

St John's Meads Church of England Primary School

Proposal to convert to academy status within the Diocese of Chichester Academy Trust

Summary of key points

Voluntary Aided Status – In response to questions about the links between the school and the church:

St John's Meads is a Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School, established by the Church to serve the local community. A Church of England school, like community schools, is funded through the Local Authority, but the buildings are owned by the Diocese of Chichester. St John's Meads is subject to Ofsted inspections but in addition, there are Church inspections (SIAMS). RE is a statutory subject and teaching on other faiths is covered as part of the curriculum. A majority of governors are 'Foundation' governors, appointed by the Diocese with a specific role to support the Christian foundation and ethos of the school and to ensure that Christian values and ethos are both reflected and protected in any proposals for change. There is a legal obligation for the Diocese of Chichester to agree formally to any academy trust that a Church school might join.

KS2 Outcomes – in response to questions about SATS results and why our school needs support:

Our school is committed to supporting every aspect of a child's learning and development, but our outcomes at the end of KS2, as measured by the Government, have fallen significantly over the past 3 years and were well below the average national expected standards

The staff at St John's Meads have worked incredibly hard last year, alongside intensive support from the LA, to ensure that the outcomes for Year 6 this year were an improvement on those in previous years. However, although the 2019 results were in line with the national average, governors have been notified that the progress that the Y6 children made at the end of KS2 in 2019 was "*significantly worse than the national average*". Mrs Weeks, the Board of Governors and the LA all agree that it is vital to sustain and build on the improvements made this year. The LA continues to have concerns about our school, but because of the way the LA is restructuring its support to schools, it cannot provide the support that we all agree is required to sustain improvement. Therefore, it is vital that we move forward and identify the best possible ways to support our staff and continue to improve outcomes for the children.

KS2 outcomes – in response to why standards have fallen in the past few years:

St John's Meads was rated 'Good' by Ofsted in 2011 and as a result, the LA asked the school to partner formally with other schools. Under this arrangement the leadership structure was changed with an executive headteacher working to support improvement in other schools. For 5 years this arrangement continued with St John's Meads school working in 2 different partnerships and during that time the governors also explored a Federation. For a number of reasons, those partnerships were not successful for St John's Meads and during that time both quality of teaching and outcomes for children declined. This was not helped by national changes to the curriculum and how children's progress was being assessed. We now have a headteacher who is committed to improving outcomes and there must be a structure in place to support her and the staff. The process of seeking and brokering support for the school through future formal or informal partnerships— even where other schools are interested in doing so takes time and effort and lacks the formal structure and wider expertise required.

It is for these reasons that governors have explored conversion to academy status as an option to secure the best possible long term future for the school in an ever-changing educational landscape. It was important to find an academy trust, with a proven track record of primary school improvement, whose values match our own. It also needed to be a trust that will work in close partnership with the school, supporting staff and children to improve where we need to do so, respecting and celebrating our identity and enabling us to continue to serve the local community.

Academies – in response to concerns expressed about academies:

There are some general principles that apply to all academies: 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 **exactly the same responsibilities** for children with special educational needs, pupils in receipt of pupil premium and for admissions.

It is important to note that although the same general principles apply to all academies, Academy Trusts fulfil their responsibilities in different ways and it is not therefore possible to generalise about the behaviour of other “Academies.” That is why the focus should be on what is being proposed by DCAT and why joining this particular academy trust would benefit our school.

DCAT – in response to concerns about SEND provision and accountability:

When considering what DCAT has to offer our school, it is important to consider the facts and to look at their website to understand how they would work with and support our school.

DCAT will not ‘damage SEND provision’ for the children at St John’s Meads. This academy trust has a strong record of improving results for children in their Primary schools and that success helps to ensure continued support from the DfE for the Trust and its growth. As DCAT’s structures and policies focus on working with schools to grow and develop, their staff would work proactively with our school, ensuring that all children achieve their full potential.

Whilst DCAT Trustees are accountable for each of their academies and employ all the staff, they work closely with school governors and leaders to ensure that schools continue to work within the Ofsted framework and to serve their local community. The headteacher would still be in control of the day to day operational running of the school, leading, managing and recruiting staff. Governors would still have delegated responsibilities as a local board and this would still include a staff governor and parent governors. The local board of governors would continue monitoring and supporting the headteacher. If we convert to academy status, you will experience very little practical difference in the daily life of the school.

Staff – In response to questions about staff and their terms of employment:

Staff terms of employment, pay and conditions would remain unchanged if we convert to academy status with DCAT. All our staff would transfer on existing terms and conditions protected under the TUPE regulations and DCAT continues to pay all its staff on national terms and conditions.

Staff would benefit from the required support and professional development that DCAT will provide and the opportunities to work with other staff in DCAT schools, but only where it makes sense for them to do so. There is no proposal for staff to be shared with other schools and no intention to employ unqualified teachers.

Most importantly, the welfare and well-being of all staff remains a priority. As part of DCAT, there would be regular opportunities for Mrs Weeks to meet with other headteachers and Mrs Cork, our SENDCo would be invited to meet with other SENDCos. This would provide mutual support and encouragement and opportunities to share best practice that would impact on all staff and children.

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