



Formal Pre-publication consultation on the proposed closure of St Mary Magdalen's Catholic Primary School

Formal Pre-publication Consultation Outcomes Report

1 Proposal.

1.1 The proposal is to close St Mary Magdalen's Catholic Primary School on 31st December 2021. The reason for the proposal is because the school is no longer viable. There are two clear reasons that contribute to this shared conclusion, they are:

- The number of pupils on roll across all year groups is significantly below the school's Pupil Admission Number (PAN). Local Authority data and forward planning suggests that this is not a situation that will be reversed in coming years.
- As school budgets are largely based on pupil numbers of roll, the current situation at St Mary Magdalen's has led to a significant budget deficit. Once again, projections suggest that this situation will only deteriorate of future years.

2 Pre-publication Consultation Outcomes Report.

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Mayor and Cabinet, Archdiocese of Southwark, the Governing Body of St Mary Magdalen's School and respondents to the consultation with the results of the consultation. The Mayor and Cabinet are the decision makers on the proposed closure of the school and this report will provide Mayor and Cabinet with the comments and responses received during the consultation.
- 2.2 This report is based on the responses received during the consultation period, when those affected by the proposal had the opportunity through a questionnaire and online meetings to comment and object to the proposal to close the school. The consultation period ran from 19th April 2021 until 28th May 2021. Following this a Representation period will now run from 11th June through to 9th July.

3 Background and reasons for closure.

- 3.1 St Mary Magdalen's Catholic Primary School is a voluntary aided primary school for boys and girls aged 4-11 located in Brockley in the London Borough of Lewisham. The school is part of the educational provision of the Archdiocese of Southwark and the London Borough of Lewisham. The school is situated at Howson Road, Brockley, London, SE4 2BB
- 3.2 At time of going to consultation there were 142 children on roll. This did not include a significant number who had requested a Section 9 letter for an in-year transfer. The fact

that the school is approximately 60 children below PAN equates to around a £250,000 shortfall in annual school budget income. The school received 12 first preferences for a place in Reception for September 2021. The fact that 22 children will be leaving Year 6 in July 2021 places additional pressure on numbers. The falling birth rates across Lewisham and London indicates that the current reduction in demand for school places will continue in the coming years, will exacerbate the current position. Unfilled school places have an immediate cost for schools through a reduction in their budgets, as well as affecting the overall viability and quality of education standards at the school.

4 Statutory requirements.

4.1 In line with the Department for Education's (DfE) guidance: *Opening and Closing Maintained Schools, Statutory guidance for proposers and decision-makers, November 2019*. Subject to approval, the council will follow the statutory process for closing a maintained school which consists of five stages:

Stage one: Consultation – It is a statutory requirement to consult any parties the proposer thinks is appropriate before publishing proposals. It is for the proposer to determine the nature and length of the consultation.

Stage two: Publication – A statutory proposal should be published within 12 months of the initial consultation period being completed.

Stage three: Representation – The representation period starts of the date of publication of the statutory proposal which is the 11th June 2021 and closes on the 9th July 2021.

Stage four: Decision – The decision report will be presented to Mayor and Cabinet on the 14th July 2021.

Stage five: Implementation – The proposed implementation of the school closure will take place on 31st December 2021

5 Pre-publication Consultation.

5.1 From 19th April to 28th May 2021, stakeholders were invited to share their comments and views on the proposal to close St Mary Magdalen's Catholic Primary School on 31st December 2021

5.2 A total of 33 questionnaires were returned both online and through the school office

- 30 (90%) of the responses were in the form of hard copies and 3 (10%) were received via email.
- Of the 19 respondents:
 - 27 do not support the proposal to closure of the school
 - 2 support the proposal to close the school
 - 4 were not sure.

5.3 This Pre-publication Consultation outcomes report contains the Diocese and council's response to the questions raised.

6 Publication of Statutory Notice.

6.1 The notice will be published in the local press, the websites of the Education Commission for Southwark, the London Borough of Lewisham and the school's website. A copy will also be displayed on the school gates.

7 Representation period

7.1 The representation period will last for four weeks from 11th June to 9th July 2021. This will allow time for any person wishing to send objections or comments to the Local Authority within four weeks from the date of the publication of the proposal.

8 Decision maker

8.1 The council's Mayor and Cabinet is the final decision maker on the proposed closure of St Mary Magdalen's Catholic Primary School and must make a decision within a period of two months of the end of the Representation period, otherwise the proposal must be referred to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator for a decision.

8.2 The Representation outcomes report will be submitted to the Mayor and Cabinet on the 14th July 2021.

9 Communication and Consultation Activities

9.1 A consultation document, including a questionnaire was used as a basis of informing stakeholders, including parents/carers and local residents about the educational and financial rationale for the proposed closure of the school and inviting feedback on the proposal.

9.2 Stakeholders were given the opportunity to express their views in writing via a questionnaire, both electronically and via hard copies available from the school office, which could be submitted by email or post.

9.3 A range of methods were used to inform and facilitate feedback about the proposal. Communication activities included a notice in the local press and circulation of the consultation document, including the questionnaire via the following websites; the Education Commission for Southwark, the Local Authority and the school.

