



**MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE
 GOVERNING BODY AND PARENTS OF
 ST MARY'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL HELD IN THE JOHN PAUL II CENTRE
 ON THURSDAY, 4TH MAY 2023 AT 19:30PM**

PRESENT: Mr S Taylor (Chair, Foundation); Canon J Bathula (Foundation); Mrs J Hurst (Foundation); Mrs N Henderson-Andrade (Foundation); Mrs E Morgan (Foundation); Mr M Doherty (L.A.); Mr G Refalo (Elected Parent); Mrs P Akin-Olugbade (Elected Parent)

Parents and Mrs C Jeffrey (Teacher, SLT)

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs L Hall (Clerk)

1. CJ opened meeting with a prayer.

Chair welcomed all to the meeting and introductions from governors were made. Chair explained that minutes will be made available to parents and there will be a meeting via Zoom around the end of May.
AP1; AP2

2. **Academisation Process - Consultation**

Chair began by saying that some parents have expressed concern that they have not been involved in any conversation, questioning why we are considering joining an academy and why we have chosen Pope Francis Multi Academy Company. He then shared a slide detailing the Diocesan academisation process, through four steps from beginning to consider academisation through to actually becoming an academy. He said that we're in Phase One and consultations are within Phase Two.

Chair informed parents that last year the Diocese asked all schools to give an indicative timescale and roadmap. He said that the next step for St Mary's is in July this year when the governing body will make a formal decision to move to Phase Two, the Diocese will be informed followed by stakeholders. Chair clarified that the meeting today is not *the* consultation, but to give parents an initial overview.

Chair asked if there are any questions.

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| When you were asked for timescales, did you consider not agreeing to join an academy? | No, because governors think there are positives to academisation. |
| You decided to go ahead anyway without consulting parents. Is this the correct procedure? Do you have to consult parents? | Yes this is the correct procedure, as per the process. |
| Does this mean the decision has been made? Will our opinion mean anything? | Parents have the right to strong views, and governors will see what they can do to allay fears. |

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| <p>So the decision was made in July 2022 without parents?</p> | <p>Academisation has been Diocesan policy for over ten years, and national government policy, that every school join an academy. For Catholic schools to survive they have to go through the process with the government. The Diocese are the Trustees, the school belongs to them and academisation has to go ahead. When the former Chair provided the timescale, it wasn't the first time the governors had been asked. When foundation governors are appointed by the Diocese, they all have to sign that they agree to fulfil the Diocesan's vision.</p> |
| <p>Is the government policy you are referring to the Schools White Paper of March last year, which hasn't passed through the Government yet?</p> | <p>The policy still applies. Parent disagreed.</p> |
| <p>If the intention to academise has been in place since 2010, why has it not been mentioned in any prospectus?</p> | <p>Governors agreed that there could have been better communication.</p> |
| <p>There seems to have been no consideration given to not becoming an academy, so the decision to toe the line has been made automatically. Can we accept that the communication has been so bad that it has taken the head teacher's resignation to spill the beans?</p> | <p>Governors agreed communication could have been better and advised that parents and staff would be consulted when governors have taken that first step. Governors have signed into the Diocese's intent and it is the Diocese's intent to ensure all schools become Academy schools. It is the parent governor's responsibility to represent the parents, and the foundation governor's responsibility to represent the Archbishop.</p> <p>Chair agreed that communication could be better and governors have not been proactive in sharing minutes from their meetings.</p> |
| <p>What is the end game if St Mary's doesn't agree to become an academy? Will it cease to be a Catholic school?</p> | <p>A school will continue to be a Catholic school, irrespective of the governors' views on becoming an Academy. There is no threat of us losing the Catholic status of the school due our views on Academisation.</p> |
| <p>When people become a governor they sign to agree with the Diocese. Is this not a conflict of interests for parent governors?</p> | <p>Only foundation governors are required to sign an agreement.</p> |
| <p>What commitments will the board make with regards to improving communication?</p> | <p>Chair suggested that dates of meetings are put on the governor page of the school website. See AP3 for further details.</p> |

