

**Consultation on the closure of St Mary Magdalen's
Meeting Two
Held on 5th May 2021 by Zoom**

Representatives from the Governing Body, Archdiocese of Southwark and the London Borough of Lewisham

Pat Barber, Chair of Governors at St Mary Magdalen's- PB
Simon Hughes, Director of Education at the Education Commission- SH
Daniel Coleman, Officer at the Education Commission- DC
Yvonne Epale, Officer at the Education Commission - YE
Angela Scattergood, Officer at Lewisham Council- AS
Matt Henaughan, Officer at Lewisham Council- MH

This was an open consultation meeting attended by parents, staff and members of the local community.

Pat Barber (PB), the current Chair of Governors, welcomed everyone to the Zoom meeting and outlined the reason for the proposed closure as referenced in the pre-publication closure document. PB made everyone aware that there were representatives from Lewisham and the Archdiocese of Southwark.

SN – (Parent Question):

1. Why have the minutes not been received?

Daniel Coleman (DC) responded: All the paperwork will be sent in one email including minutes for both meetings and the report.

PB asked DC to read out the questions sent in.

Daniel Coleman (DC) read the question that had been previously submitted.

1. Given the school is in significant deficit why was an Executive Head and Head of School appointed?

DC responded: It shows the position we were in, we were committed to turning the school around. It shows our dedication to turning the school around. It took time to uncover all the problems. Some of those problems have been resolved by the SLT. The deficit cannot be resolved.

SN (Parent Question):

1. Requested information from the Archdiocese and this was denied. One email wasn't emailed. Will I get an answer to my email?
2. The consultation ends at the end of the month, once I receive the info, how can I pose questions?

PB responded: Who were the emails sent to?

SN responded: They were sent to the Archdiocese then to Daniel Coleman. The only response was received from the Freedom of Information (FOI) request.

DC responded: I received the email on 22nd March. The email was a statement which will be included in the report. There isn't a question to answer. If the statement can be framed as questions, DCI will be able to answer.

SN responded: I will rephrase the email and resend.

SN has also sent the email to the LA

AS responded: We have received a FOI.

SN responded: I will rephrase the email and send again to LA.

DC responded: There is a question: Why were there issues regarding pupil numbers? I feel this was answered in the last call.

SN (Parent Question):

1. What if the minutes aren't agreed to?
- 2.

DC responded: The report will be written after the minutes are agreed.

PB asked if there were any further questions

LMG – (Parent Question):

1. 10% of funding comes from Archdiocese, how much is coming from the LA?

PB responded: St Mary Magdalen's (SMM) is a maintained school, the funding comes from the LA. There has been no additional funding from the Archdiocese.

SH responded: The 10% comes from capital funds. The Archdiocese governors have to make a 10% capital cost regarding repairs.

PB responded: The 10% comes from the allocation to the school.

SN – (Parent Question):

1. In regards to information requested, questions will arise, who will answer them?
2. Will they be answered before the consultation closes? Should I report to the Mayor?

DC responded: Once the governing body has put the consultation through to the Mayor and Cabinet, they might be better placed with the LA.

MH responded: It is a multi-stage process. This is stage 1 with the governors and runs to 28th of May. After 28th May the governing body considers all the questions and counter proposals. The governors then publish the proposal, there will then be a further 4-week opportunity for comments and feedback via representations. These representations go via the LA in written format. These will all be fed into the final Mayor and Cabinet report.

KB – (Prospective Parent Question):

1. I am a parent of a child who starts in September. With regards to the school closing, what happens with pupils starting in September?

MH responded: If and when the decision is made for schools to close, any pupils still on roll will go through a bespoke admissions process. This includes knowing what schools have places available. The current proposed closed date is 31st December 2021.

AS responded: I advise you to have a call with admissions at Lewisham. I will pass over KB name and it is best to speak to Ian Hewson

AEJ – (Parent Question):

1. It feels that the consultation is too late. What happened when there were problems in the school there was a meeting, this should have also happened for this consultation?
2. It feels that the decision has already been made. If I decide on a school is it guaranteed they will get the place they want through the bespoke process?

AS responded: In 2019 the Archdiocese and LA made the decision to put in the new SLT to turn the school around. The commitment at the time was genuine. The bespoke admissions will always seek to meet parental preference.

SH responded: We are not taking the proposed closure lightly, what we were confronted with at the school wasn't what we were led to believe. This is the right time legally to have the consultation. The Mayor and Cabinet will make the decision.

