



**ST. PETER CATHOLIC
ACADEMY TRUST**
BY SERVICE, TOWARDS GOD

**St. Anthony's
St. Ethelbert's
St. Joseph's**

Chair of the Board of Directors: Dr Elizabeth Duffy

General Election. Advice for Staff

Dear All,

This document is designed to act as guidance for academies within St Peter Catholic Academy Trust about managing the requirements of Purdah during an election period.

What is Purdah?

Purdah is the period that runs from the publication of a Notice of Election up to and including Polling Day.

During the Purdah period, public bodies, including the Department for Education, regulate and restrict their conduct. This is done so that they are not seen to be endorsing any of the competing political parties and help sway the election. It is also done so that no new strategies are implemented that could be obsolete almost immediately once the next party is in power.

What does this mean for us as a MAT and academies?

Given that academies are not funded by the local authority and academy employees are not local authority employees, they are not covered by the Code on Local Government Publicity in relation to Purdah.

Academies are, however, exempt charities (under Schedule 3 to the Charities Act 2011) and the Secretary of State for Education is the principal regulator. MATs/Academies and their staff should, therefore, apply the guiding principle of charity law in terms of campaigning, political activity and elections. This states that charities should be, and be seen to be, independent from party politics.

It is also important to note that Section 406(1)(b) of the 1996 Education Act forbids "the promotion of partisan political views in the teaching of any subject in the school.

It does not mean, however, that public bodies stop communicating entirely or that academies should not be active in terms of communications during an election period!

What does this mean from a practical perspective?

It is recommended that academies should consider the below during the Purdah period.

General Conduct

Academies should not publish material/views which refers to or could, in any way, be construed as being designed to affect support for a political party or a candidate.

Staff should not wear any political badges whilst carrying out their work, nor express their personal political opinions.



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Events

Headteachers should seek advice from the Trust before arranging any events involving candidates during the election period. This includes school events, such as mock elections where political parties are invited to speak to the students, and/or events which a school is asked to host on behalf of a party.

It is important to note that public meeting rooms can be used for free by candidates during an election. If this is the case, then the involvement of staff should be avoided, and it should be clear that the hosting of the event does not imply support.

A school can, however, refuse to hire facilities to a candidate, party or other group if the governors/trustees have good reason to believe that to hire the facilities would alienate people, or they are advised by the police that to do so would create a risk of public disorder.

If you have any other events already planned, such as an official opening of a sports facility, then careful consideration should be given to ensuring invitees are either non-political or representative of the candidates in the area.

Charity Commission guidance states that you are able to “decide not to invite a representative from a political party which advocates policies which are in contravention of your objects, or whose presence or views are likely to alienate supporters.” You would, however, have to have very strong reasons for deciding not to invite a mainstream political party.

Media Relations/Social Media

The Trust and/or academies should not issue statements that explain party political differences or to promote a party whose candidate is standing in the election.

The Trust and/or academies should be wary of being in photo opportunities that give publicity to political parties or candidates. It is strongly recommended that students/staff are not photographed with candidates during Purdah as it is difficult to control the context in which these may be used.

Politically sensitive material should not be shared/retweeted/liked from academy accounts.

In addition, be wary of photos that have been previously taken being re-used by an MP or candidate in a different context. If this happens, please contact the Trust.

Public Displays

School notice boards should be checked to ensure we are not caught by any “technical” breaches; for example by displaying posters or flyers of a political nature, or could be seen to be construed as being designed to affect support for a political party or candidate or for any groups known to have particular affiliations.

This is particularly important if your school is a designated Polling Station.

It is important to note, however, that Purdah should not impact on what is considered your normal marketing and communications activities. This is particularly relevant if the election falls during the typical student recruitment periods. Purdah should not stop the academy from:

- Issuing press releases if they are non-political in nature
- Producing prospectuses and promotional material about the academy - as long as it is done in a politically sensitive way.



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- Distributing newsletters and parent communications
- Engaging students in the political process – as long as it doesn't promote and/or support one candidate/party over another or imply that the academy is influencing the political views of pupils/students.

Should you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact Ciran Stapleton.

1st November 2019

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ciran Stapleton', written in a cursive style.

CEO St Peter Academy Trust