

Academy Partnership Committee Meeting

St Philip Howard Centre, Crawley

Monday 16 December 2024, 3:00pm

Attendance

Committee Members:

Angela Wilding (Chair), Greg Melly, Fergus Brotherton, Joe Davies, Stephen Ravenscroft (remote)

In Attendance:

Bishop Richard Moth, Julie Oldroyd, Maria Cowler, Sarah Kilmartin, Ray Williamson, Gill Sajnog, Dave Carter, James Kibble (remote)

Apologies:

Fr Jonathan Martin

School Applications

The Committee considered three applications for academy conversion, all of which received conditional approval.

St Peter's Catholic Primary School, Leatherhead (Xavier CET)

Overview:

St Peter's was added to the agenda as a late item to secure the academy conversion grant before its withdrawal. The school currently holds an Outstanding OFSTED rating and serves as a feeder school for St Andrew's Secondary School.

Key Points:

- Current enrolment shows 53 first preferences for 60 PAN, reflecting undersubscription common across the local area
- The school is in good physical condition, though internal areas require refreshing
- Most of the roof has been replaced with only the final stage remaining
- Financial position is as expected, with spare places in Reception Year

- Academic outcomes are broadly in line with Surrey schools, though below Trust averages
- Consultations have not yet commenced but are not anticipated to present difficulties

Committee Decision:

The Committee agreed to support St Peter's joining Xavier CET, recognising Xavier's capacity to onboard the school and the strategic advantage of the school joining alongside St Andrew's Secondary.

St Richard's Catholic College, Bexhill (Bosco CET)

Overview:

St Richard's is an 11-16 secondary school with 1,036 students on roll, regarded as the school of choice in its area. The school is led by Paul Barber, a new and outward-looking headteacher.

Key Points:

- Strong enrolment and community reputation
- School improvement work is ongoing following last OFSTED outcome of 'good'
- Financially sound - budget ratios appear overly prudent
- Previous capital projects require attention, including a sports hall built without changing facilities
- Potential sixth form expansion under discussion with East Sussex County Council
- Significant opportunities for development, including potential 3G pitch on extensive playing fields
- Verbal consultations underway; parent consultations to begin in January

Committee Decision:

The Committee welcomed St Richard's as the third secondary school joining Bosco CET, noting this strengthens the Trust at this stage of its growth. The Chair of Governors has confirmed governors commitment to the conversion process.

Sacred Heart Primary School, Hastings (Bosco CET)

Overview:

Sacred Heart is a one-form entry primary school with 90% Catholic pupils, working closely with its parish. The school is located in an officially designated Education Improvement Area.

Key Points:

- Recently experienced the departure of a bulge year, creating enrolment challenges
- Demographics for single-form entry schools in the area are challenging
- Above-average levels of deprivation, EAL learners, and SEND pupils
- Faces local competition from schools that have invested in early years facilities
- Building improvements needed, particularly to early years provision and perimeter fencing
- Safeguarding measures in place regarding former site manager's house on school grounds
- Academic outcomes align with other schools in the Education Improvement Area

Committee Decision:

The Committee agreed to support Sacred Heart joining Bosco CET, recognising that smaller primary schools requiring support benefit from Trust membership, particularly for succession planning and school improvement capacity. The DfE will group this application with St Richard's Bexhill and three schools approved in November (St Richard's Chichester, St Mary's Bognor, and St Philip's Arundel), enabling assessment of Trust growth across West and East Sussex.

Declarations of Interest:

Fergus Brotherton abstained from commenting and voting on the East Sussex school applications due to a conflict of interest.

Academy Conversion Grant Withdrawal

The Department for Education has withdrawn the £25,000 per school academy conversion grant. Julie Oldroyd presented a paper to Bishop Richard and Sarah outlining the potential impact on diocesan academy growth. Following discussions with Diocesan Trustees, an agreement was reached to ensure conversion costs continue to be covered as they arise. In future, Trusts will confirm local authority fees, legal fees, and associated costs up to £25,000 per school.

This decision was communicated to Trust leaders and acknowledged as beneficial to remaining conversions. The decision was also communicated in the end of term Directors' letter.

Actions

- Julie Oldroyd to send three conditional consent letters from Bishop Richard to St Peter's Leatherhead, St Richard's Bexhill, and Sacred Heart Hastings
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Future Meetings

The meeting scheduled for 14 January 2025 has been cancelled as no school applications are anticipated.

Next Meeting: Tuesday 25 March 2025 at 2:00pm