



Proposed Academy Conversion of Cardinal Pole Catholic School

Consultation Report for the Governing Body

February 2024

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Contents

1. INTRODUCTION.....	4
2. SCOPE AND TIMING OF STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION.....	4
3. METHODOLOGY.....	4
4. CONSULTATION MEETING CHRONOLOGY.....	5
5. COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRES.....	5
6. FINDINGS FROM THE CONSULTATION QUESTIONNAIRES.....	5
7. REFLECTIONS ON THE CONSULTATION	6
8. SUMMARY	6
9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	7
10. RECOMMENDATIONS.....	7

Appendices

APPENDIX A – CARDINAL POLE CONSULTATION LEAFLET

APPENDIX B – CARDINAL POLE CONSULTATION PRESENTATION

APPENDIX C – QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FROM THE CONSULTATION MEETINGS

1. Introduction

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

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

The Governors and Headteacher of Cardinal Pole Catholic School have been considering the benefits of converting to an Academy for some time, including collaborative work with other Catholic Schools in Hackney and Tower Hamlets to enhance collaboration.

A first step to achieving this was to complete the Diocese's Due Diligence process, including independent Finance and Standards reports. The Diocese Project Board subsequently confirmed that the school had met the requirements and issued the Diocese Letter of Consent to convert allowing the schools to submit their application to convert and form the Family 9 CAT in March 2023.

The Governors and Headteacher of Cardinal Pole Catholic School discussed the strategy, its implications and opportunities for the school and passed a resolution to submit a conversion application to the Regional Directors (RD) Headteachers Board (HTB) to proceed with the next phase of the conversion process.

The school embarked on the conversion process including a consultation exercise with the school's stakeholders, commencing in January 2024 having received its Academy Order from the RD in October 2023.

The purpose of governance is to provide confident, strategic leadership and to create robust accountability, oversight and assurance for educational and financial performance. The Governors of Cardinal Pole Catholic School firmly believe that they know what is best for the school and wished to invite comments from stakeholders on this proposal.

This report therefore sets out results of the consultation exercise commissioned by the Governors of Cardinal Pole Catholic School to listen to the views of stakeholders.

A subsequent meeting of the Governing Body by April 2024 will consider the findings of this report.

2. Scope and timing of Stakeholder Consultation

The Governors devised and implemented a consultation exercise which sought the views of parents, staff, and the wider community on whether the school should become an Academy and form the Family 9 CAT.

The consultation period opened on Monday 15 January 2024 and ended on Friday 9 February 2024.

3. Methodology

The Governors of Cardinal Pole Catholic School developed a consultation plan and FAQs leaflet, which identified all the school's stakeholders to be contacted at the start of the exercise and provided them with background information about the Diocese CAT Strategy and the Family 9 CAT to inform the debate.

The Headteacher wrote to all parents and staff on 15 January 2024 to start the consultation exercise, invite them to attend consultation meetings and direct them to accessing the consultation leaflet on the school's website.

Staff and parents were invited to attend consultation meetings to find out more about the proposed conversion to an Academy and the Family 9 CAT.

Emails were also sent to both officer and elected representatives of Hackney and Tower Hamlets, as well as the local MP, neighbouring Secondary, Primary and Nursery Schools and other partners.

The consultation materials also contained a response form which stakeholders were invited to complete and submit by the end of the consultation period.

The Consultation Leaflet produced by Governors is attached as **Appendix A** to this report.

4. Consultation Meeting Chronology

The letters to parents and staff invited them to submit questions, and to attend the appropriate consultation meetings scheduled below:

- Staff – Wednesday 31 January at 3.30pm; and
- Parents – Wednesday 31 January at 5pm

The meetings were attended by the Headteacher, the Chair of Governors, the CEO Designate for the Family 9 CAT and the Academy Implementation Officer from the Diocese.

The staff meeting was attended by 57 members of staff and the later meeting was 14 parents.

The Headteacher gave a presentation to staff covering issues such as the Diocese's vision for the CAT programme, the advantages of forming the Family 9 CAT, why this is being considered now, the conversion process and next steps.

