

27th January 2011

Dear Parents

I thought I should update you on some current issues:

Application for Academy Status

The initial response of the Governors and Trustees was to register an interest in the Government's invitation to apply for New Academy Status. However, the position of Catholic schools across the country has been to seek guarantees for our current legal protection under the 1944 Education Act. As a Voluntary Aided school the right of Catholic schools to give preference to Catholic pupils and staff is enshrined in law. New Academies only have a seven year contract whose renewal terms depend upon the government of the day. Consequently there is a real danger that, in an increasingly secular society which challenges the existence of faith schools, a future government could simply change an academy's admission arrangements without passing a new Act of Parliament, as a condition of renewing the seven year contract of the New Academy. Therefore, **all** Catholic schools are supporting the negotiations between the Catholic Education Service (CES) and the Government to establish a special category of New Academies which enshrines our current legal rights to protect our identity as a Faith school for generations to come. A further complication is that the details of the New Academies Act have not yet been passed by Parliament. We hope that amendments requested by the CES will therefore be included in the New Act when it is finally approved in the Autumn Term.

There are already a small number of Catholic Academies in existence but these were formed under the previous Labour administration and, apart from similarities in their nomenclature, have a different legal status to the Coalition Government's 'New' Academy programme.

I hope you will understand that, despite the conversion of most non-denominational secondary schools to New Academy status, the apparent inertia on the part of Catholic schools like St. Michael's is because we are awaiting the outcome of the CES consultation with Government ministers and the subsequent passage of the prepared Bill.

Thanks to the Parents' Association

I should like to express my gratitude for the support of the Parents' Association whose successful fundraising over the last year has enabled the school to make significant improvements:

1. £9,000 for equipping the new multi-gym;
2. £6,000 for upgrading the Public Address system in the Assembly Hall;
3. £8,000 for computer/interactive technology for P.E.

Your support for their next two functions is vital to enable them to continue helping the school:

Quiz Night Friday 11th February at 7.30pm
Golf Day Monday 11th July.

What the school needs to do next?

The generosity of parents in contributing voluntary donations to the Archangel Trust has enabled St. Michael's to improve its facilities dramatically. The most spectacular recent example of this is our Sports Hall.

The Autumn Term Appeal raised close to £30,000 to support the forthcoming refurbishment of the School Chapel and R.E. facilities. This work is expected to take place in the summer holidays at an anticipated cost of £95,000.

In 2011-12 we expect finally to undertake the conversion of the ground floor of the Old Convent building into a new multi-media Languages suite at a cost of around £150,000. The quadrangle garden for which parents have already paid for Key Stage 3 pupils will be undertaken as part of this project. We also plan to extend and refurbish the Music accommodation at a cost of £350,000 but this is dependent on gaining a government grant.

Longer term plans are to build two additional Science laboratories and upgrade the school's Art facilities utilising the first and second floors of the Old Convent building.

As you see, we still have exciting plans, even in these hard times! Thank you for making it possible to realise them.

With all good wishes.

Yours sincerely

Miss U.M. Morrissey
Headmistress