



# DIOCESE OF HEXHAM AND NEWCASTLE

*✠ Rt Rev Séamus Cunningham  
Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle*



## ACADEMY STATUS

The issue of Academy status is one that I have given much thought to over the last year. As a Diocese we always strive to provide for what is in the best interests of the pupils in our Catholic schools. The Academies issue is a complex one deserving of serious investigation and reflection. I remain firmly of the belief that as a diocese we have been right to take a measured and careful approach rather than make an over hasty and possibly ill-judged move. In coming to a decision I have taken into account advice and guidance from a range of sources including:

- The Catholic Education Service for England and Wales
- My fellow Bishops
- The Diocesan Spirituality, Formation and Education Service
- The Diocesan Trustees

As Bishop I believe that offering a strong lead in this area involves first listening to the views expressed by all those involved with the running of our schools. For that reason I have taken careful note of the responses received from our survey of Diocesan schools. I am also very much aware of the changing educational climate within which our schools operate.

I am clear that it is now appropriate to make the in-principle decision in line with the majority of other Dioceses. Accordingly I have decided "YES," that in principle the Diocese is now prepared to consider requests from schools seeking Academy conversion. Whilst seeing Academy status as offering many positive opportunities for our schools I would like to make it absolutely clear that we are not seeking to compel any school to become an Academy. Equally saying "Yes" in principle does not mean that a school's request will be automatically granted. Any school making such a request would have to assure us that they have thought through the whole process very carefully and would have to satisfy us in relation to a number of key points. These would include:

- Are the governors supportive of such a move?
- Have parents and staff been consulted and how have they responded?
- Will the Catholicity of the school be safeguarded?
- Will the school work in partnership with others and not become wholly autonomous?
- Has the school the capacity to take on the additional responsibilities that Academy status will bring?

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In relation to staff we would not give permission unless the school pledges to continue to follow national pay and conditions for teaching staff and local pay and conditions for support staff.

If a school's response covers all key points to our satisfaction then it will be granted conditional consent. Further detailed work would then need to be undertaken before my final permission could be granted.

I now believe that Academy status could provide us with an opportunity to strengthen and develop further the Catholicity of our schools and the bonds of partnership currently in existence. Saying "Yes" in principle allows these possibilities to be explored more fully over the coming weeks and months.

+ Séamus

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