The full presentation given to Staff is enclosed as **Appendix B** to this report.

Attendees were then given an opportunity to ask any questions they might have.

The questions asked and answers provided at the above meetings is included as **Appendix C** to this report.

5. Completed Questionnaires

11 completed questionnaires were returned by stakeholders.

Of the 11 respondents:

- 2 (18.2%) respondents 'Strongly agreed' with the proposal
- 6 (54.5%) respondents 'Agreed' with the proposal
- 3 (27.3%) respondents were 'Undecided' about the proposal
- No respondents 'Disagreed' or 'Strongly disagreed' with the proposal.

6. Findings from the Consultation Questionnaires

This section sets out the additional comments offered by the respondent.

Q2) Respondents were asked to consider the proposal that Cardinal Pole Catholic School should convert to an Academy and join the Family 9 CAT

The respondents gave the following reasons for their responses:

- “Very good idea for the children they will have more things to do and learn.”
- “No man is an island joining CAT 9 will make Catholic policy in a Catholic School stronger and better with joint efforts.”
- “Gives us a number of options.”
- “More funding.”
- “Would like to have more information based on the funding agreement before giving consent.”
- “I support the conversion of Cardinal Pole Catholic School into an academy as I understand from the facts given that this will help with the protection of Catholic Education values and allow the school to maintain a competitively high standards of education. The school-to-school peer support will ensure the school’s stability as resources and ideas are shared.”
- “Need to control the narrative as it is inevitable. Trust in SLT and GB to work together with the Diocese to protect the school’s individuality with a collective whole. Like the idea of being part of a broader community to share opportunities and expertise for the common good.”

Q3) Respondents were given the opportunity to make any other comments about the proposed conversion

The respondents offered the following additional comments:

- “The more schools the better, stronger together.”
- “Main concerns: support/administrative staff. These roles would be greater affected by efficiency/savings/processes. CP is able to set is own individual curriculum and this is not to be stipulated x-trust. Concerned about due diligence around school finances from other schools. What safeguards do we have in place to ensure we are not liable to prop-up other schools should there be misinformation or schools that do not maintain their own financial obligations.”

7. Reflections on the Consultation

The staff and parents’ response to the consultation was positive and no significant concerns were identified which had not been anticipated by Governors, Family 9 CAT and the Diocese.

A significant proportion of responses (72.7%) ‘Agreed’ or ‘Strongly Agreed’ with the proposal.

The lack of significant opposition to the proposal indicates that the Cardinal Pole community has been well informed on the proposed changes and benefits of forming the CAT.

8. Summary

This report summarises the findings of the genuine, open, and honest consultation exercise undertaken by Governors to ascertain the views of parents, staff, and other stakeholders on the conversion of Cardinal Pole Catholic School to an Academy and to form the Family 9 CAT.

This report evidences the comprehensive approach taken to raise awareness of the consultation exercise in the community, to provide background information on the issues and to host staff and parents’ meetings to allow stakeholders to find out about the Diocese’s Strategy and ask questions.

Although most respondents were in favour of the proposal, the number of returned response forms was a little low. The school and Trust should continue to communicate with staff and parents about this to ensure that the community remains updated and engaged.

The range of questions asked at the parents and staff meetings (and listed in **Appendix C**) was positive and show the willingness of attendees to engage with Governors and the Family 9 CAT on this matter.

9. Acknowledgements

The Governors and Headteacher of Cardinal Pole Catholic School would like to express their gratitude and appreciation for the staff and parents who took part in the consultation by listening to the presentations, asking clarification questions and who took the time to contribute their views.

10. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Governors of Cardinal Pole Catholic School:

- (i) Approve the contents of this report.
- (ii) Recognise that they have fulfilled their duty to undertake a Statutory Section 10 stakeholder consultation exercise on the proposed conversion.
- (iii) Publish this report on the school's website as a record of the consultation and feedback to the participants and wider stakeholders.
- (iv) Continue to share updates and engage with staff and parents on this matter; and
- (v) Proceed to the next stage of the conversion process not having identified any barriers to the schools' conversion and proposal to form the Family 9 CAT.