



St Nicholas CE VA Primary School

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Headteacher: Mrs Tracy Maley

Vision Statement:

'At St Nicholas we nurture everyone to be the best we can be, in a caring and inclusive Christian environment.' UNCRC Article 29:
All children have the right to learning that allows them to become the best that they can be.'

Dear Parents

Update on the Application to Become a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT)

Last year I briefed you on our application to form a MAT from six schools in the Sturminster Newton High School (SNHS) pyramid: SNHS, William Barnes Primary, Hazelbury Bryan Primary, Shillingston Primary, St Nicholas' Primary and Stalbridge Primary. Much has happened over the last 12 months and so I want to give you an update on the progress.

We made our initial application to become a MAT in April, but it was caught up in the turmoil of the 'snap-election' and was not finally considered until 31st August, where it was deferred. Throughout this application process it has become clear that not only is there a lack of clarity on the overarching strategy for the Southwest, the preferred model is for large MATs with a dedicated 'Executive Head' separate from the headteachers in each of the schools. This means that if we want to become a MAT, we will be compelled to join with another MAT, or become part of a large academy chain, to generate the savings to pay for this additional requirement.

Therefore, the Steering Group has decided to withdraw from the process as it does not align with our motivation and ethos for forming a MAT: retaining the unique character of our schools; and keeping control of our future. We sought to retain the status quo by adapting to the future, not hand over our ethos and finances to another organisation.

However, the application process has not been wasted as all the schools have benefited from the close level of cooperation and we have identified ways to be more financially efficient. Therefore, we have decided to explore becoming a Hard Federation which is very similar to a MAT, but it stays within the control of the Local Authority. In essence we amalgamate our governing bodies and our finances, but each school retains its own headteacher and identity, and there is no executive head.

The Steering Group is going to develop this proposal and provide a briefing to teachers and parents later on this term. I appreciate that this uncertainty may be unsettling, I can reassure you that it will not affect the quality of the teaching that the excellent teachers in all the schools deliver. This is a challenging time for education: we are still awaiting clarity on the funding formula and the SEND allocations; there seems to be a change of heart on 'academisation' in London; and we sense that the Ofsted process is subtly changing. The Steering Group's judgement (based on the views of all of the headteachers) is that exploring a Hard Federation is the best way of safeguarding our ethos and dealing with the challenges ahead: better than becoming a MAT, or staying as we are.

Best wishes

Tracy Maley

