



6<sup>th</sup> May 2021

Dear Parents/Carers,

### **NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR WIDER COLLABORATION**

As you are aware, our schools are part of a federation – The Quercus Federation. Despite Covid, the two schools and staff have continued to work closely together. Both schools have been on journeys to continue to develop and improve the quality of education your children receive. We have very different curriculum approaches, school sites and uniforms yet we form a strong bond which supports every aspect of our school communities.

As headteachers we are keen to continue to develop that partnership and to seek opportunities for wider collaboration, whilst remaining individual schools serving our own communities. One option that headteachers and governors have been exploring is to join a likeminded, child focused academy trust which has a proven track record in securing strong outcomes for all children.

After much investigation and due diligence we have identified the Diocese of Chichester Academy Trust, a growing family of schools with a proven track record for good pupil outcomes and school development. There is a strong team of professionals that can support our schools to move even forward and secure even better outcomes for our pupils WITHOUT losing our identity.

In joining The Diocese of Chichester Academy Trust:

- We will keep our school name and it will not be changed to 'academy'
- We will keep our school uniform
- We will keep our unique school curriculum
- The school's Christian ethos will be strongly supported
- We will be part of a group of likeminded schools striving to continue to deliver excellent outcomes and opportunities for our children
- You will see continued good and improving outcomes for your children
- Staff will receive outstanding CPD opportunities

We have been investigating these options for some time, ahead of the announcement made by the Government last week that they want every school to be part of a strong multi

academy trust. Before we make any further decisions we want to share this proposal with you and what it will mean for our school. We invite you to read this letter and the information attached to it and to ask any and all questions that you have.

Our proposal is to explore conversion to academy status for both schools in the Quercus Federation, Hurst Green CEPS and Northiam CEPS, by joining the Diocese of Chichester Academy Trust (DCAT) as a federation, with a single governing body. Headteachers and governors see this as a positive way forward for the schools and hope that you will agree. As small schools the attraction of joining DCAT is that they have a team of staff who can provide high quality support for the school. We have confirmed this by speaking to other Headteachers and governors within the Trust. Another attraction is that our staff will have a range of opportunities for professional development and to work with colleagues in other Trust schools to develop their practice, sharing the good practice that exists in ours and other schools in the Trust. On conversion to academy status all staff remain in post and have their terms and conditions protected and all children in, or due to join the school, remain fully part of the school as they are now.

A survey at <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/QuerQues> provides opportunities for you to ask any and all questions that you have. This survey will remain open until 2 July. There will be a meeting held over **Zoom on 13 May at 7pm** when leaders from DCAT will present on the work of the Trust and answer questions. In order to keep numbers manageable, please register using this link and we will send you an invitation:

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/QuerZoom>. If there is demand we will arrange further online meetings so that more parents and community members can ask questions and hear the answers. Separate arrangements are being made for staff.

At this stage we are inviting you to explore any questions that you have. Some answers to common questions are attached to this letter and we will publish answers to all the questions raised during this process – including those raised at online meetings - on the school websites. There is an opportunity for you to ask for a personal response to any individual question you have about the impact on you or on your child, but otherwise we intend to publish answers so that they can be seen more widely. No question is too straightforward. Later on we will issue a separate survey link asking whether you support the school moving forward in this way.

We look forward to receiving your questions and later on what you think about this proposal.

Yours faithfully



*Elaine Lambert*  
Chair of Governors



*Julia Bray*  
Northiam CEP Headteacher



*Allison Flack*  
Hurst Green CEP Headteacher



## **INFORMATION ON THE DIOCESE OF CHICHESTER ACADEMY TRUST (DCAT)**

DCAT was established in 2014 and currently nine schools are part of the trust.

The Trust has a clear vision which is to help every child achieve their God-given potential.

The Trust has clear aims; to be a trust in which:

- All children achieve and maximise their potential;
- All schools improve and perform above national expectations;
- All staff are supported and actively engage in continuing professional development; and
- The distinct Christian identity of each of our academies is maintained and celebrated.

