

## **ST JOHN'S MEADS CHURCH OF ENGLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL: PROPOSED CONVERSION TO ACADEMY STATUS WITHIN THE DIOCESE OF CHICHESTER ACADEMY TRUST (DCAT)**

### **MORE FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

#### **Why is St John's Meads in a position where it needs support? Why can't the headteacher be given time to address the issues? How does joining DCAT help?**

There are a number of factors that have led to low outcomes at the end of KS2 over the past few years and all schools are facing financial challenges. Changes to the primary curriculum and to the way in which children and schools are assessed were challenging for many schools and particularly for our staff being in a small school.

Mrs Weeks appreciates parents' and carers' support but the time available to a headteacher in a small school is constrained by the wide range of other issues that need to be managed including finance, maintenance, services and contracts. Joining DCAT will mean that some of the additional responsibilities will be managed centrally, without the school losing its ability to make decisions about its priorities and will provide additional support for school improvement. DCAT will work with Mrs Weeks to address the school improvement priorities and ensure that all children achieve their God-given potential, including in the core elements of the curriculum. This will help to ensure that change continues and is sustainable.

#### **Wouldn't it be better to stay with the local authority?**

The local authority is fully supportive of the governors' proposal that St John's Meads converts to academy status. We are aware that there is a lack of capacity within the LA to continue the offer of effective support that the school needs to ensure that all children achieve their potential. The local authority response to the dip in results has been to provide some additional funding for interventions but at the same time, there has been an increase in its monitoring of the actions that the school is putting in place, so that Mrs Weeks not only has to lead change but spend time preparing to report on that change and its impact. This is not a criticism of the local authority, but a reflection of the funding and personnel constraints placed on them. The local authority fully supports the proposal for us to convert to academy status within DCAT so that the school can secure practical ongoing, bespoke support.

#### **How does DCAT fund the support it provides?**

DCAT will take 5% of the budget allocated to the school by the Government to cover the costs of the services it provides. This 'top slice' does not apply to SEN and Pupil Premium funding as well as any income generated directly by the school (e.g. grants etc). The school already has to buy many services, including HR, payroll, financial support and audit from ESCC but as an academy, these particular services would be included in the 5%. A school's ability to spend on its own priorities therefore remains the same within DCAT as it would be with the local authority.

#### **Can you guarantee that DCAT will continue to maintain funding, including for pupils with SEND?**

National pressures on funding for schools are well publicised. There can be no guarantees that the Government will maintain current levels of funding but DCAT is committed to supporting every child and to ensuring that the needs of all pupils are met.

#### **What will the conversion process cost the school?**

Nothing. The Government provides a grant of £25,000 to the Trust for each school that converts to cover the costs of making the change.

**Isn't the local authority in a better position to deal with any emergencies that arise and secure greater economies of scale in goods and services?**

DCAT keeps reserves at a level to enable it to respond to any emergencies that arise within its schools. All schools are also fully insured. Multi academy trusts can secure economies of scale by purchasing services for the trust as a whole rather than as individual institutions and can find more effective ways of providing some services, including by appointing specialists rather than buying them in.

**I've read that academies have much higher staff turnover and lower morale. Is that a risk here?**

Staff in DCAT schools are all positive about the support that the Trust provides; turnover is low and staff absence has reduced. DCAT schools are more able to fill the posts they advertise than other schools locally. DCAT works with staff and supports them to develop and improve their own practice; it does not impose ways of working or a specified curriculum.

**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.

**The information circulated by the school is all positive about the proposal. That can cause suspicion and a concern that the school and Trust are hiding the downsides. 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 the school's ethos and values and our commitment to ensuring all children achieve their potential 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 Weeks 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.

**The school has been considering this change for years and is only asking parents now. Will our views be taken into account?**

The Board of Governors has a statutory responsibility to review, on a regular basis, how the school is performing and whether any change might support improvements. Our conclusion in 2016, having experienced two partnerships and considered the possibility of Federation, was that it would be very beneficial to appoint our own headteacher who would be full time in school in order to focus on our school, leading and managing staff and driving school improvement. Having appointed Mrs Weeks, governors considered, with her full involvement, whether we should now explore academy status. We began to do so in January this year, secured support from the Diocese, the local authority and DCAT and consulted parents at the beginning of June.

Following questions and comments from parents and carers, we have extended the consultation period to 12 July. All the responses will be summarised into a report for governors and this will be considered carefully on 18 July when governors will decide whether to go forward with the proposal to convert to an academy within DCAT. We will keep all parents informed of the outcome of that meeting. If governors decide to proceed then we will share further information about the process with parents and carers.