



# St. Cuthbert's RC VA First School

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## Frequently asked questions

### Why is the school moving into a large Trust rather than just staying as we are?

The Diocese and Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle oversee all Catholic academies/schools in the Diocesan region. The Diocese has been reviewing the organisation of its schools/academies, working with headteachers/governing bodies to consider how best to proceed in the long-term interests of all diocesan schools/academies. It has now decided on an updated policy which has been finalised under the direction of the Bishop. Its central aim is that all diocesan schools (i.e. 156 schools, educating 53,600 children) will become academies within four, regional Diocesan trusts, by July 2022. A trust is a group of academies coming together in one legal entity, to work in partnership for the good of all the academies in the trust, whilst retaining the autonomy/distinctiveness of each academy. The diocesan statement about this was circulated to parishes in December 2019, which explained that the policy implementation would happen in two stages:

Stage 1: consolidation of existing academies into the four regional trusts – completed December 2020.

Stage 2: conversion of catholic primaries to academy status within the four regional trusts – now underway

In the northern region of the Diocese, the Bishop Bewick Catholic Education Trust (BBCET) formerly known as Sacred Heart Partnership of Schools (SHPS), is the legal entity into which all northern Catholic academies will be consolidated. BBCET currently contains all five secondary schools within our region and 26 primary schools (as of 01/10/21). It is led by the Chief Executive Mrs Anita Bath. The trust is overseen by a Board of Directors who have oversight of all the academies in the Trust, though each individual academy has its own Local Governing Body, Headteacher and Leadership Team, to run the individual academies.

St Cuthbert's First School will join BBCET in Tranche 4 of Stage 2 to complete the expansion of the northern trust, the expected date for conversion to take place is 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022.

### What do we gain from joining this Trust?

Underpinning the Diocesan Academy Policy, is the desire and need to ensure the promotion, preservation, protection and future development of Catholic education. The larger trust model will ensure that the uniqueness of each individual school is celebrated and the unique contribution of each is recognised and appreciated. It will also mean that no individual school is left isolated or vulnerable in a rapidly changing educational environment. The aim is also to facilitate greater sharing, adding strength and capacity to the system and ensuring that all schools are supported.

The larger trust will result in a local network of committed and knowledgeable partner schools all working together in the sole interests of our children. We will be able to tap into a vast reservoir of experience and support from within our schools, to continue to raise standards in the future for the good of all schools. We will gain many advantages and benefits in terms of staff sharing expertise and collaboration, for instance, making the links between our primary and secondary schools even stronger and providing high quality school improvement support for our schools. As part of a larger trust, we will also gain enhanced financial support and funding from central government. For

example, grant funding for capital projects new buildings, building repairs etc) is currently made available automatically to larger trusts on an annual basis, whereas individual academies have to bid for capital funding as part of a highly competitive annual process. Being part of the trust, schools should, over time, be able to save money through the shared procurement of a wide range of support services.

The schools within the trust and the trust itself will remain highly accountable to both the Department for Education and Ofsted who will continue to ensure that each school is performing well and will continue to publish reports, for the benefit of parents, on the performance of each school within the trust.

### **Do we lose control over our school?**

No. Once consolidated into the larger trust, St Cuthbert's First School, along with all the other academies, will continue to have its own governance, known as the Local Governing Committee (LGC), responsible for oversight of the school, as well as a Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team responsible for all aspects of the day to day operation of the school, just as we have now. Ultimately, there will be 39 academies in the expanded trust in the northern region, so it will be essential that each academy continues to have responsibility and accountability for all aspects of its day to day operations, progress and development, albeit in a closer and, hopefully, more effective partnership with all of the other diocesan academies in the northern regional trust. Indeed, as part of this diocesan strategy, it is clear that each school is expected to retain great autonomy and to ensure an outstanding Catholic education for all of its students, regardless of their faith background. An overarching Board of Directors and a central team, led by the Chief Executive, will have oversight of each regional trust and ultimate accountability for the academies within the multi-academy trust.

Although part of the larger trust, each school will retain its unique identity and decision-making options with regard to how the school is run and what is taught. Each school will continue to receive its school budget from the Department for Education, via the trust, in order to run the school and the Headteacher and local governors will work closely with the central trust each year to produce an annual budget which will be approved by the trust Board of Directors. Each school will continue to receive a small amount of capital funding based on its pupil numbers but will also potentially be able to access some additional capital funding, via the annual central trust capital grant, which is designed to support a range of building and other capital projects across the whole of the trust, based on priority needs.

### **Will the name of the school change?**

No. There is no intention to change the names of the academies in the trust with the exception that the Diocese has taken the decision that, as part of the reorganisation of its schools, it will remove the word 'Roman' from the name of all schools in the Diocese.

### **Will there have to be a new uniform?**

No. There is no need to change our current uniform.

### **Will there be any changes to the school day?**

No. There is no need to change our current timings.

### **When do you propose to make these changes?**

We hope to have completed the legal procedures for Tranche 4 to take effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022.

### **How will the school be accountable as part of a trust?**

A trust is governed by company law as a Charitable Trust. The trust Board of Directors will work with all Local Governing Bodies of the academies in the trust to monitor the schools' overall performance and development. The Trust Board would only intervene in an individual academy in certain circumstances, to provide additional support. For instance, if results fell below floor targets or an individual academy fell into an Ofsted category of 'Requires Improvement' or lower, the trust would

provide significant support to that academy and help ensure that progress and improvement could be brought about rapidly for the benefit of children in such an academy.

**Will our Admissions policy change?**

No. The expanded trust will be the Admissions Authority, but there will be no change in policy or pupil admission numbers. Our catchment area and partner primary schools will remain unchanged too.

**Will the curriculum change?**

No, not as a result of joining the trust. All schools in the trust largely follow the National Curriculum. Both children and staff enjoy the flexibility it offers. Our schools will work together to improve curriculum offer by sharing best practice across our schools. In recent years we have already undertaken work to ensure good transition between KS2 and KS3 in foundation subjects such as Geography.

**Will there be any change to Special Educational Needs?**

No change. Pupils will be assessed early and will have access to appropriate support to match their individual needs as they do now.

**Will there be any changes to school meals?**

No change. And free school meals arrangements remain the same.

**Will the Local Authorities have any involvement the school?**

The Local Authorities will continue to provide their core statutory responsibilities of strategic planning and sufficiency of school places and provision in their areas, as well as co-ordinating admissions arrangements, together with statutory oversight of attendance, and some aspects of early years education, finance, safeguarding and special educational needs.