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Ursuline
High School
WIMBLEDON

Voluntary Aided 11-18 Roman Catholic School for Girls
Headteacher: Ms Julia Waters BSc (Hons) MA

Crescent Road, Wimbledon, London SW20 8HA
020 8255 2688 / www.ursulinehigh.merton.sch.uk

19th June 2023

Dear Parents and Carers,

Following our correspondence in April 2023 where we wished to inform you of the strategic planning taking place with regards to the formation of a Catholic Academy Trust, we are now writing to invite you to participate in formal consultation on our proposals.

Proposal

The Governing body of Ursuline High School are proposing to convert to academy status, joining Sancta Familia Academy Trust within the Archdiocese of Southwark.

Background & Rationale

Our school is one of 15 Catholic schools in Merton, Sutton and Croydon that have jointly prepared plans to establish a new Catholic Academy Trust (CAT) called Sancta Familia Catholic Academy Trust. The 15 schools that propose to join Sancta Familia CAT are:

St Philomena's Catholic High School for Girls
St Mary's RC Infants School
St Mary's RC Junior School
St Elphege's RC Infants' School
St Elphege's RC Junior School
Regina Coeli Catholic Primary School
St Cecilia's Catholic Primary School
Ursuline High School Wimbledon
Wimbledon College
Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School
St John Fisher RC Primary School
St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School
St Teresa's Catholic Primary School
SS Peter and Paul Catholic Primary School
St Mary's Catholic Primary School

The academies programme has continued to progress under successive Governments since 2006, and the current Government has reiterated that it would like all schools to convert to academy status, joining a strong MAT. The Archdiocese of Southwark has also made clear its intentions for all Catholic schools to join one of a number of local Catholic Academy Trusts. Our Governing Body have therefore been proactive in working closely with the local schools identified above, for whom we share a vision, so that we can contribute to the successful establishment of a CAT that benefits our school.

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As a consequence of the national and Diocesan picture, the Governors decided to look closely into whether an academy model would be in the best interests of the students, staff and wider community of Ursuline High School and are now consulting on the proposal to move forward. As a 'Good' school performing well, the Governors are keen that the school has full control of when and how it moves forward with academy status, with the added advantage of being involved in the development of the Trust from its infancy.

Advantages of Academy Status

On establishment, Sancta Familia CAT will provide access to a high level of support across school improvement and operational areas. The CAT's role will be to provide support to our school ensuring that we continue to be a 'Good' school and strive to be an 'Outstanding' School. This support will be provided regardless of our current performance, which is attractive to schools like ours that are already high performing, therefore often not prioritised in terms of this support.

As governors, we believe that the opportunity to work with new partners and schools, working together to ensure standards across the Trust are consistently high, is an exciting proposition. However, we will continue to actively work with all local schools and current partners, ensuring the best of both worlds. Governors have made it clear that academy status should not change all the things that work so well for our school.

It is true to say that the school already works in partnership with schools, including those above, and the school does not need to be an academy to do this. However, becoming an academy and joining a CAT makes partnership working with the schools in the Trust easier under one legal entity. For example, joint resourcing decisions can be made, joint specific training sessions can be undertaken across a number of schools, we can make purchases or commission services as a group of schools rather than individually to secure better deals. There will also be in place a small CAT central team focused on supporting all the schools in the CAT. This central team will work very closely with the schools and will come to know our individual strengths and weaknesses and will be able to identify where we can access support, knowledge and capacity quickly from within the Trust, allowing us to continually improve.

Whilst we will be joining a single entity, all the Governing Bodies of partner schools have been clear that the individual unique character of each school must be protected. This has been a common theme throughout the development of plans for the CAT and we will continue to ensure that this is a priority.

Disadvantages of Academy Status

As an academy, there are a number of additional responsibilities placed on the school in terms of financial management, the school estate and reporting. It is expected that on a day-to-day basis the pupils and their parents and carers, teachers and staff will not notice the difference when we become an academy.





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It is intended that the additional responsibilities will be covered by the small central team at CAT level to ensure that there is minimal impact in school. For example, an Accounting Officer (the CEO or Catholic Senior Executive Leader) and a Chief Finance Officer will be appointed to ensure compliance with company and charity law on behalf of the Trust Board.

Governors acknowledge that staff in school may be concerned that a change of employer will mean a change in their terms and conditions of employment on transfer. Governors therefore have reassured staff at this very early stage that this is a 'non-negotiable' in terms of the proposal and we would not pursue academy status where this would be a consideration.

Feedback

We would like to make sure that the entire school community has had an opportunity to ask questions about what academy status means for Ursuline High School. We are therefore holding a meeting whereby we would welcome the opportunity to talk to you about this. A meeting will take place in school on the following date:

Parents/ Carers: Tuesday 4th July 2023 at 6pm in the Ursuline Sixth Form Centre

We have included a link below to a website that includes an online form where you can provide feedback and ask questions. We would be grateful if you could submit any comments or questions to us by 11th September 2023.

www.sanctafamilia.co.uk

Additional Information

We have included some Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) with this letter which we hope can answer some of your immediate queries.

Finally, we would like to thank you for your continued support of Ursuline High School. Please be assured that our Governors act with the preservation of a high-quality Catholic education for the children of our community at the heart of everything that they do.

Yours sincerely

Claire Thorogood
Chair of Governors

Julia Waters
Headteacher