Schools joining DCAT retain their own unique identity. They benefit from a range of shared services and opportunities. Individual Local Governing Bodies, including parent representatives, continue to play an important role in the life of the school.

Each academy will be welcoming to all and will serve equally those who are of the Christian faith, those of other faiths and those with no faith.

Each school benefits from additional support and capacity for school improvement with 'hands on' input from or overseen by the Trust's Head of Improvement. The Trust's CEO is on hand to provide support and challenge for each of the Headteachers. Both Executive Leaders have been Headteachers in their own right. In addition, the Trust has dedicated staff who provide strong expertise, including in the areas of finance, governance and compliance.

The Trust is part of the Diocese of Chichester which was established in 681 CE. The Diocese has over two hundred years of successful experience as a provider of schools across Sussex as part of its mission to support and serve the whole community. The Trust draws on expertise in the Diocese of Chichester and on the wider national Church of England role as the leading sponsor of academies. The Trust directors have local and national expertise to ensure every academy is well led and governed, through the Trust's Board of Directors and the Local Governing Body.

More information about DCAT is available on the Trust's website [www.dcat.academy](http://www.dcat.academy)

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

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

Academies are charitable companies funded by the Government to provide state education free of charge. Multi academy trusts bring together several academies under a single board

of trustees, who are accountable for the academies within the Trust. They are funded at the same level as schools maintained by local authorities; and have the same responsibilities for children with special educational needs, pupils in receipt of pupil premium and for admissions.

### **So why make the change?**

All schools need support to improve and as a result of reduction in resources available to local authorities, we are unable to secure the support we need from the Local Authority. Joining an Academy Trust which shares our vision and values will provide greater security for our school and working in a wider network and with the support of DCAT will support us to grow and develop. In addition, there would be access to high quality support for school improvement, the opportunity to share good practice and develop our environment.

### **Who will be the members of the local governing body?**

On conversion, we will retain a single governing body for the two Quercus schools, Hurst Green and Northiam, including elected parents and staff. Current governors will remain in place but over time governors will be appointed by DCAT, seeking to ensure that there is a balance of appropriate skills.

### **Is this a governor decision or is it being forced? Is the school in financial difficulty?**

This is a strategic decision that the Governors are making. Neither school is currently in financial difficulty, though in common with all schools, particularly small schools, the finances are coming under pressure. Within DCAT the school will be supported by a strong school improvement team who will work with us on our priorities; by an established and well qualified finance team and a range of other central services, including HR, payroll, legal advice and ICT technicians. Cost effective support will help to ensure that we can continue to focus the major part of the school's budget on teaching and learning. DCAT's aim is to ensure funds are focussed on the classroom.

### **Isn't this just what the Government wants? Is there any point in giving our views?**

Governors had already been investigating the opportunities that joining a multi academy trust could offer the school as compared to our current position. Small schools have been coming under pressure to join together, in particular as income has not kept pace with rising costs. Conversion to academy status within strong multi-academy trusts is certainly the direction set by the Government and there may be fewer choices in the future. Now, it is important to us that parents, staff and the wider community have the chance to explore what this means and to understand why headteachers and governors think this is the best way forward for our school. Having done so, we hope you will agree with us – but we will take into account all views expressed before committing the schools to this way forward.

### **Doesn't joining an academy trust mean that everything will change?**

No! DCAT is committed to working with its schools and supporting them to improve. Staff continue in post on transfer and all pupils remain on roll. Term dates, school times, uniform and admissions arrangements will not change.

We recognise that information widely available on the internet and social media identifies a different approach in other cases when schools have become academies. There are Trusts who make changes when schools convert, who impose a curriculum model and ways of working, who take a higher proportion of the school's budget to spend on large and highly paid central teams. DCAT does not behave in that way – and will not do so.

