

'Learning and Growing with God by our side.'

Consultation on the proposed academisation of **St Alban & Stephen Catholic Primary School & Nursery**



as part of the **All Saints Catholic Academy Trust**



Section 1: Academy Information

What are the Governors of St Alban & St Stephen Catholic Primary School & Nursery proposing?

The Governors are proposing that St Alban & St Stephen Catholic Primary School & Nursery converts to an Academy and joins the existing All Saints Catholic Academy Trust (ASCAT).

The school has received the consent of the Diocese of Westminster and the Regional Director (RD) to convert to an academy.

ASCAT has received the consent of the Diocese of Westminster to welcome St Alban & St Stephen Catholic Primary School & Nursery into an expanded Catholic Academy Trust (CAT).

What is an Academy?

Academies are publicly funded independent schools that are not managed by a local authority, but their funding and accountability is directly with the Department for Education (DfE).

Why is the school now proposing to become an Academy and join the ASCAT?

In early 2024, the Diocese mandated all maintained Catholic schools to engage in the process of academisation before the end of the 2024-25 school year. The Governors have hence since been actively considering joining a CAT, and, together with the Headteacher, believe it is in the best interest of our school, and the time is right to move forward after careful consideration and a thoughtful journey.

In September 2017 the Diocese of Westminster published its strategy for Catholic Academy Trusts <<https://education.rcdow.org.uk/academies-homepage-new/>>.

The Diocese's CAT Strategy sets out the reasons, benefits and structure of CATs. The Diocese is clearly minded to continue with and increase the speed of its CAT programme, and by choosing to join and expand a Trust now and under our 'own steam', we can shape our own future.

We also believe the time is right in terms of reductions in funding and support from local authorities.

What are the considerations for the conversion?

There are a number of reasons for this, including:

- It is a requirement of the Cardinal that all Catholic Schools should join a CAT to 'protect secure and develop Catholic Education'
- The Headteacher and Governors believe that converting and joining a CAT will deliver the best future for our school.
- The Headteacher and Governors believes joining a CAT will secure strategic school to school support and development through sharing the very best of our leadership, management, teaching and learning, pastoral and spiritual development.
- Catholic schools currently work as 'islands' and by coming together in solidarity we will be stronger, more robust and more resilient for the future.
- Catholic education is facing many threats both nationally and across the Diocese, in terms of declining rolls and increased financial pressures due inflationary pressures and a real terms decrease in school funding year of year
- With government borrowing already at unprecedented levels, prospects for an increase in school funding in the short to medium terms are extremely low.
- We face a growing need to protect, secure, and develop the Church's mission in Catholic education, working together to grow our resilience and overcome other future threats.
- Behind the scenes, very little will change for pupils, staff and parents. The changes will bring in closer working practices to Governance and back-office functions.

What is the All Saints Catholic Academy Trust?

ASCAT is part of the Diocese of Westminster Family of CATs and CAT Strategy by which it hopes all Schools in the Diocese's 11 Families (across 17 London Boroughs and 2 Counties) will join CATs to protect, secure and develop Catholic Education for the future.

ASCAT was formed in 2016 and currently encompasses the following 11 schools, in 3 hubs:

St Ursula Hub (Watford and Three Rivers)

Divine Saviour Catholic Primary School
St Joan of Arc Catholic Secondary School
St John's Catholic Primary School
Holy Rood Catholic Primary School

St Albans Hub

St Bernadette Catholic Primary School
St John Fisher Catholic Primary School
St Dominic Catholic Primary School (from 1st June 2025)

St Mark's Hub (Hemel Hempstead)

J F Kennedy Catholic Secondary School
St Thomas More Catholic Primary School
St Albert the Great Catholic Primary School
St Rose' Catholic Infant School
St Cuthbert Mayne Catholic Junior School

**Why do we have to join ASCAT, among the several of trusts within the Diocese?
Can we join the same trust as St Nicholas Breakspear?**

The Diocesan Trustees, under the guidance of the Diocesan Bishop are responsible for identifying an appropriate strategy for the academisation of its remaining Voluntary Aided Schools. St Nicholas Breakspear Catholic School belongs to a different Trust that precedes the 2017 Diocesan Academy Strategy. Since this point the Diocesan Trustees have keen that all schools benefit from close relationships, within a Trust, with its local family of Catholic schools. In order to be able to benefit from a close and collaborative network of Catholic primary schools in St Albans and more widely within South West Hertfordshire, St Alban & St Stephen Catholic Primary School & Nursery have been asked by the Diocese to join ASCAT.