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| The board needs to be more proactive, rather than expect parents seek out minutes. | Chair said that there will be more of these meetings, whether information sessions or talking over our opinions and driving forward for the future. |
| If there was an equal number of parent governors as there are foundation governors, the onus would be on the Diocese to convince us, the parents. It looks like the parent governors are outnumbered by foundation governors. | The whole purpose is to protect Catholic schools. This is the policy of the Diocese, not simply governors who make the decision. Church schools were started in the beginning to protect that ethos. |
| Why does Miss Pickering say we are going in a direction she doesn't believe in? | Parents will need to ask Miss Pickering what she meant by that. |
| The head teacher made a statement but she was your leader. You should be able to analyse her meaning and be able to explain. We shouldn't have to all go to her. | It would be wrong of governors to translate Miss Pickering's meaning. |
| This all started with her resignation. It's hard to believe that she hasn't explained her resignation to you. | Chair said that, in his view, Miss Pickering disagreed with the academisation. |
| Whatever we say it won't change your decision. | Chair replied that governors feel it is the right thing to do for the long term well-being of the school. We will consult fully and do our best to explain/allay fears. |
| You signed an agreement – you were following orders. What if you didn't agree with those orders? | Chair replied that he would have to resign. |
| Whatever we feel or say, this isn't going to change. | Chair said that he didn't think there would be a change Governors added that we may not be able to change this, but we can still make it work for us. |
| Parent stated that she wouldn't have sent her children to St Mary's if she had known about the academy. She said she is very cross that parents weren't consulted. The Chair's email on Tuesday night should have been sent two or three years ago to let parents know that governors were thinking about academisation. | |
| Do the parents of pupils starting in September know? | Chair confirmed that they do not. |

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| <p>Can you help us understand the benefits? Parents are concerned that we have lost the head teacher and the deputy head, we are losing great leadership. We need to understand why academisation is better. We want to see your rational. We can all Google the pros and cons of academisation, but we'd like to see the figures and results.</p> | <p>Chair explained that parents are not going to be able to see graphs tonight.</p> |
| <p>Do you have the figures?</p> | <p>Chair replied that we do, but not at the level parents are asking to see.</p> |

3. Why Consider Becoming an Academy

Chair said that the government are strongly in favour of all schools academising by 2030. Over time Local Authority funding and scope of responsibility has been reduced. For example, there has been a £480,000 cut in funding for school improvement and if we want to continue to access this we will have to fund it ourselves at a cost of £4000 a year. LEA's no longer have the resources to help schools if they get into difficulties.

Chair explained that there is a lot of data out there, and stats could be found to prove either view, but Department for Education shows that strong trusts outperform strong LEA's. He said that the governors believe there are opportunities in the MAC to create strong networks. He said that we shouldn't do it just because everyone else is, but we should be reassured we are not alone.

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| <p>Is this information specific to religious schools?</p> | <p>No, all schools.</p> |
| <p>Our closest Catholic schools are fifteen or twenty miles away. Won't sharing resources and creating networks be more challenging?</p> | <p>For example, Whiteland's is in a multi academy trust spread over a huge area. There are lots of successful large, non-religious MACs.</p> |
| <p>There are eleven schools in Pope Francis already, with six more to enter. Isn't this too large a group to manage?</p> | <p>Chair responded that there are advantages such as economy of scale.</p> |
| <p>How does that effect my child?</p> | <p>Less spent on staples means more to spend on other resources.</p> |

4. Academisation – Benefits?

Chair described the MAC working together to support each other. He said that the head teachers are very close and have brought into the idea of looking out for each other within a family of schools. He mentioned the head teacher of Our Lady of Lourdes in Witney, who arranged a whole MAC music evening and a Primary Lead for School Improvement who is providing targeted support.

