



## All Saints CE VC Primary School

Bishops Caundle

Sherborne

Dorset

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Headteacher  
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16<sup>th</sup> March 2017

Dear Parents / Carers,

Within the climate of changing landscapes for schools in Britain, the majority of schools in the Sherborne area are currently advancing plans for a new local primary/secondary multi academy trust (MAT). This will be known as the Sherborne Area Schools Trust (SAST).

All Saints Primary School has always worked collaboratively with The Gryphon School and all its other feeder primaries and the bonds are strong. The school is part of the Sherborne Pyramid of schools and Sherborne Cluster of small schools and we continue to be committed to sharing good practice and developing local provision. All Saints was involved in the initial consultation meetings for the SAST and the possibility of being part of the MAT process was thoroughly researched and investigated.

However, on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2015 the Governors of All Saints Primary School decided that they would leave the process pending further research. At this point in the proceedings All Saints would have had to commit significantly financially (despite being the smallest school, contributions were split equally among schools) and dedicate substantial Headteacher time.

In addition, and perhaps more importantly, the staff and Governors also considered that there was no evidence to suggest that academy conversion in itself led to better outcomes for children and young people. There was however some evidence that a more formal collaboration between schools could bring substantial benefits such as:

- shared accountability leading to better progress and attainment for pupils and helping schools meet rising expectations.
- school leaders and teachers sharing thinking and planning to spread expertise and tackle challenges together.
- Governors and trustees working more strategically, especially during challenging times.
- sharing school leaders, teachers and other staff across more than one school enabling different solutions to recruitment challenges or retaining staff by providing new opportunities within the group and to planning succession more effectively.
- finding it easier to attract and fund specialist expertise and providing richer curricular and extracurricular activities.
- sharing professional development.
- coping better with shrinking budgets through the economies of scale possible through group business management and collective purchasing made possible within larger groups.

The Headteacher and Governors of All Saints continued to research wider options by visiting existing MATs, discussing options with newly appointed Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of MATs, attending information sessions run by Dorset County Council (DCC) on a variety of collaborative structures, inviting a visit from the leader of Learning and Inclusion (DCC) who discussed the particular issues for small schools like ours, discussing federation with a Headteacher whose school was preparing for this and meeting with representatives of the Diocese of Salisbury Multi Academy Trust (DSAT) as we are a Church School. Recently we have met with a proposed Member and Trustee of SAST to be fully informed of developments. At the same time we keep ourselves well informed of the national picture around the academies agenda.

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The Sherborne Area Schools Trust would consist of 7 schools. MATs vary hugely in size but currently more than 80% of MATs include no more than five schools, therefore the size of this trust is of concern.

**We do not want to compromise what we already have at All Saints and we need to believe that whatever path we choose will help us achieve the best possible outcomes for the children in our school.** As a small community school we want to safeguard our school's long term financial future and community status whilst protecting our ability to appoint and retain our own staff members and staffing structure.

MATs require member schools to top-slice a percentage of their annual budget to fund central services such as finance and HR. MATs can then vary the budget they devolve to each school to address particular needs. This means governors will have far less control over their finances if they have joined a MAT. Emma Knights, chief executive of the National Governors' Association has said (07/16) "The financial implications are much tougher once you become an academy. Once they're in, schools cease to exist as their own legal entities. I get called weekly by primary headteachers who joined a secondary trust, asking how they can get out because they're being dragged down. I have to say 'You can't.'"

To formalize our thinking, one of our governors designed an analysis matrix. All stakeholders contributed identified factors that could be changed or improved if we were to become part of a MAT and Governors ranked and weighted these factors. This helped us decide changes we would consider and those we would not and what our non-negotiables would be. For example we want to be really clear about how we would receive support and challenge as there are a variety of approaches to this. We wish to be clear on the balance of centralised control and delegated decision-making in our school. Which policies will be implemented on a trust-wide basis and which at individual school level? We want to be clear on the governance arrangements below trust board level. This work remains in progress and will help us make informed decisions concerning the future of our school.

The Governors of All Saints Primary have therefore carried out extensive research and have spent time considering the options open to them. Joining a MAT would be a major cultural change that would need to be compatible with the school and enable it to thrive. It is not a change that can be reversed and we felt it essential to take our time, ask the right questions, rather than finding out later we had invested time and finance exploring something that may not be right for us.

We continue to work alongside our colleagues in the Sherborne Pyramid/Cluster (this will not change post SAST), thereby engaging in opportunities for shared expertise and a consistency of approach in all our local schools as we develop the future education for all our children.

If you would like to find out more information regarding the details behind this decision, please join us for an informal consultation on Friday 24<sup>th</sup> March at 6pm. Please complete and return the response slip below.

Kinds regards,

Mark Wookey  
Chair of Governors

Anne Crumpler  
Headteacher

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**All Saints Primary School MAT Open Consultation**

I would like to attend this meeting on Friday 24<sup>th</sup> March 6pm

Print Name(s).....

Signature.....

Telephone.....

**Please return by Monday 20<sup>th</sup> March**