How will the school benefit from joining ASCAT?

The aim of the Diocese's CAT Strategy is to protect, secure and develop the Church's mission in education.

Existing and prospective children in schools within CATs will benefit in several ways, including;

- Enhanced collaboration and partnership across the schools

- Increased savings and efficiencies at a time of growing financial pressures
- Improved teaching, learning, pastoral and spiritual development for each child through increased collaboration, challenge and support
- Increased CPD opportunities and career pathways for staff
- Improved retention and development of the best Catholic teachers and Leaders
- Clear, robust and effective Governance at Trust, CEO and Local Governing Body levels
- Secured Catholic education across the Diocese for generations to come.

What work has been done by governors to explore all options?

Governors have conducted a number of activities over the past year to ensure we reach the best decision for our school.

These include:

- Discussions with other local schools to understand their strategy and journey.
- Attendance at specific training and information sessions for Governors.
- Research on other CATs.
- Research on academisation based on information from a variety of sources.
- Presentations and Q&A from various CATs on a number of different subjects.
- Presentation and discussion covering the pros and cons of all the options for the future of the school.
- Due diligence processes with the Diocese of Westminster.

Will the CAT expand to include more schools over time?

Yes, ASCAT will expand to embrace all Catholic schools in the Watford, St Albans and Dacorum areas who wish to become Academies under the Diocese of Westminster CAT programme. ASCAT has also been granted consent to welcome Catholic Schools in Barnet into the Trust.

How will the Governance arrangements of the All Saints Catholic Academy Trust work?

The Diocese of Westminster has nominated 5 Members who own the Memorandum and Articles and Association of the Trust, registered with Companies House.

The Members include Cardinal Vincent Nichols, the Archbishop of the Diocese of Westminster, Auxiliary Bishop and Chair of the Education Commission of the Diocese

of Westminster, Chief Operating Officer/Financial Secretary of the Diocese of Westminster and the Director of Education for the Diocese of Westminster.

The Members have appointed a Board of Foundation Directors with strategic oversight for the Trust and Schools. The Foundation Directors have been recruited on the basis of a wide range of skills and professional experiences, necessary for the effective running of a Trust of schools. Their responsibilities are to each of the Trust's schools equally.

Each School will retain a Local Governing Body which, who with the Headteacher, remain responsible for the day to day running of the school.

The Local Governing Body will have powers delegated from the CAT Board of Directors under an agreed Scheme of Delegation are accountable to the Board.

Will the School retain its individual ethos?

Yes, the Diocese is very clear that the individual ethos, character and good practices of each school are retained and that all the schools operate as equals supporting each other. The school will retain the elements of its unique identity including its uniform and decisions about the curriculum that pupils follow and how this is taught will still be made at school level.

Each school is seen as central to its own community with the skills of each being used in a supportive way for all the others. Every school gives and receives support from one another.

When will the school become an Academy?

Work is underway; the planned conversion date is 1st September 2025.

Why is there a consultation?

The Academies Act 2010 requires the school to consult "such persons as they think appropriate" on whether the school should become an academy.

The Governing Body of St Alban & St Stephen Catholic Primary School & Nursery is consulting with all key stakeholders about the proposed academy conversion including parents, staff, pupils and other schools over a 4-week period commencing 28 April to 23 May 2025.

Does the school need agreement from the Local Authority to become an Academy?

No. The Academies Act 2010 has removed the need for the Local Authority to approve plans for the school to become an Academy.

