



Bishop Challoner  
Catholic School

# **Proposed Academy Conversion of Bishop Challoner Catholic School**

## **Consultation Report for the Governing Body**

February 2024

### ***Document Control Sheet***

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## **1. Introduction**

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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 Bishop Challoner Catholic School have been considering the benefits of converting to an Academy for some time, including collaborative work with other Catholic Schools in Hackney and Tower Hamlets to enhance collaboration.

A first step to achieving this 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 schools to submit their application to convert and form the Family 9 CAT in March 2023.

The Governors and Headteacher of Bishop Challoner Catholic School discussed the strategy, its implications and opportunities for the school and passed a resolution to submit a conversion application to the Regional Directors (RD) Headteachers Board (HTB) to proceed with the next phase of the conversion process.

The school embarked on the conversion process including a consultation exercise with the school's stakeholders, commencing in January 2024 having received its Academy Order from the RD in October 2023.

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 Bishop Challoner Catholic School firmly believe that they know what is best for the school and wished to invite comments from stakeholders on this proposal.

This report therefore sets out results of the consultation exercise commissioned by the Governors of Bishop Challoner Catholic School to listen to the views of stakeholders.

A subsequent meeting of the Governing Body by April 2024 will consider the findings of this report.

## **2. Scope and timing of Stakeholder Consultation**

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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 form the Family 9 CAT.

The consultation period opened on Monday 15 January 2024 and ended on Friday 9 February 2024.

## **3. Methodology**

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The Governors of Bishop Challoner Catholic 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 the Family 9 CAT to inform the debate.

The Headteacher wrote to all parents and staff on 15 January 2024 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 Family 9 CAT.

Emails were also sent to both officer and elected representatives of Hackney and Tower Hamlets, 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**

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

- Staff – Tuesday 23 January at 3.45pm; and
- Parents – Tuesday 23 January at 6pm

Prior to the staff meeting the Executive Headteacher, CEO Designate and Implementation Officer met with NASUWT and NEU staff union reps to explain the reasons for the proposed CAT and to answer questions.

The staff and parents meetings were attended by the Headteacher, the Chair of Governors, the CEO Designate for the Family 9 CAT and the Academy Implementation Officer from the Diocese.

The staff meeting was also attended by NASUWT and NEU staff union reps. The parents meeting was also attended by 5 members of SLT.

The staff meeting was attended by approximately 160 members of staff and the later meeting was attended by 20 parents.

The Headteacher gave a presentation covering issues such as the Diocese's vision for the CAT programme, the advantages of forming the Family 9 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**

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4 completed questionnaires were returned by stakeholders.

Of the 4 respondents:

- 2 (50%) respondents were undecided about the proposal
- 2 (50%) respondents 'Disagreed' with the proposal

#### **6. Findings from the Consultation Questionnaires**

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This section sets out the additional comments offered by the respondent.

**Q2) Respondents were asked to consider the proposal that Bishop Challoner Catholic School should convert to an Academy and join the Family 9 CAT**

The respondents who indicated that they were 'Undecided' about the proposal gave the following reasons:

- "How can I agree when the governing body have not provided any details or evidence to support their decision that converting to academy status is the best route for our school and will provide the best opportunities and outcomes for our pupils? The information issued to staff was a series of statements presented as fact without any weight behind them."
- "On the Diocese of Westminster "Academies Homepage NEW" webpage reference is made to the Diocese published *Families of schools: The Implementation of Catholic Academy Trusts (CATs)*. Page 15 of this document states that all academies within the CAT will be expected to contribute financially between 2.5% and 3% of their budget to the central CAT fund. A call to the LA has confirmed that schools within the LA current contribute less than 1% of the budget to the LA central services. Please can you provide the following information:
  - How much is the increased contribution to the academy trust?
  - How is this contribution to be spent?
  - What is the impact on the remaining finances of the school?
  - What is the consequential impact on the educational resources for the pupils at the school?"

The respondents who indicated that they 'disagreed' with the proposal, gave the following reasons:

- "Bishop Challoner is in a multi faith area and takes the majority of its pupils from non-catholic faith. It is not appropriate to form part of a new CAT especially if it means the increased pushing of Catholic Faith onto the majority non-catholics. Joining the CAT will not increase catholic recruitment simply because of the geographical location of the school in a largely non-Catholic borough. Additionally, there has been no information for parents on how this will impact the curriculum in place and this concerns me greatly."
- "How will converting to an academy increase the number of pupil allocations to Bishop Challoner and address the declining pupil numbers across the London boroughs? And how will this increase the number of Catholic applications in an increasingly non-Catholic borough? What evidence is there to show this will be the case?"

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

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

- "Why were no governors present (apart from the headteacher) at the consultation meeting to staff in January 2024? Do governors plan to share their 'vision' before a final decision is made?"

The respondents who indicated that they 'disagreed' with the proposal, offered the following additional comments:

- “I wish to know what plans there are for the curriculum as I understand Academies have more autonomy to set their own priorities and also what impact this will have on the pushing of the catholic faith onto non-catholic students in the school. Currently, some teachers show a total lack of respect for those who are non-Catholic and try to force them to join in prayers and berate them for not following the catholic faith which is inappropriate.”

In addition to the above **Appendix D** contains further questions submitted by NEU members.

## **7. Reflections on the Consultation**

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Some of the comments in section 6 from respondents misunderstand aspects of the proposed Family 9 Catholic Academy Trust and what will not change as a result of the school joining the CAT.

Notwithstanding this, the staff and parents’ response to the consultation at the meetings was largely positive and no significant concerns were identified which had not been anticipated by Governors, Family 9 CAT and the Diocese.

## **8. Summary**

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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 Bishop Challoner Catholic School to an Academy and to form the Family 9 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 was a low and those that replied were undecided or disagreed with the proposal.

The school and Trust should continue to communicate with staff, parents and unions about this to ensure that the community remains updated and engaged.

The range of questions asked at the parents and staff meetings (and listed in **Appendix C**) was positive and show the willingness of attendees to engage with Governors and the Family 9 CAT on this matter.

## **9. Acknowledgements**

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The Governors and Headteacher of Bishop Challoner Catholic 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**

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It is recommended that the Governors of Bishop Challoner Catholic 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, parents and unions on this matter; and
- (v) Proceed to the next stage of the conversion process not having identified any significant barriers to the schools' conversion and proposal to form the Family 9 CAT.