



St Mary's CofE Primary School

Proposal for
Voluntary
Aided
Conversion

**Formal Consultation
Information
Document**

Bringing out the best in each other



Statutory Notice

St. Mary's Church of England Primary School Proposal for change of status from Voluntary Controlled to Voluntary Aided

Notice is given in accordance with section 19(3) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 that the Governing Body of St. Mary's Church of England Primary School intends to make a prescribed alteration to St. Mary's Church of England Primary School, Lodge Hill Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham, B29 6NU from 1st September 2019.

It is a proposed strategic decision by the Governing body to change the status of the school from Voluntary Controlled to Voluntary Aided. This notice is an extract from the complete proposal document. Copies of the complete proposal can be obtained from the school website at: www.stmarys-sellyoak.co.uk

Within four weeks from the date of publication of this proposal, any person may object to or make comments on the proposal. Anyone who wishes to make representations about this proposal should either make comments through the web site: <https://www.birminghambeheard.org.uk/people-1/stmarysceb29final>

or in writing to:

The School Organisation Team, Education Infrastructure, PO Box 15843,
1 Lancaster Circus, Birmingham, B2 2RT

Comments or objections must be received not later than this date: 27/03/2019.

Mr Gerald Fage
Co -Chair of Governors

Mrs Sarah Down
Co -Chair of Governors





Voluntary Controlled Schools and Voluntary Aided Schools

The Church of England has been providing education, in different forms, for around 200 years. In 1944 an Act of Parliament absorbed Church schools into the state system and at this point the schools could opt to be either Voluntary Aided (VA) or Voluntary Controlled (VC). Put simply the difference between the two is that VA means the school is aided (or supported) by the Local Authority (LA) and that VC is controlled by the LA.

St. Mary's is a VC school so currently:

- it is a state school which is funded by the LA (who own the land and buildings);
- the governors are parents, staff, representatives from the Church and the LA;
- the staff are employed by the LA;
- we cannot generate revenue and raise funds as a school entity;
- our admissions policy is controlled by the LA;
- we must use the LA Religious Education syllabus.

A VA school is different in some ways, although it still remains under the regulations of the LA and there would not be a change to the amount of funding that the school receives.

If St Mary's were to become a VA school, it would:

- remain as a state school and remain funded by the LA but the governing body would own the land and buildings;
- not become an academy;
- have governors made up of parents, staff and representatives from the Church (the only change is that the latter become the majority);
- employ the staff directly (through the governing body) but retain all agreed national pay and conditions and continuity of service;
- be able generate revenue and access additional funds made available only to VA schools to support building projects and school maintenance;
- have the flexibility to control the admissions policy to meet local needs;
- be able to write or choose its own Religious Education curriculum.



Our School Context:

We serve a diverse community at St Mary's and this is reflected in the pupil population. The school is highly regarded in the local area and enjoys very productive partnerships with parents, the Church, the Diocese, the local consortia of schools and the Bournville Teaching School Alliance.

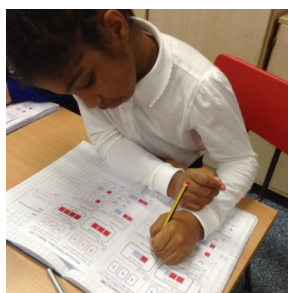
A rise in the local birth rate led to a doubling of pupil numbers between 2012 and 2018. The school is now at full capacity with 420 pupils on roll. The process of expansion was managed in the context of significant financial and recruitment challenges and required a great deal of logistical work in order to maintain a safe and productive learning environment. Throughout this time, the school ensured that the quality of provision was maintained and built upon.

Outcomes for pupils leaving the school from 2014 onwards have been strong and consistently above the national average and within the top 20% of schools nationally at KS2. The school, like all schools, faces financial challenges but is as well-equipped as it can be to face these due to careful and precise long term planning.

Our focus upon improvement is relentless and all members of the school community try to live out the school's motto through their everyday work: 'Bringing out the best in each other'. Following an OFSTED inspection in February 2017, the school was judged as Good and a subsequent SIAMs inspection in May 2017 judged the school to be an 'Outstanding' Church school.

Staff and governors work very effectively towards the shared objective of providing the best possible education. The school evaluates its own effectiveness critically so there is a focus on continuous improvement running through its work.

With this strategic focus the Governors and Senior Leaders of the school are keen to maintain this effectiveness in the years to come, in order to continue to serve the community in this positive way. We believe that conversion to VA status will support the school in meeting this aim.





Why do we believe we should change status?

Access to additional funding from the Department For Education: (DfE)

As the local authority does not own the buildings of a VA school, the DfE provides funding for VA schools to carry out works to maintain and develop the school buildings. The ratio agreed is a 10% contribution from the governing body/school and 90% from the DfE.

We have spent significant sums of money in recent years in order to equip the us for the demands of having 420 pupils on site. All of this work has been self-funded. In 2014/15, the roof of the school's kitchen had to be replaced— this was funded by ourselves and the LA with each contributing 50% of the total cost. If we were a VA school at the time, we may have contributed as little as 10% of the cost which would have represented substantial savings. We believe that to maintain the standards that we currently achieve, the school may need further small projects to make use of our space. We believe that access to this funding would aid us in carrying these out these improvements and being able to divert savings to the classroom. We also would have a more valuable contingency source of revenue available to us if a larger project was required in the future.