What form of relationship will exist between the Local Authority and the school?

This is for individual Academies or Catholic Academy Trusts to determine – there is no statutory requirement for any formal relationship between Local Authorities and Academies.

Academies are directly funded and accountable to central government (Department for Education and the Education Skills Funding Agency).

The Local Authority retains statutory duties for aspects of Special Educational Needs, admissions co-ordination and provision of home-to-school transport. Local Authorities are also expected to play a key strategic role locally in areas such as pupil place planning admissions and sharing good practice.

The school and the Trust have good relationships with Hertfordshire County Council and both seek to maintain and cultivate this in the future.

Are Academies subject to the same Ofsted inspection regime?

Schools converting to Academies will continue to be inspected in the normal way.

Will joining ASCAT reduce the likelihood of pupils from St Alban & St Stephen transferring to St Nicholas Breakspear and Loreto College at the end of Year 6?

No. The Secondary admission process is a completely separate process. Families will still be expected to apply for Secondary school places in the usual way and will have all of the same options available to them including all of the Secondary schools, Catholic and otherwise, that parents may wish to apply to. There is no advantage gained or lost in respect of this by our school joining ASCAT.

What is the process for the school to join ASCAT?

The conversion process includes the following key legal processes:

- Putting in place a Supplementary Funding Agreement (SFA) for the school
- Transferring the employment of the staff from the local authority to ASCAT following a statutory process (TUPE*)

- Agreeing a Commercial Transfer Agreement for the transfer of assets and contracts from the local authority to ASCAT
- Arranging a 125-year lease for any land held by the local authority and agreeing a Church Supplemental Agreement (CSA) with the Diocese of Westminster for the buildings owned by the Diocese

*(*TUPE = Transfer of Undertaking – Protection of Employment)*

St Alban & St Stephen enjoys excellent relationships with the other primary schools in St Albans, will any of these other schools be able to join ASCAT in time?

With the majority of the Catholic schools in St Albans already part of the Trust, St Alban & St Stephen already enjoys close relationships with a number of the Trust's St Albans schools. It is the Diocese's plan for remaining Voluntary Aided Catholic Schools in St Albans to also join ASCAT in time. As a Catholic Academy Trust, ASCAT was founded to serve the Catholic schools of the Diocese of Westminster. While non-Catholic schools in St Albans would not be able to join the Trust, St Alban & Stephen will still continue to enjoy excellent working relationships with all of its local school partners. It is important to the school and to the Trust that St Alban & St Stephen continues to be part of successful, collaborative network of St Albans schools.

Section 2: Staff Issues

Does the school have to hold consultation with staff?

Under employment legislation the Governing Body which is the current employer will need to conduct a TUPE consultation with all staff (both teaching and non-teaching) and the relevant unions as part of the staff transfer process.

Will teachers' pay and conditions change?

No. Whilst Academy Trusts do have the freedom to vary terms and conditions from national ones, the Diocese of Westminster Strategy commits its CATs to abiding by teachers' national pay and conditions.

If the school becomes an Academy, who takes responsibility for the pension arrangements?

Teachers working in an academy fall within the scope of the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS), just as if they were employed in a Local Authority maintained school.

Non-teaching staff at schools can join the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS). This is administered by Hertfordshire County Council as at present.

Employees will pay the same rate as at present under both schemes, subject to any nationally imposed changes.

How will the TUPE process work and what specific responsibilities does the Governing Body have?

As the current employer, the Governing Body is responsible for informing and consulting with staff.

The Governing Body is responsible for informing ASCAT, as the new employer, of any 'measures' which will impact on their employment.

There are none planned in this case and ASCAT will write to each member of staff confirming that they will transfer under existing terms and conditions.

Section 3: Finance

Will we get more money as an Academy? Does the full funding go to the school, or the CAT takes a top-slice as what the Local Authority is doing now?

