Proposed Academy Conversion of St Catherine's Catholic Primary School

Consultation Report for the Governing Body

June 2025

Document Control Sheet

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Contents

1. INTRODUCTION 4
2. SCOPE AND TIMING OF STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION 4
3. METHODOLOGY 4
4. CONSULTATION MEETING CHRONOLOGY 5
5. COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRES 5
6. FINDINGS FROM THE CONSULTATION QUESTIONNAIRES 6
7. REFLECTIONS ON THE CONSULTATION 9
8. SUMMARY 10
9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 10
10. RECOMMENDATIONS 10

Appendices

APPENDIX A – ST CATHERINE'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL CONSULTATION FAQ

APPENDIX B – ST CATHERINE'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL CONSULTATION PRESENTATION

APPENDIX C – QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FROM THE CONSULTATION MEETINGS

1. Introduction

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 Catherine's Catholic Primary school 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 working with the All Saints CAT in the Diocese of Westminster.

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 the All Saints CAT in December 2025.

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 the All Saints CAT in December 2024. The School subsequently received its Academy Order from the Regional Director in January 2025.

The school embarked on the conversion process including a consultation exercise with the school's stakeholders between 28 April and 2 June 2025.

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 St Catherine's Catholic Primary School firmly believe that they know what is best for the school and wished to invite comments from stakeholders on this proposal.

This School 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 26th June 2025 will consider the findings of this report.

2. Scope and timing of Stakeholder Consultation

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 the All Saints CAT.

The consultation period opened on 28 April and ended on 2 June.

3. Methodology

The Governors of St Catherine's Catholic Primary School 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 All Saints CAT to inform the debate.

The Headteacher wrote to all parents and staff on 28 April 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 the All Saints CAT.

Emails were also sent to both officer and elected representatives of the London Borough of Barnet, 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

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

- Staff – online on 8 May at 6.30pm; and
- Parents – 13 May at 6.30pm.

The meetings were attended by the Chair of Governors, Headteacher and the Diocese's Academy Support Officer.

The staff meeting was attended by almost 40 members of staff, CEO of All Saints Catholic Academy Trust and 2 governors; and the Parents meetings were attended by 23 parents, 3 governors and 3 staff.

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

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

Despite the consultation closing on 2 June, the consultation questionnaire remained available to stakeholders on 3 June, and several forms were submitted on that date. To ensure transparency, all submissions have been included, however differentiation has been made between responses received during the consultation period, and after it had closed.

During the consultation period:

17 completed questionnaires were returned

- 1 stakeholder 'Strongly agreed' with the proposal
- 1 stakeholder 'Agreed' with the proposal
- 4 stakeholders 'Disagreed' with the proposal
- 6 stakeholders 'Strongly Disagreed' with the proposal
- 5 stakeholders were undecided about the proposal

3 June submissions:

15 completed questionnaires were returned

- 1 stakeholder ‘Strongly agreed’ with the proposal
- 1 stakeholder ‘Agreed’ with the proposal
- 5 stakeholders ‘Strongly Disagreed’ with the proposal
- 8 stakeholders were undecided about the proposal

All submissions:

32 completed questionnaires were returned

- 2 stakeholders ‘Strongly agreed’ with the proposal
- 2 stakeholders ‘Agreed’ with the proposal
- 4 stakeholders ‘Disagreed’ with the proposal
- 11 stakeholders ‘Strongly Disagreed’ with the proposal
- 13 stakeholders were undecided about the proposal

6. Findings from the Consultation Questionnaires

Q2) Respondents were asked to consider the proposal that St Catherine’s Catholic Primary School should convert to an Academy and join the All Saints CAT

The respondents who indicated that they either **‘Strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’** with the proposal, offered the following comments:

During the consultation period:

- Joining ASCAT could provide greater long-term stability and security for Catholic education at St. Catherine's. As mentioned in the letter, Cardinal Vincent Nichols has specifically encouraged this move to "protect, secure, and develop Catholic Education." In today's changing educational landscape, being part of a larger Catholic organization can help preserve the school's Catholic ethos and values against potential future policy changes or funding challenges.
- The consultation sounded as though it would be a positive move.

