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Representation - formal consultation - on the proposed closure of Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior School

Representation period: 12 November to 10 December 2020

Consultation document

Background

Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior School, is a Roman Catholic voluntary aided secondary school for girls aged 11–18 located in Upper Norwood in the London Borough of Croydon. The school is part of the educational provision of the Archdiocese of Southwark and the London Borough of Croydon. The school is situated at 147 Central Hill, Upper Norwood, London, SE19 1RT.

Croydon Council, in consultation with Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior School Interim Executive Board (IEB) and the Archdiocese of Southwark, led a pre-publication consultation from 01 October to 23 October 2020, allowing stakeholders to comment on the proposed closure of Virgo Fidelis School from 31 August 2021. Analysis of the 60 responses received during the pre-publication consultation period formed the basis of the outcomes report. The pre-publication outcomes report was presented to the Interim Executive Director of Children, Families & Education and the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Learning for a decision/approval to progress to the next step of consultation known as the representation period.

The representation period is the opportunity for people to comment on or object to the council about the proposal within four weeks of the publication date. This consultation will run from 12 November to 10 December 2020, after which, the responses will be analysed and used to construct the formal consultation outcomes report. This report will be submitted to the council's cabinet in January 2021 for a final decision on the proposal to close Virgo Fidelis School from August 2021.

The Proposal

The IEB, in consultation with Croydon Council and the Archdiocese of Southwark have agreed to commence the statutory process for the proposed closure of Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior School from August 2021 following completion of Year 11 GCSE examinations.

Reason for the proposed closure

The IEB, Croydon Council and Archdiocese of Southwark share the collective view that the school is no longer viable. There are several reasons contributing to this shared view, chiefly:

- the majority of the buildings estate needed for a viable 11-16 secondary school is unfit for purpose and in poor repair (these portions of the estate are currently out of use due to health and safety concerns)

- the pupil roll has fallen consistently over the past several years
- the school budget has been in deficit over the past several years with the school now in significant debt.

As a consequence of the above, as well as other factors, the school is increasingly hampered in its capacity to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum that it would be reasonable to expect of a modern secondary school now and in the immediate and longer term future.

The IEB applied to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA) for a variation to the school's admission arrangements for September 2020. The proposed variation of the school's Published Admission Number (PAN) for Year 7 was approved by the OSA and as such, been reduced from 120 places to zero for September 2020.

Statutory requirement

The process for decision making regarding school closures is set out in the Department for Education's (DfE) statutory guidance 'Opening and Closing Maintained Schools' November 2019. The statutory process consists of:

- Pre-publication consultation
- Publication of statutory notice
- Representation / formal consultation
- Decision by the council's cabinet on the school closure proposal

Pre-publication consultation

Thursday 01 October 2020 marked the beginning of the pre-publication consultation which ran until 23 October 2020. Stakeholders were invited to share their views on the proposal to close Virgo Fidelis from August 2021. .

A total of 60 responses were received during the pre-publication consultation period;

- 57 (95%) of the 60 responses were received via the online survey and 3 (5%) were received via email;
- Of the 57 online respondents;
 - 32 do not support the proposed change.
 - 12 do support the proposed change
 - 12 were not sure
 - 1 was not affected/did not wish to answer the questions
- The 3 email respondents did not specifically state whether or not they support or do not support the proposed closure.

The top thematic issues raised by respondents are:

- potential disruption the proposed closure may have on students' education.
- loss of Catholic secondary school places in Croydon
- impact on the number of single sex secondary school places in Croydon
- history attached to the school and its building and wish for this to be protected.
- used to be a good school

The pre-publication consultation outcomes report (www.croydon.gov.uk/getinvolved) contains the Diocese and council's response to the above issues.

The pre-publication consultation outcomes report was presented to the Interim Executive Director of Children, Families & Education and the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Learning for consideration. It was agreed to proceed to the next stage of the statutory process - known as publication of statutory notice and representation / formal consultation period. Please note that no decisions have been made at this point as the DfE's guidance stipulates that any persons can send objections or comments to the LA within four weeks of the publication date.

Potential impact of the closure

Years 7 and 10 pupils

The Office of the Schools Adjudicator approved the suspension of entry to Year 7 for September 2020. Year 7 pupils who accepted a place at Virgo Fidelis have been offered an alternative school place at Notre Dame High School, an all-girls' Roman Catholic comprehensive school situated in Elephant and Castle; or another school of choice. Year 10 students will be taught on the site of St Mary's Catholic Secondary School. Subject to approval of the proposed closure of Virgo Fidelis, the governors of St Mary's Catholic Secondary School have agreed to retain the Year 10 pupils as they move into the final year of their education in a COVID-secure and single-sex location away from the rest of the school. The pupils who remain will be enrolled at St Mary's for Year 11.

Current Pupils

Years 8 and 9 will be offered alternative places at other schools, subject to approval for the proposed closure of the school. Year 11 pupils will have completed their GCSE examinations in July 2021, and the proposed closing date of the school is August 2021.

