

# St Alban's Catholic Primary School

Minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held in the school  
at 6.30 p.m. on Monday 13 June 2016 at 6.30 p.m.  
to discuss potential Academy structures

## No. 2015/2016 - 5

**Present:** Mark Broadbent (MB, chair), Lia Campos (LC), Patrick Coughlin (PC), Jo Coward (JC), Sally Livesey (SL), Joseph McCrossan (JMcC), William Merrick (WM), Janet Muir (JMu), Jo Wager (JW), Rachael Beale (RB, clerk), Mary Jane O'Sullivan (MJOS), Janet Scally (JS) (observers)

**Apologies:** Graham Hughes, Larry Binns (observer)

MB introduced the purpose of the meeting: not to make a decision, but to agree what further information is required in order to make a decision. Some of the corporate structures presented thus far seem very complex compared to simpler structures observed in the diocese of Westminster.

MJOS gave an update from St Laurence's. Four governors have been allocated to an academy-status working group, but this has so far met only once; it has been a standing agenda item all year. St Laurence's has not been actively seeking academy status, but wants to make any decision in a considered way, while still avoiding being forced into a decision at the last minute.

JMcC felt it was important to understand when the "last minute" was likely to be, with regard to the local picture, the diocesan picture and the Cambridgeshire picture (not to mention the governmental picture). MJOS was told at the termly briefing not to be concerned about the local authority view. JMcC said that the head teachers in Cambridge had no appetite for change, which may well reflect the views of the governing bodies. In terms of the wider sphere (St Alban's existing partnerships with Peterborough), there is also little movement. Elsewhere in the Diocese, however, developments may accelerate progress. St Felix and St Louis in Haverhill and Newmarket are looking to establish a MAT by September, but the general feeling is that this is both too soon and too small. Tim Coulson on the secondary school improvement board, which comes to an end in the summer, may turn his attention to primaries.

JS felt there was no immediate hurry unless the local authority becomes a failing authority. The results in Cambridgeshire are dire, however. The Diocese seems to be the driving force at the moment, but not in an aggressive way. WM felt the Diocesan position was purely strategic, to do with future safety; no educational argument has yet been made in favour of better outcomes for the pupils. JMcC felt that procurement and succession planning were key factors. SL noted that if a Catholic school fails, it could be taken over by a non-Catholic school. MB thought the shortage of Catholic heads was also a factor.

SL has contacted the CES; the website wouldn't accept a message, and the telephone contact insisted that any conversation had to be directly with our own Diocese. SL is willing to follow this up further if it's felt to be worthwhile pursuing, and is willing to talk to Paul Barber off the record. It was felt that this was worth looking into.

MB and JMcC went to see St Mary's in Royston, which is very similar to St Alban's & St Laurence's. There was a clear understanding that the meeting was partially to

explore cross-Diocesan collaboration, and a suggestion that some conversations had already taken place at the Diocesan level. They are already in a MAT, but the Diocese of Westminster is in the process of re-organising its MATs, and St Alban's is its nearest neighbour, geographically.

WM asked if there was an academy trust with a school in another area, what the commitments were with regard to the relationship? Is it purely administrative, or more wide-ranging? JMcC said that staff might visit the other school for training and professional development; it would be hoped that there would be exchange between the schools involving the pupils, as Royston's outdoor space is excellent. Back-office support and procurement are also likely to be pooled. WM pointed out that this is the beginnings of an educational case that will benefit staff and children for making the move.

LC noted that geographic distance is a problem; JMcC agreed, and highlighted the difficulties of moving between Cambridge and Peterborough. St Mary's is also 1-form entry, with one larger class. Currently St Alban's is a little isolated; it attends the network (Schools South of the River) meeting, but a lot of the issues raised are not relevant. JW asked why the school doesn't seem to fit in at that network meeting? JMcC felt it was to do with meeting the needs of the community; the deprivation, social care and support requirements are more extreme for other schools. MJOS felt that the support St Laurence's receives from the CB4 cluster was very useful.

MB had revisited notes from Robert Meakin's consultation, and felt this was addressing more alternative models of collaboration. SL asked if maybe that was what St Alban's needed? JS said that the steer they were given from the meeting in Norwich was that this was considered to be only half a step.

WM said that the Luton model has moved on since he taught there, but at the time there were many schools that had different statuses and different funding arrangements. There were academies, state schools, a Catholic school, and the Barnfield organisation (a little like a regional college). All of these sat under different arrangements with different formal structures, but all bought into the curriculum network. Other arrangements don't prevent informal setups. These networks were more or less peer-led. JMcC mentioned an example from Peterborough, where a system of triads exists; they buy into the Jack Hunt partnership, and Sacred Heart has a very strong partnership there. Peer learning goes on, with heads collaborating and sharing data. Here, St Alban's has bought into the Parkside Federation's sports allocation. Curriculum meetings, however, have all been to do with assessment and early years.

