**Gainford C of E Primary School Q&A Document**

**1. Why is Gainford considering becoming an Academy?**

Many schools are choosing to take advantage of academy status. Gainford is not obliged to convert to an academy at this stage and can continue to be maintained directly by Durham County Council if we choose. However, you may be aware that the Government had in its ‘White Paper’ originally stated the aim that all schools should be part of, or in the process of joining, strong multi-academy trusts by the year 2030. The Schools Bill, which was intended to implement the White Paper, has now been abandoned on the whole but the government has confirmed it remains committed to the objectives outlined in the White Paper and will continue to progress academy plans as much as it can without legislation.

However, we are concerned that cuts in central government funding to local authorities has led to reduced local budgets and cuts to local services which could affect schools in the future. We are also aware of falling pupil numbers in Durham and the impact on small schools such as ours.

If this happened the school could be forced to move from being a local authority supported school to an academy at short notice and at a time not of our choosing. This would not be a situation we wanted to be in. Governors have therefore been considering for some time whether we ought to join an Academy Trust that shared our values and which would work hard with us to keep improving the school.

In summary, we are considering converting to become an academy. When considering which academy trust we could join it was obvious we were a good fit with the Durham and Newcastle Diocesan Learning Trust (DNDLT). Gainford is a C of E diocese school and we already have strong working relationships with the key people in the Trust. Following conversations with them we believe that:

1. the school effectiveness support being offered by the DNDLT would be more than we currently receive from the Local Authority and would include an additional three days of practical support from a qualified Ofsted inspector. This would be a great benefit to us
2. there are potential financial benefits as we could take advantage of shared buying of services and increased negotiating power thereby releasing resources for curriculum, we could also work more closely in partnership with nearby DNDLT schools to ensure the most efficient use of resources and cost savings where possible
3. we would retain our own unique ethos and a large degree of local autonomy
4. we would reduce the risk of being forced to join a large Academy Trust without the opportunity to shape it or retain any autonomy at school level.

**2. What is an Academy?**

Academy schools are state funded schools in England which are directly funded by central government (specifically, the Department for Education) and independent of direct funding and control by the Local Authority.

Academies were initially established through the Learning and Skills Act 2000. However, the number of schools converting to academy status only really started to gather pace following the passing of the Academies Act 2010. There are now over 9,400 academies and the recent White Paper included the aim for all schools to become part of a strong academy Trust (or have plans to join one) by 2030. As stated above the Schools Bill intended to implement this White Paper has now been abandoned but the government has made clear its commitment to the aims in the White Paper and the academy system.

**3. What is the Durham and Newcastle Diocesan Learning Trust (DNDLT)?**

The Durham and Newcastle Diocesan Learning Trust (DNDLT) exists to enable Church of England Schools to continue to achieve educational excellence through Christian based ethos and values.

The DNDLT was born out of the vision of the Durham Diocesan Board of Education to give a further option to both Diocesan and community schools who wished to seek an academy solution, with the launch of the original Durham Diocesan MAT in November 2017.  This vision was expanded in 2020 to reflect existing partnership working with the Newcastle Diocesan Education Board and enable the Trust to also become an option for schools within the Newcastle Diocesan area.  In November 2020 the Trust formally changed its name to become the Durham and Newcastle Diocesan Learning Trust and amended its Articles and Membership to reflect this wider scope and commitment from both Diocesan Education Boards.   The DNDLT currently contains seventeeN Church of England Primary schools including our neighbouring school, Ingleton Church of England Primary as well as several other nearby schools. Three further schools are due to join in the next 12 months.

Gainford is a church school. The Church school system is managed and developed through individual dioceses, and each Diocese has a Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) which is a statutory body. The Diocese of Durham covers seven local authority areas (Durham, Darlington, Stockton and Hartlepool as well as Sunderland, Gateshead and South Tyneside) and the Diocese of Newcastle covers three local authority areas (Northumberland, Newcastle and North Tyneside)

There are currently 49 church schools in the Diocese of Newcastle and 57 church schools in the Diocese of Durham, almost half of these are already academies. The two Dioceses set up their own Multi-Academy Trust in 2017 which is a separate organisation called the Durham and Newcastle Diocesan Learning Trust (DNDLT).

4. **Are any other church schools in our area part of or considering joining the DNDLT?**

As set out above Ingleton Church of England primary school joined the Trust in 2019 and Green Lane Church of England Primary school joined the Trust in August 2023.

5.  **Are any other schools in our local area academies?**

Seventeen other church schools (15 of which are currently within the Diocese of Durham area) are also part of the Durham and Newcastle Diocesan Learning Trust 2023.

There are also other academy trusts containing Church schools in Durham and many non-church schools which are part of separate academy trusts unconnected with the Diocese. Our governing body considered various options before taking the decision to consult on joining the DNDLT.

6. **Will a move to academy status mean a new name for the school?**

No. The school will continue to be called Gainford C of E Primary School and Preschool and there is no intention to change the name of the school.

7. **Will a proposed new academy have a new uniform?**

No. Parents will not need to buy a new uniform.

8. **Will a proposed new academy still be open to the community?**

Yes. There will be no change to the current provision.