10 Summary of responses.

10.1 The top thematic issues raised by respondents and the responses are outlined below.

Key issues	Responses.
What measures were put in place by relevant authorities to address parental issues with the running of the school? (one respondent)	The Diocese responded the annulling of SATs results in July 2018. An investigation was undertaken and measures were taken to address this issue. An effective and experienced governor was appointed as Chair and an experienced and skilled exec. head and head of school were seconded to the school.
Can the school status be changed from a maintained school to an academy? (one respondent)	Changing the status of the school will do nothing to address the two issues listed in the proposal, the significant budget deficit and the low numbers of pupils. (60 below PAN)
Why were the falling numbers not highlighted at an earlier stage? (One respondent)	Excess school places is an issue across the whole of the local authority. Highlighting this situation earlier would have not altered the position. The budget is linked to the number of pupils on roll and forecasting indicates that the overcapacity issue will only worsen.
Given the financial position of the school, why was it seen fit to place an executive head and head of school into post where there was such under capacity? (One respondent)	From the initial engagement of the Diocese in 2018, the aim was to ensure that the school could be sustained and the quality of education was of the highest possible. With these in mind, the decision was taken to install highly effective leadership, at all levels.
Can this school work with other schools to share costs and resources? (One respondent)	Schools across the Diocese are facing reduced budgets. Given the capacity situation across the whole LA, other schools would not be in a position to financially support St Mary Magdalen School. It is the case that the vast bulk of the school's budget is predicated on the number of children on roll and this money has to be spent on those children.
What will happen to the site and could it be used as a parish centre? (Two respondent)	There has been no firm decision made with regards to the future of the site. It is difficult to see how using the site as some form of local, parish hub can be financed, given the size of the building and the grounds.

Has the process followed the correct statutory guidelines? (One respondent)	The whole process has been conducted in line with the statutory guidelines set out in Section 15 of the Education and Inspection Act 2006. This Act sets out the five stages and the timelines and these have been adhered to.
Increased travel will make it very difficult to find a school (One respondent)	Using data supplied by LA, as at January 2021, there were 681 places across all year groups, within one mile of the school.
Could someone be employed to market the school and therefore increase number of pupils? (One respondent)	The school budget would not allow for the employment of an individual or team to market the school. Given there is an overcapacity of places across the LA, it is clear that there are not the children available of Reception age.
Are there enough places for Catholic children? (Two respondent)	As at April 2021, there were 139 places available across all year groups in four Catholic schools, within 30 minutes travel time of St Mary Magdalen's School. (Using public transport)
Having smaller classes would benefit the children from an academic perspective (One respondent)	The school does not have the financial ability to run smaller classes. Each class would need a qualified teacher. As stated, school budgets are largely based on the number of children on roll. Having smaller classes would only exacerbate the unsustainable financial position.

10.2 Points made in support of the closure of St Mary Magdalen's.

- Given the deficit budget and the prediction that this will only continue to deteriorate, there will be a reduction in the quality of education for the children. As the school's budget reduced their ability to recruit quality staff will be diminished.

11 Next steps.

11.1 The proposal to close the school will be published on 11th June 2021. This will be followed by a four-week Representation period which will run from 11th June to 9th July 2021. On completion of this, Lewisham Education Authority will submit a decision report to the Mayor and Cabinet. This will be done by the end of July 2021.

Appendix 1

Population Responses	Breakdown
Who you are:	
Member of staff at SMM Catholic Primary School	1 (3%)
Member of staff at another school	(0%)
School governor at SMM catholic Primary school	(0%)
School governor at another school	(0%)
Parent/carer of a child/ren at SMM Catholic Primary School	18 (53%)
Parent/carer of child/ren at another school	3 (9%)
Pupil at SMM Catholic Primary School	3 (9%)
Local resident	7 (9%)
Prefer not to say	1 (3%)
other	1 (3%)
Did not answer	(0%)
Gender:	
Male	8 (24%)
Female	19 (58%)
Transgender	1 (3%)
Prefer not to say	5 (15%)
Did not answer	1 (3%)
Age:	
Under 15	3 (9%)
16-18	(0%)
19-25	(0%)
26-34	5 (15%)
35-44	10 (30%)
45-54	4 (12%)
55-64	1 (3%)
65+	3 (9%)
Prefer not to say	7 (21%)
Did not answer	(0%)
Ethnic background:	
White British	6 (19%)
White Irish	(0%)
White European	2 (6%)
Other white	2 (6%)
Mixed white and black Caribbean	(0%)
Mixed white and black African	(0%)
Mixed white and Asian	(0%)
Other mixed background	(0%)
Asian or Asian British: Indian	(0%)
Asian or Asian British: Pakistani	(0%)
Asian or Asian British: Bangladeshi	(0%)
Asian or Asian British: Chinese	(0%)
Other Asian or Asian British background	(0%)
Black or black British: Caribbean	4 (13%)
Black or black British: African	12 (39%)
Other Black or black British background	1 (3%)

Arabic	(0%)
Prefer not to say	3 (9%)
Other	1 (3%)
Did not answer	(0%)
Do you consider yourself to have a disability:	
No	25 (74%)
Yes	3 (8%)
Prefer not to say	7 (20%)
Did not answer	(0%)
Please specify:	
Mobility	(0%)
Visually impaired	1 (9%)
Hearing impaired	(0%)
Mental health	2 (18%)
Learning disability	4 (36%)
Prefer not to say	4 (36%)
Other	(0%)
Did not answer	(0%)