

Monday 17 March 2025

Dear Parents and Carers,



We shared with you in April 2023 news of the strategic planning taking place regarding the formation of a Catholic Academy Trust [CAT]. The Sancta Familia Catholic Academy Trust has now been established and the first schools have joined the Trust. We now write to invite you to participate in our stakeholder consultation on our proposal for Wimbledon College to join the Sancta Familia CAT.

Proposal

The Governing body of Wimbledon College is proposing to convert Wimbledon College from voluntary aided status to academy status, joining the 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 for the establishment of the new Sancta Familia Catholic Academy Trust. Five schools have already joined the Trust and the remaining 10 propose to join in the near future. The 15 schools are:

Converted to Academy status

Regina Coeli Catholic Primary School
St Elphege's RC Infants' School
St Elphege's RC Junior School
St John Fisher RC Primary School
Ursuline High School Wimbledon

Schools proposing to join the Sancta Familia CAT

Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School
St Cecilia's Catholic Primary School
St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Wimbledon
St Mary's RC Infants School, Carshalton
St Mary's RC Junior School, Carshalton
St Philomena's Catholic High School for Girls
St Teresa's Catholic Primary School
St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School
SS Peter and Paul Catholic Primary School
Wimbledon College

The academies programme has evolved under successive Governments since 2006. The current Government continues to recognise the value of multi-academy trusts. The Bishops of England and Wales have asked all Catholic schools to join together in

such Trusts, as they believe they provide the best framework for maintaining and developing Catholic education across their dioceses. The Archdiocese of Southwark, has also made clear its intentions for all Catholic schools in the Archdiocese to join one of five local CATs. The Governors with support from the Jesuits in Britain have responded to the direction of the Archbishop of Southwark and looked closely at whether an academy model would be in the best interests of the students, staff and wider community of Wimbledon College.

In support of the Bishops' initiative, the College leadership has been working closely and proactively, with the local Catholic schools, identified above to establish the Sancta Familia CAT. We believe that this collaboration in solidarity with those whose vision we share is the best way of contributing to a successful Trust that will benefit all of our schools.

The Governors are now undertaking stakeholder consultations on the proposal to move forward. The College already has the advantage of being involved with the development of the Trust from its infancy. As an excellent school performing well, the Governors are keen that the College has full control of when and how it moves towards academy status.

Advantages of Academy Status

As the Sancta Familia CAT grows it 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 an excellent 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. 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 in its day-to-day operation.

Of course, the College already works in partnership with schools, including those above, and it 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 the umbrella of a single legal entity. For example, joint resourcing decisions can be made, joint specific training sessions can be undertaken across a number of schools and we could make purchases or commission services as a group of schools rather than individually, to secure better deals. The CAT also has a small central team focused on supporting all its schools. 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, with a central executive team and board of

directors, 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. It is important to both our Trustees [The Jesuits in Britain] and to us, as governors, that going forward Wimbledon College remains a Jesuit school.

Wimbledon College would be in a unique position as a religious order school within a Diocesan CAT and The Jesuits in Britain have been working with the Archdiocese of Southwark and the Catholic Education Service to ensure that the College's Jesuit identity will be retained. Both The Jesuits in Britain and the Governing Body have made it clear that Wimbledon College will not move forward to academisation until its identity as a Jesuit school is guaranteed.

Potential concerns relating to 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. However, 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 in the transfer to academy status.

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

The College will of course be expected to make a regular financial contribution, alongside the other schools, to support this team. The team are there to provide an integrated support service not just for the College, but for all the schools in the CAT. The financial contribution is thus made in solidarity with the other schools. Supporting the CAT in this way should also bring long-term benefits for the College, stabilising pupil recruitment through the network, deepening collaborative work on teaching and learning across the school transfer years and providing tailored resources for the educational mission and the Catholic life of each school.

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 are reassuring 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 Wimbledon College and to provide views on the proposal. 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: Wednesday 2 April at 6.30pm

We have included links below to a page on our website that includes an online form where you can provide your consultation response, give feedback on and ask questions about the proposal. There is also a link on the website page to the Sancta Familia website and the Southwark Archdiocese website.

We would be grateful if you could submit any comments or questions to us by Friday 9 May 2025, when the consultation closes.

<https://www.wimbledoncollege.org.uk/parents/academisation-consultation-about-conversion>

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 Wimbledon College. Please be assured that the Governors act with the preservation of a high-quality Catholic education for the children of our community at the heart of everything that we do.

Yours sincerely,

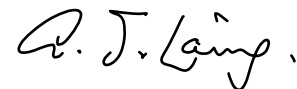


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Joint Chairs of Governors



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