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Wednesday 4th October 2023

**Henshaw C of E Primary School Q&A Document**

**1. Why is Henshaw considering becoming an Academy?**

Many schools are choosing to take advantage of academy status. Greenhead and Henshaw Primaries (our Federation) are not obliged to convert to an academy at this stage and can continue to be maintained directly by Northumberland County Council if we choose. However, the Governors and Senior Leadership Team are committed to be always seeking to improve upon what we are able to offer our children and staff and think that joining an Multi Academy Trust (MAT) may enable us to do so in various ways.

We are therefore considering converting to become an academy. After considering many other academy trusts we could join we believe we are a good fit with the Durham and Newcastle Diocesan Learning Trust (the Trust). Our Federation schools are already closely linked with the Diocese and we already have close working relationships with the key people in the Trust. Following conversations with them we believe that:

1. The school effectiveness support being offered by the Trust would be more and better than we currently receive from the Local Authority. In particular, it would include an additional three days of practical support from a qualified Ofsted inspector. This would be a great benefit to us.
2. Closer working with other schools with a similar ethos and consequent sharing of knowledge and resources.
3. We believe that the services provided by the Trust will be better and better value for money than those currently provided by the Local Authority.
4. There are potential financial benefits as we could take advantage of shared buying of services and increased negotiating power thereby releasing resources for curriculum.
5. We would retain our own unique ethos and a large degree of local autonomy, things which tend to be lost with other MATs.

You may be aware that the Government had in its ‘White Paper’ originally stated the aim that all schools should be part of, or in the process of joining, strong multi-academy trusts by the year 2030. The Schools Bill, which was intended to implement the White Paper, has now been abandoned on the whole but the Government has confirmed it remains committed to the objectives outlined in the White Paper and will continue to progress academy plans as much as it can without legislation.

As a result of the initial deadline to join a MAT by 2030 the Governors have been considering, for some time, whether we ought to join a MAT which shares our values and which would work hard with us to continue improving the schools. Whilst the strict deadline to do so has been removed, at least for now, with a continuing move towards an academy model and the potential for cuts in central government funding to local authorities leading to cuts to local services which could affect schools in the future, we wish to be proactive in looking towards the academy structure to ensure that a decision is taken in the best interests of our Federation irrespective of any Governmental pressure.

**2. What is an Academy?**

Academy schools are state funded schools in England which are directly funded by central government (specifically, the Department for Education) and independent of direct funding and control by the Local Authority.

Academies were initially established through the Learning and Skills Act 2000. However, the number of schools converting to academy status only really started to gather pace following the passing of the Academies Act 2010. There are now over 9,400 academies and the recent White Paper included the aim for all schools to become part of a strong academy Trust (or have plans to join one) by 2030. As stated above the Schools Bill intended to implement this White Paper has now been abandoned but the Government has made clear its commitment to the aims in the White Paper and the academy system.

**3. What is the Durham and Newcastle Diocesan Learning Trust (the Trust)?**

The Durham and Newcastle Diocesan Learning Trust (the Trust) exists to enable Church of England Schools to continue to achieve educational excellence through Christian based ethos and values.

The Trust was born out of the vision of the Durham Diocesan Board of Education to give a further option to both Diocesan and community schools who wished to seek an academy solution, with the launch of the original Durham Diocesan MAT in November 2017.  This vision was expanded in 2020 to reflect existing partnership working with the Newcastle Diocesan Education Board and enable the Trust to also become an option for schools within the Newcastle Diocesan area.  In November 2020 the Trust formally changed its name to become the Durham and Newcastle Diocesan Learning Trust and amended its Articles and Membership to reflect this wider scope and commitment from both Diocesan Education Boards.   The Trust currently contains seventeen Church of England Primary schools including Newbrough Church of England Primary School and Wark Church of England Primary School in Northumberland which are two of our local partner schools. As a Federation, both Henshaw and Greenhead are consulting on joining the Trust and we will remain Federated schools, whatever the outcome.