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| How dynamic and autonomous are schools within the MAC? | Chair replied that there are still local governing boards. The budget is set and then the head teachers have freedom to operate within that agreed budget. They standardise what needs to be standardised but allow individual schools some freedom to do what works best for them. |
| We are worried that St Mary's will lose what makes it St Mary's. | Chair said that governors want to maintain that which is good, but also see what else can be improved. |
| What changes will staff see? | Chair explained that St Mary's will remain their home school and that governors hope teachers will be able to develop their careers within the academy |
| You hope that teachers will remain at their home school? Who will their employer be? | Chair confirmed that Pope Francis MAC will employ the staff. |
| Have any of the schools in the academy improved their Ofsted? | Three have improved, two have fallen and three remain the same. |
| Will SEN provision remain the same? | SEN will remain within the school. |
| Parents are concerned that there seems to be a lot of hoping and envisioning. | Parents, governors and staff are all trying to make the best school we can. Education is not a democracy; not in local authority schools, and not Catholic schools either. St Mary's governing body's job will be to shape the academy in the best way they can. The SENCo has asked what she could lose, explaining what works well for her. It is important to know what we are fighting for, and know your worries so we can work with you rather than imposing our will on you. |
| What is different for those eleven schools who have academised? | Every school's journey is different. We should ask what we can bring to the academy. We've all got to pull together and also ask ourselves the question: why did I send my child to St Mary's rather than the local school? Not just because of good teachers or a head that we like, but for fundamental reasons. |
| If those reasons exist, why are we changing? | The overriding need is to safeguard Catholic education |

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| Parent said that she sent her children here, not because it's Catholic but because of Miss Pickering. | Miss Pickering won't remain at the school forever; we have to remember that Catholic education is under threat and that we are living in a secular world. |
| What if the government are voted out next year? The next government could be against academisation. I can see that Catholic education is under threat, if we are stuck let's start talking more often and as equals. What if we go down this road for the wrong reasons? | The governors and Miss Pickering have worked together a long time – seventeen years as head teacher, nineteen in the school altogether. She is an amazing, Catholic head teacher. Governors agreed the communication hasn't been good, but this meeting is a start. If governors disagreed with the Diocese, if they thought academisation was not good for the children they could resign. |
| How do the teachers feel? | (At this point, within meeting attendees, it was mentioned that Miss Grant and Mrs C. Hall have also resigned.) |
| If the Diocese force us down this road, if we refuse, what does that mean? | Chair replied that funding will continue and the Diocese wants Catholic education to survive. It's not the case that we will lose any money. Parishioners received a letter from the Archbishop outlining his intentions. |
| Non-Parishioners don't count? Why didn't he write to the parents? I'm now a customer and I have to decide if I'm going to use your business. | It isn't the governor's Multi Academy Company and no one is employed by them (except EM as a teacher). There is no agenda, we are all school stakeholders. |
| What does this change mean for my children? | We are all anxious and no one has all the answers. As best as we can, we need to navigate this difficult time together. |
| Will the information and minutes be put on the website? | Chair confirmed that the minutes going forward will be published. AP3 |
| And also the historic minutes? | If they are requested they should be published. |

5. Head Teacher Recruitment

Chair explained that the head teacher advert went out on Tuesday with a deadline of 17th May. Governors recognise that this is a challenge and a critical role. He reassured parents that they will ensure that they employ the correct candidate. He also said that they are in discussion with the Diocese and LA regarding an interim solution in parallel with the recruitment process. Adverts are also going out for other teaching staff, but advertising for a deputy will be delayed until a head teacher is in position.

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| <p>Are we expecting any other teachers to resign?</p> | <p>Teachers have until 31st May to hand in their notices for September starts. No school in the country can say for sure until then which staff they will have in place for the new academic year.</p> |
| <p>We are concerned there could be a domino effect amongst staff.</p> | <p>Governors appreciate this, but among the staff there is a huge love for the schools and a commitment to the pupils. They hope that staff will see the opportunities available. Any change is destabilising but we have a fantastic community.</p> |
| <p>Can you say what staff morale is?</p> | <p>It reflects this room.</p> |
| <p>The good Ofsted result should give them all a lift.</p> | <p>Governors agreed and said it should help with recruitment.</p> <p>During the meeting governors had with staff, the love and genuine care they have for the school and pupils was clear.</p> |

The meeting closed at 21:00

LH 05/05/2023

AP1 – Minutes of this meeting to be made available to parents.

AP2 – Zoom meeting between governors and parents end of May.

AP3 - Full governing body meeting minutes to be published on the school website.