Academies receive the same amount of per-pupil funding as they would receive from the Local Authority as a maintained school. However, the Local Authority withholds a portion of the school's funds as a contribution to council budgets. That would happen differently for an Academy. The school receives the full funding and pays the CAT for central support services, many items of which are currently paid for by the school as individual items. The total overall funding for all schools within the CAT would be higher than the sum total of present funding distributed to each school individually. There are other financial advantages, for example Academies are able to reclaim VAT on capital expenditure, whilst Voluntary Aided Schools are unable to this. Academies are also able to make use of treasury functions to yield a higher interest on schools reserves and balances, that can be reinvested back into schools.

The Government is clear that becoming an Academy should not bring about a financial advantage or disadvantage to a school. However, academies do have greater freedom to decide how they use their entire budget, and Multi Academy Trusts are able to identify efficiency savings from enhanced partnership working.

Section 4: Admissions

Will becoming an Academy affect our admissions arrangements?

Currently the school's governing body is its admissions authority. Upon joining the Trust – ASCAT will become the admissions authority. Each school in the Trust, however, continues to make decisions about their admissions arrangements, and the responsibility for admissions is delegated to the Local Governing Body through the Trust's scheme of delegation.

In the same way as maintained schools, all academies and their schools are required to adopt clear and fair admission arrangements in line with the admissions law and the School Admissions Code.

Do Academies have to be a part of the annual coordinated admissions scheme? For example, when the LA needs to find places for families relocating to the area etc.

Yes - Academy Funding Agreements require them to be in local coordination. That means although the academy will apply its own admission arrangements, the LA will send out offers of places. The LA also coordinates admissions for in-year applications and applications for year groups other than the normal point(s) of entry. This will not affect the Academy's right to determine which applicants have priority for admission. Academies are also required through their Funding Agreements to participate in local fair access protocols which help to ensure that no child is without a school place.

Will the Academies decide to bring in academic selection?

No, there will be no introduction of selection. Schools which already select some or all of their pupils may continue to do so when they become Academies, but schools becoming Academies cannot decide to become new selective schools.

Section 5: Special Education Needs

Will our responsibilities in relation to Special Educational Needs and exclusions change?

No. Responsibilities as an Academy in relation to Special Educational Needs and exclusions will be just the same as they are now as a maintained school.

Can a child with a statement of Special Educational Needs nominate an academy as their school of choice?

Yes. These arrangements and related processes must at all times comply with the School Admissions Code, and responsibilities as an Academy in relation to Special Educational Needs will be just the same as they are now as a maintained school.

Does becoming an Academy change the way in which exclusions are dealt with?

Academies are required by their Funding Agreement to follow the law and guidance on exclusions as if they were maintained schools. This includes reporting exclusions to the Local Authority. However, Academies do not have to consult the Local Authority before deciding to exclude a pupil and they can arrange their own independent appeals panel.

Section 6: Further Information

How do I find out more about the proposals?

The Headteacher and Chair of Governors will host a consultation meeting for parents at 6pm on 15 May 2025 (Thursday). A separate meeting is being held for staff.

Please complete and return the questionnaire page below to the School office by 23 May 2025.

If you would prefer to complete it online, return it by email to:
<consultation@ssas.herts.sch.uk>

Miss Petty Lai

Chair of Governors

St Alban & St Stephen Catholic Primary School & Nursery

25 April 2025

St Alban & St Stephen's Catholic Primary School & Nursery

Academy Consultation Questionnaire

(Please complete and return to the School office by 23 May 2025)

Please tick the box(es) that best represent you?	
Parent	
Employee at the School	
Member of the Community/Local Resident	
Local Authority Employee	
Other	

Do you agree that St Alban & St Stephen's Catholic Primary School should convert to an Academy and join ASCAT (by entering into a Funding Agreement with the Secretary of State)?	
Strongly agree	
Agree	
Undecided	
Disagree	
Strongly disagree	
Please give your reasons below	

Do you have any other comments to make about the proposal for St Alban & St Stephen's Catholic Primary School & Nursery to convert to an Academy and join ASCAT?

~ End of questionnaire ~