SC (Parent Questions):

1. How many schools in the LA are facing this situation?
2. How many are Catholic? How many schools will be affected in 6 years-time?
3. Has anyone considered sharing resources between schools in this situation? Schools once lost are lost for ever.

SH responded: MH gave a good explanation last time. The situation for Catholic schools is grave. We have to take this decision now rather than later. It is the same for Catholic schools in other LAs. If we don't do this now we will end up with the quality of teaching and quality of buildings deteriorating. By pupils moving, it increases places and increases funding to keep those schools good.

MH responded: Currently there aren't other schools in this position however schools have reduced their size over the last few years. In terms of secondary, it had been down but has gone up as bulge years from primary are now in secondary. The data will be sent out with the minutes. More popular schools can go through smaller year groups.

AS responded: We will always seek every other possibility before closing a school. It is a last resort. Sharing of resources can only go so far.

SC (Parent Question):

1. How many schools are in this situation?

AS responded: It is the smaller schools that face these issues.

SN - (Parent Question):

1. I wish to oppose the consultation. I would like to request an extension on the consultation to put together an opposing proposal.

PB responded: We are following a statutory process.

MH responded: In terms of putting forward alternative proposals, this has to be done before the 27th May. If you aren't able to do it in this time, there will be a 4-week period prior to Mayor and Cabinet direct to the LA.

SN – (Parent Question):

1. I have seen extensions given in the past. Can it be extended?

MH responded: The LA part will start after the governors' part which is the bit we are in.

AEJ – (Parent Question):

1. I Understand the legality. People are being misinformed. Most faith schools are facing this problem. How are you going to show that a school a pupil is sent to won't face the same problem?

SH responded: We didn't want to be in this position. We did not have full access to all information with the previous SLT. The new team have found that the position the school is in, isn't another one in this position, it can recover from here. Legally we have to go through a process where the Mayor and Cabinet decide on all presented views. If the parents can come up with a way for the school to be viable it will be looked at, this is the purpose of the consultation. If you haven't got money in a school you cannot pay the teachers. Every time a child leaves, funding also leaves.

AE-J Parent: The facts are on the table, the consultation will still lead to the school closing.

PB responded: We are following a statutory process. We cannot close the school, the process has to be followed.

SN – (Parent Question):

1. I understand AEJ's perspective. Until parents come together and share views, it isn't right to pull your children out now as the numbers will continue to dwindle. I have sent emails highlighting issues at the school. The emails were ignored. It should not have had to come protests at the school.

PB responded: These issues were brought up last time and will be recorded.

SN Parent : It feels like I am being cut off and ignored.

PB responded: SN is making very good points. Voicing for others.

AS: I am very sorry to hear about the experience SN has had. As discussed last time, we rely on the information from governors and SLT. As soon as the Archdiocese and LA became aware, both parties stepped in.

SH: I am very sorry for what SN and her child went through. Once we became aware of the issues we stepped in. We acted in a way that changed the SLT and governance of the school. We did everything we could to change the way the school was. What we didn't know at the time only became apparent once the new governance and SLT were in the school. I suggests SN speak with Mrs Seymour and Miss De Souza to discuss the options available. Opportunity to use this time to think about what is the best option.

SN (Parent Question) :

1. I wish to direct this question to AS. - If the school closes and my child moves to another Lewisham school how will my child be supported?
2. My child heard discussions that they should not of heard under the old management?

PB responded: I advise SN to contact Mrs Seymour, Miss De Souza or AS directly. It is a personal matter not for consultation.

KB – (Prospective Parent Question):

1. I am still going to go ahead with my child starting in September.

PB responded: That is fine, it is your decision.

SO – (Parent and Governor Question):

1. In support and understanding of SN, the frustration is with the previous leadership. There was no opportunity to confront them. The Archdiocese and LA acted as soon as possible. SN brought good changes to the school.

SN – (Parent Question):

1. I wish to direct this question to PB- in regards to things that have been left unanswered to, would you be able to give answers to?

PB responded: I will do my best to answer or direct the questions. Please send them to the school.

AEJ – (Parent Question):

1. When I joined the school in 2018, the 1st time they had a meeting the previous Headteacher made no communication. SN brought us together as parents. Was anything done to make the SLT answerable to the governing body?

PB responded: They are not here to represent themselves and no longer work in Lewisham. We are so very sad following on from everything that has happened. We have done our very very best to not get to this point but our best couldn't conquer these problems.

PB asked if there were any further questions.

PB thanked everyone for joining us. Documents would be sent out as advised.