Emergency Contingency Funding:

As a school we plan for a small contingency to support ourselves should the school suffer significant damage (fire, flooding etc) but with school budgets under pressure we would like to have access to a fund that would support us should the worst happen. We have suffered from flooding in the past two years and had we been a VA school at the time, rather than having to fund 100% of the repairs ourselves, we would have been able to make a bid to access this fund.

Flexibility linked to our finances:

At the moment the governing body are not allowed to generate revenue for the school which can be ploughed back into its overall budget (e.g. through letting the site for out of hours use). If we were a VA school we could look at doing this through the setting up of an additional 'Governors Fund' which would finance the 10% required of the school for any future works or site improvements. This would mean that building and site improvements would not need to be funded from the school's budget at all, releasing more money to be directed into classrooms.



Additional control over admissions:

School finances are under pressure across the country. The vast majority of our budget is determined by the number of pupils attending the school and one way of securing our school's future is to ensure that it is operating at its capacity of 420 pupils.

In recent years the birth rate in this part of the city has been inconsistent and this is likely to continue. We would like to have the flexibility to adapt our admissions policy if we believe we may find it challenging to admit the full number of 60 pupils into our Reception year group using our current criteria. We are not planning to make any changes but in the future we would have the flexibility to reach more pupils by adapting our admissions policy. This would be applied in such a way as to not disadvantage local families who would ordinarily expect to secure a place for their child here.

The experience of neighbouring schools:

In the past three years, two local schools have changed their status in the same way as we are proposing. One of these, St Peter's CofE in Harborne, was visited by senior leaders as part of the research into this proposal because their reasons for conversion were very similar to ours. We found that their experience has been a highly positive one and has enabled them to have the flexibility to meet the needs of their school and community more effectively.



Religious Education:

One of the targets for improvement from our most recent Church School inspection is to ensure that pupils learn about and from world religions and not only about and from Christianity. We would like to be able to design a specific curriculum with local importance, tailored to our families and community. Whilst the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus is currently used, it is almost 10 years since it was written, it is very prescriptive and we believe that a new curriculum would better enable us to plan effective learning for our pupils.



What would not change?

Staffing:

The terms and conditions, continuity of service and rights of the school's employees would not change. The school would maintain the same level of contributions towards pensions and to all intents and purposes the staff wouldn't experience any difference between being employed by the LA or the Governing Body.



National Curriculum:

We are proud of our curriculum at St Mary's, which offers a broad range of learning opportunities and which is a vehicle for much success. We would still be required to meet all of the national curriculum requirements and any future developments and improvements would be in line with this. The proposed change of status is designed to give the school the best chance of maintaining the current levels of teaching support we provide for all children, particularly those with specific learning needs. Our children would still be required to sit all of the National Curriculum statutory tests required of any state school.



The school's level of independence:

For many years, the school has been able to make decisions based on the needs of the pupils and its knowledge of the local community. A change of status would enhance this aspect of our work rather than restrict it and would mean that the school would not lose its autonomy.

The school's Christian distinctiveness:

The school's Anglican character and strong values would be protected and developed. Staff and governors recognise their role as custodians of the school and this ethos would be preserved.





Outcomes from the pre-consultation period (21st January 2019 until 15th February 2019)

A pre-consultation period took place during the first half of the Spring term. This took the form of an introductory version of this booklet, an invitation for parents to respond both in writing and in person during information meetings held at the end of January. All staff were invited to a meeting intended to explain the proposal in more detail and to provide an opportunity to ask questions. There were also a number of informal meetings and discussions held during this time.

A summary of outcomes from this exercise is below:

- 1) Number of written responses received by the school: 0**
- 2) Total number of attendees at parent information meetings: 9**
- 3) Main topics raised:**

Will a change to VA affect future staffing levels?

School budgets determine staffing decisions. The budget for a VA school is calculated and distributed in the same way as a VC school so the amount of money the school receives from the LA in future years will be unaffected by a change of status. Therefore, any change will not have an adverse effect on staffing levels any more than the current status does— it may be that this change could provide greater protection for staffing levels in the future.

Can the school alter salaries and terms and conditions of staff?

No, the school would remain as an LA school and is therefore bound by national and local agreements. This means that all staff will retain their current posts and their associated salary benefits and contractual rights.

Will there be any changes to the uniform?

No, there will not be any alterations in this regard and there will be little outward sign of the change of status.

Does this change bring the school closer to academy conversion?

No, the process to become an academy is completely separate to the process of becoming a VA school. As explained in the pre-consultation period, the school wishes to remain as part of Birmingham Local Authority so it remains accountable to the local Community and governors recognise the community's strength of feeling on this issue.

Will any changes to admissions impact on local children and their families?

No. This question has prompted a revision to the information about admissions provided in this booklet.

Will the support for children with Special Educational Needs be affected?

No. This question has prompted a revision to the information about admissions provided in this booklet.

Does the proposed change have an impact on the school's Christian character?

The change would not reduce this aspect of the school's distinctiveness. The ethos and values would remain as strong and as visible as they are now.

Will governors gain financially from the setting up of a 'Governors Fund'?

No, this fund would be solely for helping the school to fund building and site improvements. It would be a formal part of the school's budget and therefore subject to regular checks and external audits by BCC to ensure this money was being spent appropriately.