**9. What will be the impact on our children with special needs?**

There will be no change to the level of support provided. The school will continue to recognise that every child is different and has the right to be included as a valued, respected and equal member of the school community. All SEND services will continue to be managed by the local authority with budgets administered by the local authority. There are good support systems within the DNDLT, however, for SENDcos and headteachers needing ideas or advice about supporting children with additional needs.

**10. Will the school hours be any different as an academy?**

Although it is highly unlikely that the school day will be changed, it is the decision of the DNDLT Board to decide this as they have the power to do so. This decision is usually delegated to the school specific ‘academy council’ of an academy, so there is no real change from our authority in this regard. As is the case now, parents would be consulted prior to any change in school hours, although no change is envisaged.

**11. Will pupils’ education be disrupted by a transition to academy status?**

No. When an academy is approved to go ahead, it will do so with minimal disruption to the students. Most of the changes will take place behind the scenes with support from a dedicated team from the DNDLT.

**12. If we move to being an academy will this change what is taught?**

We would be expected to continue to offer the full range of National Curriculum subjects. OFSTED continue to inspect academies and their handbook for inspection is the same one as used in any other school.

**13. Would there be an increased emphasis on religion and Christianity in a**

**Diocesan academy?**

We would maintain our status as a Church School and the existing emphasis on our Christian values and ethos would not change. Church schools are also subject to the statutory (section 48) Church School Inspection and this also would not change. If a community school were to join the DNDLT they would not be required to change their current ethos and values and would retain their own unique ‘non-church’ ethos.

**What will this mean for our School finances?**

**14. How is an academy funded?**

Currently, all revenue funding goes directly to the Local Authority. The Local Authority (LA) takes a proportion of the money from the school budget to provide essential services to the school and the rest is delegated under the Local Management of Schools. Schools can, and do, buy additional services from the LA and other providers. As a result, schools currently depend upon the local authority for many services such as school improvement, HR, finance, etc. This historically led to a dual system where the LA has taken the lead on school effectiveness whilst the Diocese has focused on the distinctive and inclusive characteristics of the school.

Academies receive a similar level of per-pupil funding as maintained schools, plus funding to meet additional responsibilities that are no longer provided for them by the Local Authority (LA). With DNDLT, the money that would have been provided to the LA to run the school is provided directly to DNDLT. The DNDLT will retain an agreed figure (usually around 6%) of the school budget in order to provide services to the academy including school effectiveness support, HR, governor support and finance support. Local authorities fund their core services in a similar way.

**15. Does this improve on current funding arrangements?**

Converting to an academy should not be to our detriment financially and there may be the potential for some financial gain due to the increased buying power across the DNDLT and the opportunity to compare and contrast services centrally to ensure we are obtaining the best value for money.

However, any decision to join the DNDLT is not motivated by money. Funding is available to cover the costs of the conversion process itself, which is provided by central government once the decision to convert has been approved. We may have opportunities to support and be supported by other schools and to benefit financially from doing so. In addition, the DNDLT Board may have access to capacity funding from the Department for Education as well as opportunities to bid for capital funding on an annual basis.

**What will this mean for Teachers and Staff?**

**16. What are the Terms and Conditions for staff?**

On conversion to academy status teachers and staff employed by the school will transfer with the same terms and conditions, via a formal TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment) process. In addition, conversion will not affect any union memberships.

**17. Who will employ teachers and staff following conversion?**

At present teachers and staff are employed by the governing body. Following conversion, teachers and staff will be employed directly by the DNDLT.

**18. Will the DNDLT employ non-qualified teachers?**

All class groups of pupils will be registered to a qualified teacher, as is the case in schools currently.

**19. Will the Board of Governors have less authority and control?**

Instead of a Governing Body there would be an Academy Council. This Academy Council would operate in a similar way to the Governing Body. The composition and powers of the Academy Council will be set out in a formal ‘Scheme of Delegation’ which allows the DNDLT board to delegate responsibilities to the Academy Council. There will continue to be (elected) Parents on the Academy Council (as at present), together with Foundation representatives and a Staff representative as well as co-opted nominees.

That said, the DNDLT may appoint additional governors, such as governors provided from the local community, and may step in if the Academy Council is not performing its duties effectively. Our School and Academy Council would have considerable freedom and responsibility to take commercial and strategic decisions.

**What will this mean for standards?**

**20. Does the DNDLT have the capacity to raise educational standards?**

The DNDLT has its own school improvement capacity for those schools choosing to become an academy which includes a member of the Diocesan Joint Education team and consultants with a proven track record and capable of working at the highest levels. The DNDLT will offer 6 days of school improvement partner support including practical school improvement support and follow up every year.

**21. How will an academy raise achievement?**

The whole structure of the Multi Academy Trust is designed to challenge and support schools in equal measure. As stated above we would receive at least 6 days of school improvement support from a school improvement professional, irrespective of whether the school is outstanding or inadequate. This is more than we currently receive from the LA.

These visits are not inspections but an opportunity for senior leaders to benchmark their judgments through shared lesson observation, work scrutiny, analysis of data, supported self-evaluation and school improvement planning. Indeed, the outcome of these visits will confirm the development state of the school.

The DNDLT will intervene rapidly in schools that are underperforming or on a downward trajectory based on OFSTED criteria.