Our Federation of schools are both Church of England schools. The Church school system is managed and developed through individual dioceses, and each diocese has a Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) which is a statutory body. The Diocese of Newcastle covers three local authority areas (Northumberland, Newcastle and North Tyneside) and the Diocese of Durham covers seven local authority areas (Durham, Darlington, Stockton and Hartlepool as well as Sunderland, Gateshead and South Tyneside).

There are currently 49 church schools in the Diocese of Newcastle and 57 church schools in the Diocese of Durham, almost half of these are already academies. The two Dioceses operate a single Multi-Academy Trust - the Durham and Newcastle Diocesan Learning Trust (the Trust).

As church schools, our Federation is already supported by the Diocesan Director of Education as well as a team of advisors (the joint education team).

4. **Are any other church schools in our area considering joining the Trust?**

As set out above Newbrough Church of England Primary School and Wark Church of England Primary School in our partnership have already converted following consultation and our two Federated schools are entering this consultation now.

5.  **Are any other schools in our local area academies?**

Seventeen other church schools are also part of the Durham and Newcastle Diocesan Learning Trust. There are also other mixed academy trusts in Northumberland containing church schools as well as many non-church schools which are part of separate academy trusts unconnected with the Diocese. Our governing body considered various options before taking the decision to consult on joining the Trust including visiting and talking to several other schools and Trusts about the options and have concluded that the Newcastle Diocesan Learning Trust would be the best fit for our schools.

6. **Will a move to academy status mean a new name for the school?**

No. The schools will continue to be called Greenhead C of E Primary and Nursery School and Henshaw C of E Primary School, there is no intention to change the name of the schools. The two schools will still form the West Tyne Church Schools Federation.

7. **Will a proposed new academy have a new uniform?**

No. The uniform will not change.

8. **Will a proposed new academy still be open to the community?**

Yes. There will be no change to the current provision.

**9. What will be the impact on our children with special needs?**

There will be no change to the level of support provided. The school will continue to recognise that every child is different and has the right to be included as a valued, respected and equal member of the school community. All SEND services will continue to be managed by the Local Authority with budgets administered by the Local Authority. In addition, there are good support systems within the Trust for SEND coordinators and headteachers needing ideas or advice about supporting children with additional needs.

**10. Will the school hours be any different as an academy?**

Although it is highly unlikely that the school day will be changed, it is the decision of the Trust Board to decide this as they have the power to do so. This decision is usually delegated to the school specific ‘academy council’ of an academy, so there is no real change from our authority in this regard. Parents would be consulted prior to any change in school hours. No change is envisaged.

**11. Will pupils’ education be disrupted by a transition to academy status?**

No. When an academy is approved to go ahead, it will do so with minimal disruption to the staff and students. Most of the changes will take place behind the scenes with support from a dedicated team from the Trust.

**12. If we move to being an academy will this change what is taught?**

No. We would continue to offer the full range of National Curriculum subjects but with additional support from the Trust. OFSTED continue to inspect academies and their handbook for inspection is the same one as used in any other school. The academy would be expected to strive to be outstanding in both the statutory OFSTED (section 5) and the Church School (section 48) inspections. In other words, there may be no change in what or how pupils are taught; except that the move to becoming an academy is designed to ensure sustainable, secure and rapid improvement.

**13. Would there be an increased emphasis on religion and Christianity in a Diocesan academy?**

We would maintain our status as a Church School and the existing emphasis on our Christian values would not change, neither would our school promise or distinctive Christian ethos. Church schools are also subject to the statutory (section 48) Church School Inspection and this also would not change. Our school ethos and school promise would remain unchanged.

**14. What will this mean for our School finances?**

**14.1 How is an academy funded?**

Currently, all revenue funding goes directly to the Local Authority. The Local Authority (LA) takes a proportion of the money from the school budget to provide essential services to the school and the rest is delegated under the Local Management of Schools. Schools can, and do, buy additional services from the LA and other providers. As a result schools currently depend upon the local authority for many services such as school improvement, HR, finance, etc. This historically led to a dual system where the LA has taken the lead on school effectiveness whilst the Diocese has focused on the distinctive and inclusive characteristics of the school.