The respondents who indicated that they either **‘Strongly disagreed’ or ‘disagreed’** with the proposal, offered the following comments:

During the consultation period:

- I feel that should you join a CAT it should be a Barnet based one, serving the community you are in and not one based outside the area. This doesn’t sit right. You need to ask why haven’t the other local catholic schools all joined this- as it a clear there is a strong negative consensus, otherwise they would be holding this consultation. As a parent of children in 3 catholic schools locally I know this isn’t the case. Very bad decision for st Catherine’s.
- The academy consultation does not provide a comparison between the advantages and disadvantages of the current system and those of joining an academy, making it difficult to make an informed decision.
- It would no longer be a catholic school
- The school should remain under the local authority

- Motivation to do so is unclear. I don't see any threat which would request this changes in order to protect, secure and develop Catholic Education. Academies do not guarantee improvement, but academization is irreversible. 60% of academy trust are now operating at a loss. we need more transparency on St Catherine's situation to understand ASCAT would be beneficial.
- I'm concerned about the funding and resources that will come to St Catherine's if we become an academy.
- I don't think the benefits outweigh the negatives of leaving the local authority and worry about the legal aspects of joining a company whom the parents can't hold to account. I'm not convinced that academy models are the best option for schools. I also worry about the speed at which this is being pushed through.
- It will lose it catholic root and Catholics in the area may not get school places.
- Motivation and the advantages for St Catherine's are unclear. Barnet's Catholic schools are oversubscribed and well-funded. I see why working under a trust has certain administrative advantages, but to me these do not outweigh potential risks in the future. ASCAT made a lot of statements and promises, but those can be withdrawn at any time. Also transferring St Catherine's to another trust would make all this promises null and void. I fear for the future of an independent school.
- I believe it's much better for the school to remain a public school. Converting to an academy may restrict the school's decision-making and financial flexibility.

3 June submissions:

- It always seems like a negative path unfortunately. Having worked in an academy – one of the things that drew me to St Catherine's was that it was not part of an academy. Everything we do is for the school and the children. This often is not the case when academy trusts get involved.
- I believe academy schools are run in a business manner

The respondents who indicated that they were '**Undecided'** about the proposal, offered the following comments:

During the consultation period:

- I feel quite worried that the school may lose its identify. Also we may lose very important links with Barnet services such as Inclusion/SEND facilities.
- I am concerned that we will be funding other schools that are not fully subscribed in order to keep it open
- Not sure what is the best option for St Catherine's, sorry.
- Not enough information going forward about the financial status and teaching.

3 June submissions:

- I just haven't had the tine or a chance to engage with this and what it entails. Would appreciate more time.
- Don't understand all the pros and cons.
- Unfortunately not had enough time to fully research the options to reach a decision.
- Feel there has not been enough information how this will affect staff and pupils.
- The process seems very quick – only one term to consider all aspects
- I would like confirmation that teachers keep or exceed national pay & pensions. That's the big one for me. I worry about the quality of the teachers dropping. I can see the other benefits.

Q3) Respondents were given the opportunity to make any other comments about the proposed conversion.

The respondents who indicated that they either **'Strongly agreed' or 'agreed'** with the proposal, offered the following comments:

During the consultation period:

- 1. How will ASCAT ensure our school retains its unique character and teaching approach? 2. What percentage of our budget will go to central trust expenses and what services will we receive in return? 3. Will there be any changes to staffing structures or teacher contracts that might affect classroom stability?

