



Balcombe C E (C) School

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11th September 2023

Proposal for Balcombe Church of England Primary School to join the Hurst Education Trust (HET)

Dear Parents and Carers,

The Governors at Balcombe Church of England Primary School are always looking for further opportunities to fulfil our vision to enable our children to be the best that they can be in every way and prepare them for the next stage in their learning journey, socially, emotionally, academically, morally and spiritually.

In March 2022, the government published a white paper which stated all schools were required to join a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) by the end of 2030, As a result the Governors and the Senior Leadership team began to explore options for our school in conversations with both the Diocese of Chichester and other local partners.

While the government has now withdrawn the immediate need to academise, the future direction for all schools is towards academisation. After much research and investigation, the Governors felt that being part of a Multi Academy Trust that matches our ethos and the ambition we have for our children would mean that our school could provide even more opportunities and improve outcomes for everyone.

In arriving at this conclusion, we had discussions with the MATs that are available to us over several months. We had meetings, presentations, governor board meetings and we visited some schools that have already gone down this route.

Throughout the process, Hurst Education Trust (HET) consistently demonstrated that they would support our ambitions for our school, providing resources, opportunities and the backing that would not otherwise be available if we remain part of West Sussex County Council. The strong team of professionals at HET would also work with us in securing even better experiences and outcomes for our children, all without losing our unique identity and what makes us special.

Our proposal now is to establish a formal partnership achieved through the school converting to an academy within the Hurst Education Trust. This Trust has been established as a partnership between the Diocese of Chichester and Hurstpierpoint College. It is a diocesan academy trust, co-sponsored by the Diocese of Chichester.

The conversion will bring little change to our day-to-day activity in school. There will be no change to the staffing in the school as a direct result of any conversion. The key requirement throughout this process has been to focus on the benefit for all our children. The school leadership sees this as an exciting and positive step for the school and we hope that you will agree.

If we join Hurst Education Trust, we would:

- Keep our school name
- Keep our school uniform
- Maintain and enhance the school's Christian ethos

- Keep our vision and values
- Keep our own school curriculum
- Continue to have a local governing body, including representation from staff, parents, our parish churches and the local community, as we do now.

Benefits to children and staff would include:

- Strong focus on improving experiences and outcomes for all children, including Greater Depth.
- Children benefiting from access to some of the extensive facilities at Hurstpierpoint College, including astroturf pitches, swimming pool, theatre, science labs, music, art, specialist design technology and use of minibuses.
- Children having opportunities for joint activities with other schools in the Trust and the College.
- Comprehensive support services provided by Hurst Education Trust will free up senior management and governor time, enabling greater focus on improving education.
- Economies of scale achieved with some sharing of resources between Hurst Education Trust schools, and also with Hurstpierpoint College, together with some financial savings will ensure that we will be able to put more resource into the classroom.
- Staff receiving outstanding training and development opportunities and access to professional expertise at Hurstpierpoint College.

There will be no impact regarding secondary school options when your child leaves Balcombe School at the end of year six.

Following the Governing Body's decision to proceed to consultation, we want to share this proposal with you and what it would mean for our school. We are doing so at this stage in its development to give you the fullest opportunity to help develop our thinking. We invite you to ask any questions that you have.

A survey, which can be found using the following link <https://forms.office.com/e/wXlXrATZi> or in the QR code below, provides opportunities for you to ask any questions that you have. This survey will remain open throughout the consultation period, which will end on 2 November.

In order to provide parents and carers with an opportunity to hear more about the proposal and to ask questions of the school leadership and the Hurst Education Trust team, there will be a meeting held at the school at 6:30pm on Thursday 21st September, where a short presentation will take place. Please register your interest in attending via the following link: <https://forms.office.com/e/vTLtNL8KyE> or use the QR code at the bottom of this letter.

Some answers to common questions are attached to this letter and we will publish answers to all the questions raised during this process – including those raised at meetings – on the school website. There is an opportunity for you to ask for a personal response to any individual question you have about the impact on you or on your child, but otherwise we intend to publish answers so that they can be seen more widely. No question is too straightforward. Later we will issue a separate survey link asking whether you support the school moving forward in this way. We look forward to receiving your questions and to hearing what you think about this proposal.

In all that we do we are guided by God.

Yours sincerely



Ian Tremble
Chair of Governors

Wendy Millbanks
Headteacher