Staff

The Local Authority and Diocese will work collaboratively to seek to redeploy all staff, or as many as possible, into alternative employment in other schools locally.

Community

Local residents will have the opportunity to express their views during this consultation and the representation period.

School Places

School roll projections indicate sufficiency of secondary school places across the Borough for the next 3 years, however this will be reviewed / monitored if the proposed closure of Virgo Fidelis is approved. The expansion of Free Schools in the Borough has created a surplus of places and choice for parents.

Balance of denominational provision

With regards to diversity of education provision and parental preference, the proposed closure will reduce the number of Roman Catholic school places available in the Borough if an alternative plan has not been agreed by the Diocese, although the London Borough of Croydon has more Catholic secondary schools than any other borough intersecting with the Diocese.

Who we are consulting

We are formally consulting with the school, parents/carers, governors and local community on the proposed closure of the school. In addition, we would welcome the views of:

- all schools / admission authorities in Croydon – governing bodies / academy trusts
- neighbouring Admission Authorities;
- Ward members;
- The Anglican Diocese of Southwark (C of E);
- The Archdiocese of Southwark (Catholic);
- Students;
- Anyone else who has an interest or may be affected by the proposed closure of the school.

Formal consultation (representation) period

This consultation will run from **12 November to 10 December 2020**. During this time you are invited to respond to Croydon Council on the IEB's proposal to close Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior School from August 2021.

Consultation Timetable

Date	Action
12 November 2020	Publication of statutory notice
12 November 2020	Start of representation period
10 December 2020	End of representation period
18 January 2021	council's cabinet decision on whether to close the school
31 August 2021	Proposed school closure, if approved

How to give your views

Should you require this document in any other format or language, please contact the council using the details below.

This consultation period allows anyone with an interest to comment or raise any concerns about the proposal to close Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior School from August 2021 by:

- Completing the online questionnaire at www.croydon.gov.uk/getinvolved or a paper copy of the questionnaire (Annex A below) and returning it by post or email to the address below.
- Writing to:

Croydon Council
School Place Planning Team
2nd Floor Zone D
Bernard Weatherill House
8 Mint Walk
Croydon
CR0 1EA

➤ Email: school.org@croydon.gov.uk

Due to COVID-19, the majority of staff are currently working from home and therefore we encourage responses to be submitted electronically either via the online questionnaire or by email where possible.

What happens next?

After the closing date of 10 December 2020, responses will be analysed and a formal consultation outcomes report will be written. The council's cabinet is the final decision maker on the proposed closure of the school. The outcomes report will be submitted on the 18 January 2021 as part of the Education Estates Strategy report.

The results of the consultation will be published on the council's website.

Annex A below – Questionnaire

Annex A - Questionnaire

Proposed closure of Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior School

1) Please tell us whether you support/do not support the proposed closure of Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior School.

I support the proposed school closure

I do not support the proposed school closure

Not sure

2) If you do not support the proposed change, please tell us why.

3) We are keen to understand how the proposed school closure may affect you. Please use this space to tell us if you are impacted by the proposed school closure and how.

4) What can we do to address any impacts you have mentioned?

About You

We are endeavouring to receive comments from a broad range of people reflective of our community. In order to enable us to assess the degree to which this has been successful, it would be helpful if you could take a moment to complete the section below.

The Council will take all reasonable measures to ensure that any data provided will be protected against loss and misuse. Your information will not be retained or shared with any other parties and will be destroyed in line with relevant destruction policies and processes.

6) Please tell us who you are.

- Member of staff at Virgo Fidelis
- Member of staff at another school
- Governor at Virgo Fidelis
- School Governor at another school
- Parent/Carer of a child/children at Virgo Fidelis School
- Parent/Carer of child/children at another school
- Pupil at Virgo Fidelis School
- Ex-pupil of Virgo Fidelis School
- Local resident
- Member of a local church
- Prefer not to say

Other (Please specify) _____

7) Gender:

- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- Non-binary
- Prefer to self-describe
- Prefer not to say

8) Age:

- Under 16
- 16-18
- 19-25
- 26-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+
- Prefer not to say

9) Which of the following best describes your ethnic background?

- White British
- White Irish
- White European
- Other white
- Mixed white and black Caribbean
- Mixed white and black African

- Mixed white and Asian
- Other mixed background
- Asian or Asian British: Indian
- Asian or Asian British: Pakistani
- Asian or Asian British: Bangladeshi
- Asian or Asian British: Chinese
- Other Asian or Asian British Background
- Black or Black British: Caribbean
- Black or Black British: African
- Other Black or Black British background
- Arabic
- Prefer not to say

Other Please specify _____

10) Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

- No
- Yes
- Prefer not to say

11) Please specify

- Mobility
- Visual impairment
- Hearing impairment
- Mental Health
- Learning disability
- Prefer not to say

Other (Please specify) _____