

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

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why are you proposing to convert to academy status? And why now?

All schools need support to improve and in the current financial climate we are unable to secure the support we need from the Local Authority. Joining a Trust with the same vision and values will ensure that our distinctive Christian ethos is respected, protected and developed. In addition, there would be access to high-quality support for school improvement, the opportunity to share good practice and develop our environment. With support from the Trust, we can make the improvements we need to make in order that all our children achieve their God-given potential.

Why DCAT? Why not a more local, smaller partnership?

As a Voluntary Aided Church school we can only join a Church Trust and DCAT is the Trust for the Diocese of Chichester. Smaller partnerships would lack the capacity to support us in the same way and could become a distraction from our core purpose of improving our own school.

We are keen to work within DCAT to establish an Eastbourne and Bexhill hub which would bring the benefits of scale and proximity. We will be able to develop links with St Catherine's across a range of enrichment and extension activity but otherwise, in our first year within DCAT, we will be working with Trust leaders to focus on our own development. We expect that DCAT's support for St John's Meads will have the same impact on outcomes for our pupils, as well as ensuring that we continue to develop the whole child.

This is the pattern that DCAT has followed with all its schools and the presentation, shared with parents on 19th June and now on the school website, includes information on improvements in outcomes and progress in DCAT primary schools. The March School is not included because its first set of results within DCAT have not yet been released; but the school is open and plays a full and active part in DCAT activity. Their headteacher has developed practical resources for use across the Trust that will support headteachers develop curriculum and strategic plans ready for the new OfSTED framework.

What is DCAT's growth plan and how will it maintain standards as it grows?

DCAT has always had a cautious approach to growth. It does not actively market itself. But wants to be the Trust of choice for Church schools in the Diocese. DCAT is talking to several other schools, including in Eastbourne and Bexhill, but will give time to supporting schools as they join before admitting others. The hub model means that schools and DCAT work together in smaller groups so that whilst DCAT covers a large geographic area, schools experience DCAT on a smaller scale, based around the hub. Developing additional hubs will therefore support growth.

What guarantee is there that SEND provision will not be scrapped as has happened with other academies/trusts?

A complete guarantee. DCAT is fully committed to every child achieving their God-given potential. DCAT meets all its statutory responsibilities for children with special educational needs and disabilities, working in partnership with Local Authorities. SENDCos in DCAT come together to share best practice, work together and develop their own training.

Will you employ only qualified teachers to teach our children? What is staff retention in other DCAT schools?

DCAT is committed to employing qualified teachers and to paying all our staff on national terms and conditions. Staff turnover at current schools is low and staff absence has reduced. Staff welcome the support they receive from the Trust and feel valued.

Is this a governor decision or is it being forced? Is the school in financial difficulty?

This is a strategic decision that the Board of Governors is making. The school is not in financial difficulty, though in common with all schools the finances are coming under pressure. Within DCAT the school will be supported by an established and well qualified finance team and a range of other central services, including HR, payroll, legal advice and ICT technicians. Cost effective support will help to ensure that we can continue to focus the major part of the school's budget on teaching and learning. DCAT's aim is to ensure funds are focussed on the classroom and the core educational function.

There is very little difference between the funding for academies compared to LA schools. DCAT does however receive an annual capital allocation due to the size of the Trust to be spent on maintaining and improving school buildings which schools can access. Last year, this sum was just short of half a million pounds. DCAT is in good shape financially. Its accounts are audited each year and can be found on the Trust's website. The Trust complies fully with ESFA requirements on how its funds are spent.

What are the school development plans?

The school's development priorities are published on the school's website annually: <https://www.meads.e-sussex.sch.uk/school-development-priorities-2018-19/>

What other options have the governors considered?

Our only alternative is to stay as we are. Previously the school had considered federation and then another partnership with a different school. Having looked carefully at other options, Governors maintain that DCAT can offer so much more in order to support our journey of school improvement:

- The ability to work collaboratively with other DCAT schools and for our headteacher to be part of a group of very strong and experienced headteachers
- Resources and funds to practically support school improvement work
- The freedoms to maintain our vision and distinctiveness as a Church school whilst enjoying the securing and support of being part of an increasingly strong multi-academy trust
- Access to a number of funding streams that we cannot currently access
- The ability to use the best of existing training and access DCAT's staff training as well as requesting more specific support to the needs of St John's Meads
- The immediate use of high-quality HR and legal services

Once we become an academy, can this be reversed?

If we convert to academy status, we cannot revert to maintained school status.

What happens to school assets, eg field etc? How will these be protected and not sold off?

When schools convert to academy status, the land they occupy is made available under either a licence or a lease. The main school site and school field cannot be sold off.

What are the next steps and when will the change take place? Is it a foregone conclusion?

Governors are consulting now and encourage all parents, carers, staff and friends of the school to share their views using the online survey or on the paper form attached to the letter sent on 5th June 2019. All replies should be submitted by 5th July please.

We will publish a report on the outcome of consultation and Governors will meet later in July to consider that report and then decided on whether to continue with the conversion process.

In order to reach this stage in the process we have secured agreement both from DCAT, that we can join them, and support from the Diocese of Chichester for us to do so. We will also need the agreement of the Regional Schools' Commissioner.

The conversion process is summarised in the letter of 5th June and if we proceed this will occupy much of the Autumn term, with conversion sometime between 1st December 2019 and 1st February 2020.