well as in the PowerPoint presentation given at both meetings and made available on the website.

In some cases, consultees who asked these questions also did so at the meeting and received assurances on the points raised. Questions submitted in advance of the meetings were addressed at the meeting. Others may not have been able to attend the events to ask these in person.

At the meetings the Diocese and Trust addressed these points and offered re-assurance on preserving staff terms and conditions, directed hours, use of unqualified teachers, as well as Admissions, Curriculum and Finance matters.

Both meetings covered a wide range of issues and were positive and engaging in nature.

The 14 responses should be seen in context of nearly 60 staff and parents representing over 440 pupils who were invited to submit comments.

The lack of opposition to the proposal from the majority of staff and parents who did not complete an online response form indicates that St Vincent de Paul Catholic Primary School community has been well informed on the proposed changes and benefits of joining the DOWAT.

The staff and parents' response to the consultation was generally positive and no significant concerns were identified which had not been anticipated by Governors, DOWAT and the Diocese and addressed by the Diocese's CAT strategy and approach of DOWAT.

## 8. Summary

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This report summarises the findings of the genuine, open, and honest consultation exercise undertaken by Governors to ascertain the views of parents, staff, and other stakeholders on the conversion of SVPCPS to an Academy and to join DOWAT.

This report evidences the comprehensive approach taken to raise awareness of the consultation exercise in the community, to provide background information on the issues and to host staff and parents' meetings to allow stakeholders to find out about the Diocese's Strategy and ask questions.

Although the majority of respondents (eight) were in favour of the proposal, with one undecided, the number of returned response forms was a little disappointing.

The consultation findings summarised in this report are one of a range of factors that the Governors will consider when making a final decision on the way forward. Other factors include the benefits the school stands to gain, as well as the request by the Archbishop that school convert to 'protect, secure and develop' Catholic Education.

The range of questions asked at the parents and staff meetings (and listed in **Appendix C**) was wide ranging, reassuring and positive. The questions and answers illustrate the willingness of attendees to engage with the Headteacher, Governors and the DOWAT on this matter.

The school and Trust should continue to communicate with staff and parents about this to ensure that the community remains updated and engaged.

## 9. Acknowledgements

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The Governors and Headteacher of SVPCPS would like to express their gratitude and appreciation for the staff and parents who took part in the consultation by listening to the presentations, asking clarification questions and who took the time to contribute their views.

## 10. Recommendations

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It is recommended that the Governors of SVPCPS:

- (i) Approve the contents of this report.
- (ii) Recognise that they have fulfilled their duty to undertake a compliant Statutory Section 10 stakeholder consultation exercise on the proposed conversion.
- (iii) Publish this report on the school's website as a record of the consultation and feedback to the participants and wider stakeholders.
- (iv) Continue to work with DOWAT to ensure that the fears expressed by consultees about loss of independence, personal touch and sense of belonging are avoided; and that the school retains its ethos, charism and uniqueness within the CAT.
- (v) Continue to monitor progress, share updates and engage with staff and parents on this matter;
- (vi) Proceed to the next stage of the conversion process not having identified any barriers to the schools' conversion and proposal to join DOWAT.