JC wanted more of a vision from the Diocese of the future of education in the next 5-10 years. JW said it would be quite hard for them to present this vision without also imposing it. JC gave examples: in 5 years' time, we want a clear policy for retention of head teachers, for example. Out of this vision, the means for achieving it might emerge. How the school is structured becomes the vehicle to get it to where it should be going; what's missing is that direction. WM noted that structures only usually last 5 or 6 years, and this is not an irrevocable decision; it just needs to work for the next few years. It is likely by that point the structures will be different, which is what makes the need for a vision so important. SL felt this would not come from the Diocese, however.

JMcC said that any new Catholic school would have to be a free school, and would require the raising of funds. JC asked about the crossover between faith schools and free schools; MB said that the criteria required no more than 50% of places to be allocated by faith, but that this might change because not enough free schools have

been opened. WM asked if becoming a MAT made St Alban's ready to adopt this position? JW asked for clarification on what happened during the takeovers of schools that are Catholic with ones that are not. The Diocesan fear is that the Diocese would lose control because it would no longer be able to appoint governors.

JMcC said that recruitment is a real problem; people are not moving in to Cambridge. LC commented that it was a shame that it was not possible to form trusts with the Church of England. JMcC said that there would be clearer guidance from the CES and the Diocese on the subject of free schools within the next year. SL asked if that meant that St Alban's should wait for this guidance? JMcC said that the main question was the state of the local authority. There are 8 Teaching School Alliances looking for business. MB said that the immediate environment (Newmarket & Haverhill, Royston) also needed careful consideration. JMcC said he would circulate the vision paper he had received from the Diocese of Westminster, and has also requested a meeting.

WM noted that at some point the school will have to be knocked down and rebuilt. Where will this money come from? Will the MAT be of use in finding funds for rebuilding? SL said the biggest value is in the site. JMcC said that St Alban's could relocate. MB said a MAT would be a bigger organisation with more resources available to it. PC had concerns that any savings might be top-sliced by the Diocese and redistributed. JMcC said that the devolved formula capital money was all the Diocese was getting, but this has been cut back. SL said that schools currently pay a levy to the Diocese; JS said that families in another Diocese were asked to contribute directly; SL noted that a lot of families in the Diocese don't have access to a Catholic education. If this money was not available to the same extent, then maybe the Diocese would look to top-slice in this way.

PC felt that there was a real opportunity here, but that it wasn't possible to look very far ahead. Ultimately, though it depends on what is good for the staff and pupils. It's important to look at what St Alban's might stand to gain out of any new arrangement. JMcC felt professional development for staff was one big thing that could come out of a MAT; St Alban's is a very small school. PC felt that scenario planning would be fruitful; MB felt that knowing exactly who St Alban's would be federating with is critical; JMcC said recruitment and retention was also very important. SL felt that these questions in particular could be addressed by affiliating with a school in another Diocese. JMcC thought he could explore further at the upcoming headteachers' conference as to how things were progressing with St Felix and St Louis.

WM pointed out that becoming an academy brought certain curricular freedom (although it is necessary still to go through SATs). What would the school do to take advantage of this curricular freedom? And do all schools in any alliance need to share this decision, or could different schools do different things? MB thought this was dependent on the trust board. JS said that at St Laurence's they had understood that the heads still made this kind of decision. WM wanted to be sure that St Alban's would not be placed in a situation where it would be constrained.

JMcC is attending a headteachers' conference in 2 weeks' time. As a Catholic cluster, the schools had approached Julie O'Connor to talk about the vision. The schools are going to discuss how collaboration is viewed within the Diocese from the heads' point of view; those unable to attend have a question sheet. The other 4 schools in this putative cluster will all be attending. JC asked whether the next step might be to explore the commonalities between these schools, and how each school could benefit? JMcC said that only one MAT is established; there aren't many schools left that have not been involved in discussions. JC suggested that setting up a meeting

would be a good thing. JMcC said that St Louis and St Felix were definitely going ahead with their MAT; St Alban's could then be invited to join.

Some schools have no appetite for further alliances and affiliations. The GB would like to give JMcC a clear mandate to explore where the other schools are in relation to MAT formation, with the headteachers, in an informal manner. WM felt it was important also to understand whether St Alban's could join them if it so desired. JMcC said that St Louis would not have the capacity to support St Felix (which is at 'requires improvement' status) by itself. MB said that we also need to understand whether affiliation with St Mary's in Royston was a realistic option. JMcC said that Julie O'Connor should be looking into this; the bishops may also be in dialogue, which could assist inter-Diocesan co-operation.