Academies receive a similar level of per-pupil funding as maintained schools, plus funding to meet additional responsibilities that are no longer provided for them by the Local Authority (LA). With the Trust, the money that would have been provided to the LA to run the school is provided directly to the Trust. The Trust will retain an agreed figure (usually around 6%) of the school budget in order to provide services to the academy including school effectiveness support, HR, governor support and finance support. Local authorities fund their core services in a similar way.

**14.2. Does this improve on current funding arrangements?**

It is anticipated that converting to an academy will leave our financial situation at least unchanged but may well put us in a better position. There is the potential for some financial gain due to the increased buying power across the Trust, sharing of services and resources throughout the Trust and the opportunity to compare and contrast services centrally to ensure we are obtaining the best value for money. However, this is something that we will be looking into thoroughly with the Diocese as part of this consultation procedure. If the figures were to show that we would be in a significantly worse financial position that would be a strong reason not to take the Academisation process further.

However, any decision to join the Trust is not motivated solely by money. Funding is available to cover the costs of the conversion process itself, which is provided by central government once the decision to convert has been approved. We may have opportunities to support and be supported by other schools and to benefit financially from doing so. In addition, the Trust Board may have access to capacity funding from the Department for Education as well as opportunities to bid for capital funding on an annual basis.

**15. What will this mean for Teachers and Staff?**

**15.1 What are the Terms and Conditions for staff?**

On conversion to academy status teachers and staff employed by the school will transfer with the same terms and conditions, via a formal TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment) process. In addition, conversion will not affect any union memberships.

**15.2 Who will employ teachers and staff following conversion?**

At present teachers and staff are employed by the Governing Body. Following conversion, teachers and staff will be employed directly by the Trust.

**15.2 Will the Trust employ non-qualified teachers?**

All class groups of pupils will be registered to a qualified teacher, as is the case in schools currently.

**16. Will the Board of Governors have less authority and control?**

Instead of a Governing Body there would be an Academy Council. This Academy Council would operate in a similar way to the Governing Body. The composition and powers of the Academy Council will be set out in a formal ‘Scheme of Delegation’ which allows the Trust board to delegate responsibilities to the Academy Council. There will continue to be (elected) parents on the Academy Council (as at present), together with Foundation representatives (representative appointed by the Diocese) and a staff representative as well as co-opted nominees. We would also look to retain one single local academy council across both our schools to continue the current federation and established joint working.

That said, the Trust may appoint additional council members, such as those provided from the local community, and may step in if the Academy Council is not performing its duties effectively. Our School and Academy Council would have considerable freedom and responsibility to take commercial and strategic decisions.

**17. What will this mean for standards?**

**17.1 Does the Trust have the capacity to raise educational standards?**

The purpose of this proposal is solely with a view to improving the educational offering to our children. The Trust has its own school improvement capacity for those schools choosing to become an academy which includes a member of the Diocesan Joint Education Team and consultants with a proven track record and capable of working at the highest levels. The Trust will offer 6 days of school improvement partner support including practical school improvement support and follow up every year.

**17.2 How will an academy raise achievement?**

The whole structure of the Multi Academy Trust is designed to challenge and support schools in equal measure. As stated above we would receive at least 6 days of school improvement support from a school improvement professional, irrespective of whether the school is outstanding or inadequate. This is more than we currently receive from the LA. The Trust will intervene rapidly in schools that are underperforming or on a downward trajectory based on OFSTED criteria.

Visits are not inspections but an opportunity for senior leaders to benchmark their judgments through shared lesson observation, work scrutiny, analysis of data, supported self-evaluation and school improvement planning. Indeed the outcome of these visits will confirm the development state of the school.

We will be holding a consultation meeting for parents on 17th October (at Greenhead Primary) and the 18th October (at Henshaw Primary) to discuss this proposal further and this will give you the opportunity to give any questions you may have to the Senior Leadership Team of the Federation or the CEO of the Trust, Paul Rickeard, who will also be in attendance.