The respondents who indicated that they either **'Strongly disagreed' or 'disagreed'** with the proposal, offered the following comments:

During the consultation period:

- You should investigate other means of generating income as this is what it comes down to. The only staff progression opportunities for the SLT.
- Westminster encourages school to academize since 2017. And still there must have been reasons why St. Catherine's didn't do this step in this last 8 years. We would have appreciated if this decision process which obviously went on for two years, would have been more transparent. What is the critical argument we must academize now? Which other academies did you consider? What were the pro and cons?
- I'm just strongly against it as I don't think it will be what's best for our kids.
- Wouldn't it be better for St Catherine's to be more aligned with the other Catholic schools in the borough of Barnet? Can you share which other trusts you looked at and why they were discounted?
- I am also worried about disadvantages for teachers and other staff. The explanations of how joining the trust would make hiring and retaining good staff easier have been fairly general and outlined advantages for other schools, but not for St Catherine's specifically. If the staff is not on board, hiring will indeed become much more difficult, for example if new staff would get different contracts than existing staff.

The respondents who indicated that they were '**Undecided'** about the proposal, offered the following comments:

During the consultation period:

- I hope that more time and consideration is taken and I feel being the first school in barnet maybe risky. Also, I read once you have academy status you cannot go back. Especially as all the other schools are in Hertfordshire rather than the London borough of barnet.

3 June submissions:

- I would also like to see the pledges & commitments. Especially on SEN.

The local authority did not provide a response to the consultation:

7. Reflections on the Consultation

The staff and parents' response to the consultation was mixed.

The majority of respondents (5 during and 8 after the consultation period) were undecided about the proposal, and a higher proportion were against than in favour of the proposal.

St Catherine's Governing Body are grateful to everyone who contributed to the recent consultation regarding the proposal for St Catherine's Catholic Primary School to become an academy and join the All Saints Catholic Academy Trust (ASCAT). We are grateful for the thoughtful and heartfelt responses received from across the community.
We have reviewed all submissions—including those received just after the official closing date—and would like to share some reflections and next steps.

What We Heard
The consultation highlighted a broad range of views:

- Some parents welcomed the opportunity to strengthen the school's Catholic identity and long-term stability.
- Others expressed concerns about timing, transparency, local identity, and the implications for staff, governance, and funding.
- A significant number of parents asked for more information before feeling confident in a decision.

Our Response
We would like to clarify a few key points in response to your feedback:

A Strategic Catholic Vision
This proposal is not just a local decision. It is part of the **Diocese of Westminster's wider strategy** to place all Catholic schools into strong Catholic Academy Trusts. Cardinal Vincent Nichols has supported this direction to **protect and develop Catholic education** amid a changing national landscape.
St Catherine's has been invited to be the first school in what the Diocese envisions as the *Barnet Hub of ASCAT*. This means we would lead and help shape a **local grouping of Catholic schools within the trust**, maintaining our identity and voice while benefiting from the support and stability of a larger Catholic family.

Catholic Ethos Will Be Strengthened
ASCAT is a trust built specifically for Catholic schools and governed in line with Catholic principles. Our Catholic mission, pastoral care, and community values will be **protected and enhanced**, not diluted.

Governance and Accountability
The school's governing body will continue to play a key strategic role. We will have representation at trust level to ensure St Catherine's interests are fully represented.

Support for Staff
Staff will retain their national pay, conditions, and pensions. Joining ASCAT can enhance staff development opportunities and help attract and retain high-quality teachers.

Community Engagement

We recognise that some parents felt the consultation period was too short. While it met statutory requirements, we will reflect on how we can improve transparency and communication in future.

8. Summary

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 St Catherine's Catholic Primary to an Academy and to join the All Saints CAT.

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.

The number of returned response forms, alongside the majority of respondents being 'Undecided' was a little disappointing. The school and Trust should continue to communicate with staff and parents about this to ensure that the community remains updated and engaged.

However, 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 All Saints CAT on this matter.

9. Acknowledgements

The Governors and Headteacher of St Catherine's Catholic Primary School 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

It is recommended that the Governors of St Catherine's Catholic Primary School:

(i) Approve the contents of this report.

(ii) Recognise that they have fulfilled their duty to undertake a 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 share updates and engage with staff and parents on this matter; and

(v) Proceed to the next stage of the conversion process not having identified any barriers to the schools' conversion and proposal to join the All Saints CAT.