



9 December 2022

Dear All,

### **Consultation to convert to Academy status**

This letter is to inform you that after careful consideration and preliminary discussion with the Diocese of Norwich, the Governing Body propose that Acle St Edmund C of E Primary School converts to Academy status and joins the St Benet's Trust. Governors believe that this will enable us to continue to improve the opportunities we provide for your children and support the school in its future development.

You may be aware that the Government White Paper published earlier this year set out plans for all local authority schools to be in a Multi Academy Trust by 2030. All schools have been encouraged to consider converting to Academy status and joining a Multi Academy Trust.

We are, therefore, now writing to consult with parents, carers and other local community partners to determine whether the school should proceed with conversion, and we would like to invite your views on the matter.

### **What is an Academy?**

Academies are publicly funded state schools that are independent of the Local Authority and receive funding directly from Central Government. They are free to all children and have to follow the same rules as all other state-funded schools over admissions, pupils with Special Educational Needs and exclusions. They are still inspected by Ofsted.

Our school will still be a Church of England school under the Diocese of Norwich and our religious designation will not change.

### **Why is this being considered?**

Governors are very aware that as a small school, we have limited recourse to external support. Running the school during the pandemic and in the current economic climate has demonstrated how isolated and potentially vulnerable the school is as a stand-alone organisation today.

Whilst the school has done very well to successfully stand alone to this point, Governors believe it is prudent to evaluate our options now and control our own destiny. The alternative is to accept the risks of waiting and facing increasingly difficult challenges as a stand-alone school in a challenging economic climate.

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### **What are the advantages of conversion?**

The Government is clear that the greater freedoms enjoyed by Academies are designed to allow schools to develop and to build on individual strengths in response to the needs of the community. We feel that the additional freedoms and flexibilities would enable the Governors and school leaders greater opportunity to control the long-term future of our school. The latest National Governance Association report on MAT Governance states that MATs are the most financially secure of all school structure types, due to the financial advantages of governance across a group of schools

In addition, we believe that the formal partnership with St Benet's Trust will have a number of benefits for our school. This includes a more targeted approach to the long term future of the school, strengthening our Church of England identity, access to resources which will improve teaching and management practice within the school, as well as a range of professional support services to help get the best out of our finances, for the benefit of children attending the school.

St Benet's has a good track record of working with strongly performing schools, as well as supporting those that need it to improve their performance, and to address attainment and progress issues to raise standards. We believe that we have much to offer to St Benet's, and have been encouraged by the experiences shared by other members of the Trust. Their strong support of SEND and disadvantaged groups aligns very much with our school's own practice and Vision.

### **What are the disadvantages of conversion?**

The school will no longer be maintained by the Local Authority (Norfolk County Council). It will be managed by St Benet's, which has statutory duties as an academy trust company. Governors are confident the Trust can manage these.

### **Will any changes to the school be made as a result of conversion?**

We do not intend to make any changes on conversion. You and your child are unlikely to see any change in your day-to-day experience. There will be no change to the uniform, the admissions arrangements or to the times of the school day or terms. Leaders, teachers and support staff will remain and have their terms and conditions protected as part of the conversion process. The school will continue to have a local Governing Body and all children on roll at the school will continue to attend.

Please be assured that the distinctive Christian ethos and values and the unique character of our school would remain unchanged should Academy conversion take place.

Responsibility for leadership and management of each academy remains with the Governing Body and the Headteacher. St Benet's maintains Local Governing Bodies which include elected staff and parent governors, in all of its academies. As within any Multi Academy Trust overall responsibility for governance sits with Trustees.

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## How to take part in the consultation process

We want to know what parents, carers and the local community think about this proposal, so we are consulting with everyone associated with our school before Governors meet again to make a final decision.

The formal consultation period opens today, Friday 9 December 2022 and will remain open until Monday 30 January 2023.

## How can I find out more?

In order to hear your views, we have arranged for a meeting to take place on Monday 23 January at 6pm at the school. Both Governors and representatives from St Benet's will be present to meet parents, carers, staff and other members of the local community.

If you have any specific comments or questions about the academy conversion, or what this will mean for our school and children, please email [academyconsultation@acleprimary.norfolk.sch.uk](mailto:academyconsultation@acleprimary.norfolk.sch.uk) by 5pm on Monday 30 January 2023 so that they can be included in the next Full Governors meeting.

Following the consultation period, the Governing Body will consider all the feedback and views received during the consultation, and will then make the final decision on whether to complete the academisation process.

We look forward to receiving your feedback and will write to parents, carers and other stakeholders to inform you of our decision.

Yours sincerely,

Alastair Smyth  
Chair of Governors