



St Joseph's Catholic Primary School



Catholic Voluntary Academy Status Parents - Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Catholic Voluntary Academy?

An Academy is a publicly funded independent school which does not select pupils by ability. A Catholic Voluntary Academy is an Academy operating under the authority of the Bishop and Trustees of the Diocese.

Why should St Joseph's seek to become a Catholic Voluntary Academy?

In recent years the Catholic Education Service has been in discussion with the Coalition Government regarding the Catholicity of our schools and how they can be safeguarded for the future. In particular the discussions explored how Academy status would ensure that all of the schools within our Diocese could be supported and protected. As a result the Catholic Education Service and the Bishops of England and Wales agreed that the exploration of Academy status was the correct one for its schools.

More recently, the Chair of the Catholic Education Service of England and Wales, Bishop Malcolm McMahon, announced that there were now no legal barriers to conversion for Catholic Voluntary Aided schools. In June 2011 Bishop John and Diocesan Trustees contacted all Headteachers and Chairs of Governors of Diocesan schools to encourage them to consider conversion to Catholic Voluntary Academy Status. The first schools in our Diocese converted on 1st July 2012, and many more have converted since.

Our Diocese requires us to convert as families of schools to protect the future of our learning communities. If we converted the model we would use is an Umbrella Trust, this would be set up for all schools in our Learning Community (St Pius X Catholic High School, Wath-upon-Dearne; Sacred Heart Catholic Primary Goldthorpe; St Michael & All Angel's Catholic Primary Wombwell; St Alban's Catholic Primary Denaby; Our Lady & St Joseph Catholic Primary Wath; St Helen's Catholic Primary Hoyland) to join if and when they decide investigate conversion to Catholic Voluntary Academy Status. St Pius X Catholic High School have already received the Bishop's permission to investigate and as part of St Pius' consultation process they will consult with parents of Y5/6 students in all of their partner primary schools.

A condition of Catholic schools becoming Catholic Voluntary Academies is that they sign up to a Partnership Agreement with all other Catholic Voluntary Academies in the Diocese. This was determined by our Diocese, and it secures Catholic teaching and Catholic values in the governance and leadership of our schools. This agreement will emphasise our preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, as well as our commitment to supporting other schools within the Diocese. Schools which are Good or Outstanding as judged by Ofsted and converting to Academy status must agree to support other less successful schools.

What would be different if St Joseph's became a Catholic Voluntary Academy?

St Joseph's would continue to operate in exactly the same way and therefore there would be no visible difference to students, parents and staff. We would continue to provide the best possible Catholic education for all our children. Academy status would give the school the freedom to move away from National Curriculum restrictions, however, the school will continue to provide a broad and rich curriculum that will meet the needs of all of our students.

Will there be any change to admission arrangements?

When a school becomes an Academy they take over the responsibility for admissions. As a voluntary aided school this is already the situation for St Joseph's. There will be no change to the admissions policy. Academies must meet all the mandatory conditions of the School Admissions Code which came into force on 1st February 2012.

Does becoming an Academy change the way in which exclusions are dealt with?

No, Academy status has no impact on the handling of exclusions or excluded pupils.

If you become an Academy, can you change your mind at a later date?

The rate of conversion to Academy status is increasing rapidly. It is likely that the majority of schools will be Academies in the not too distant future. This means that maintained schools (ie Voluntary Aided and Community Schools) will reduce in number. The length of the Academy contract, called the Funding Agreement, with the Secretary of State for Education lasts for seven years. That means notice of termination of the contract must be for a minimum of seven years.

Will the school receive more or less funding?

The Government has stated that Academies must not be advantaged or disadvantaged in terms of funding compared to other schools. What an Academy will be able to do is to spend the element of school budget which is currently retained by the Local Authority for services provided to the school or on behalf of the school. It is argued that by controlling this element of the funding, schools can achieve better value for money and therefore use this funding more effectively.

Will school funds be used to pay the costs of the work involved in converting to Academy status?

No. There is a specific 'start up' grant that is awarded from the Department for Education for the costs of conversion to Academy Status.

I've heard that Academies are independent schools – does this mean that you will be charging fees?

No. Academies are publicly funded independent schools but are not allowed to charge fees for education.

Do you intend to introduce Academy selection?

No.

Can a child with a Statement of Special Educational Needs nominate an Academy as their school of choice?

Yes.

How do I give my view to the school about becoming an Academy?

There will be several opportunities for you to express your view. We will arrange an information evening for parents. Following this additional documentation will be sent to parents informing them of times when you can come into school to discuss any concerns or issues you may have. In addition, we will publish information on our website and there will be times when you can contact us by telephone. You can e-mail us at: sjpr@rotherham.gov.uk or write to us at any time, please title your letter or email 'Academy'.