

Wednesday 19 October 2022

Dear All,

Consultation to Convert to Academy Status

You may be aware that the Government white paper published earlier this year has set out plans for all local authority schools to be in a multi academy trust by 2030 and is therefore encouraging all schools to consider converting to academy status.

This letter is to inform you that after careful consideration and preliminary discussion with the Diocese, the Governing Body propose that Dereham Church Infant and Nursery School converts to academy status and joins the Diocese of Norwich Education and Academies Trust (DNEAT). 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.

We are therefore now writing to consult with staff, parents 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 authority of the Bishop of Norwich and its religious designation will not change.

Why is this being considered?

As a Voluntary Aided school, gaining academy status would give us the ability to continue to develop and strive to achieve the best for our children. As part of the DNEAT Multi Academy Trust, there will be greater opportunities for working more closely with other local Church of England schools and the wider community of schools.

The Governors are very aware that as a VA infant school, we are in the minority within the Dereham Cluster and the last two years of trying to run a school during the pandemic brought home to the school leadership just how isolated and potentially vulnerable we could be as a stand alone school.

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 to better secure the long term future of our school. The latest NGA 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 to this we believe that the formal partnership with Diocese of Norwich Education and Academies Trust (DNEAT) 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 better management of our finances for the benefit of children attending the school.

DNEAT has a good track record for assisting schools to improve their performance and to address attainment and progress issues to raise standards. Plus their strong support of SEN and disadvantaged groups aligns very much with our school's own practice.

What are the disadvantages of conversion?

The school will no longer be maintained by the local authority. It will be managed by the Diocese of Norwich Education and Academies Trust. DNEAT has statutory duties as an academy trust company, and the school is confident it 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 of school. 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 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 head teacher. DNEAT maintains Local Governing Bodies, which includes staff and parent governors, in all of its academies. As within any Multi Academy Trust overall responsibility for governance sits with Trustees. There would therefore continue to be elected parent and staff governors serving on the governing body of our school.

How to take part in the consultation process

We want to know what parents 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 **Wednesday 19th October 2022 and will remain open until Wednesday 30th November.**

How can you find out more? In order to hear your views we have arranged for a meeting to take place on **Monday 31st October at 4.30pm** at the school when both Governors and representatives from DNEAT will be present to meet parents, staff and other members of the local community, to listen to your views and to answer as many of your questions as possible.

We are also arranging an online meeting on **Wednesday 2nd November at 4.30pm**, for anyone who wishes to talk with representatives of DNEAT and the governors, but who cannot attend in person on 31st October. We will send out details of how to join this virtual meeting in due course.

If you have any specific comments or questions about the academy conversion or what this will mean for our school and children, either before or after the meetings, please contact the Governors by emailing the Chair of Governors at **pwaller62r5@nsix.org.uk** and quoting "DCINS Academy Consultation". We look forward to receiving your responses.

After the consultation period end on Wednesday 30th November, the Governing Body will consider all of the feedback and views received and will then make the final decision on whether to complete the academisation process. We will write to you as parents to inform you of our decision.

Yours sincerely,

Patricia T Waller
Chair of Governors