### **What are the risks of making this change?**

We recognise that this is a significant change in the legal status of the school, but joining a Trust established by the Diocese of Chichester, which shares our commitment to ensuring all children achieve their potential seems to the governors and headteachers to be a positive way forward. DCAT will work with us, will help us to sustain levels of funding for teaching and learning within school and will free time for leaders to focus on outcomes for children.

### **What about access for others who use the sites?**

There is no reason for any of those arrangements to change. We are committed to continuing access for the community to the Pretious Sports Hall at Northiam in the same way as it is currently managed.

### **How can I find out more?**

Please ask questions using the survey at <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/QuerQues>. If you have any individual issues you would like to discuss please leave your name and phone number in your response and someone will contact you.

We are holding a meeting on **13 May at 7pm** which will provide an opportunity to hear more about the proposal and to ask questions. If you would like to attend this meeting – or register your interest in a further meeting – please do so at:

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/QuerZoom>

### **How can I make my views known?**

In the first instance we want to provide time for questions to be asked and answered. We will issue a link to a form for comments on the proposal shortly before half term. If you have any comments please send them by close on 2 July.

## **Academies: Some key facts**

### **Curriculum**

Academies are required to have a broad and balanced curriculum which promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils and prepares them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life. For pupils below Key Stage 1 (i.e. reception and nursery), academies are required to follow the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

The curriculum must include:

- English, maths and science;
- Religious Education; and
- relationships education and health education.

Academies are required to take part in the same pupil assessment arrangements and to report on the achievement and attainment of pupils in the same way as all other state-funded schools.

### **Inspection**

Academies continue to be subject to Ofsted inspections.

### **Staffing**

The regulations that place requirements on maintained schools do not directly apply to academies. General employment law applies to academies in the same way as to other organisations. Teachers must be suitably qualified. The Academy Trust has responsibility for setting pay and conditions. DCAT is committed to employing qualified teachers and to paying all our staff on national terms and conditions. Staff turnover at current schools is low and staff absence has reduced. Staff welcome the support they receive from the Trust and feel valued.

All teachers employed at an academy have access to the Teachers Pensions Scheme and all other employees at an academy have access to the Local Government Pension Scheme.

### **Funding**

The academy trust will receive General Annual Grant from the Secretary of State calculated as the equivalent to that which would be received by a maintained school taking account of the number of pupils at the academy. Capital funding is also available, channelled through the Academy Trust.

Every academy trust must abide by the requirements of and have regard to the guidance in the Academies Financial Handbook.

### **SEND**

Academies should be fully inclusive local schools and in common with all other schools have a clear legal duty to do their best to meet the needs of children and young people with

special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). DCAT is fully committed to every child achieving their God-given potential. DCAT meets all its statutory responsibilities for children with special educational needs and disabilities, working in partnership with Local Authorities. SENDCos in DCAT come together to share best practice, work together and develop their own training.

### **Admissions**

Academies are required to provide education for pupils wholly or mainly drawn from the area in which the academy is situated.

Academies must have admission arrangements that clearly set out how children will be admitted, including the criteria that will be applied if there are more applications than available places.

Academies are required to provide education for pupils of different abilities (i.e. they may not select pupils by ability).

### **Land**

When schools convert to academy status, the land they occupy is made available to the Trust by the Church site trustees and under a lease from the local authority. The land cannot be sold off.

### **The conversion process**

There is a defined process to secure our conversion to academy status, which includes:

- Consultation with parents, staff and other stakeholders;
- Agreeing a contract with the Secretary of State to run both Hurst Green CE Primary School and Nursery and Northiam CE Primary Schools as academies within the Diocese of Chichester Academy Trust as state-maintained schools, free to all pupils and students;
- Consulting staff and their unions on the transfer to a new employer;
- Working with the owners of our sites to ensure that they can be used by the Academy;
- Transferring contracts for goods and services.

A grant from the DfE will support the costs incurred, including expertise in managing the process so that your child's education is not disrupted.