

Appendix 1 – Children Young People and Education Public Questions and Statements

1. Question from Bogumit Polachowski

What does the council gain by closing St. Paul's as they do not own the building and the pupil numbers on roll currently including Early Years indicate that we will continue to be viable and prosper into the future?

Answer

The proposal on the table to be consider in the consultation is not made to directly benefit the council. The council has a statutory duty to secure sufficiency of places for children and young people, this includes addressing any excess or insufficiency. We have shared the future trend data on pupil numbers. Which suggests that the oversupply of places in the local area which will increase overtime. The council is there keen to work with the diocese and the schools to find a long-term solution. To enable any changes needed to happen overtime in a planned way. Before any change in pupil numbers impacts on the quality of education and funding in any of the schools affected.

2. Question from Kathleen Ford

With regards to the rivalry between the Beechwood and Noctorum estates, their high levels of crime and antisocial behaviour, how does the Equality Impact Assessment mitigate the risks to vulnerable parents and pupils (many of whom have Special educational needs and disabilities) to ensure community cohesion?

Answer

As part of the consultation process, any concerns from members of the community in relation to anti-social behaviour should be raised to allow an appropriate assessment to be undertaken. This would allow options to explored to support any parent or young person in relation to the proposals that have been outlined. Whatever the outcome of a consultation if approved, it is important that we support parents and young people to feel confident to attend school safely.

3. Question from Jennifer Norwood

Could the proposal for this stage of consultation be delayed, due to the Governors opposing the recommendation to amalgamate, as both schools are progressing discussions with Multi Academy Trusts regarding academisation, with one school already in consultation with parents on a proposal?

Answer

The pupil place planning review that has been undertaken for this area has included all school types, including both academies, maintained and voluntary

aided schools. The local authority has a statutory duty to secure sufficiency of places for children and young people, this includes addressing any excess or insufficiency. For this reason and the remit of the review it would not be appropriate to delay in relation to exploring academisation.

4. Question from Carol Corvers

Can you show us how due process has been followed to result in a proposal to close St Paul's, a school that is deemed to be efficient, financially viable, both now and in the foreseeable future, and achieving good outcomes for extremely disadvantaged pupils in an area which is very near the top of the index of Social Deprivation?

Answer

The council has a statutory duty to secure sufficiency of places for children and young people, this includes addressing any excess or insufficiency. Based on projections that include house building in the local area and birth rates, it is predicted that numbers on roll will fall to 46% occupancy. The predicted reduction in pupil numbers will mean less funding is available to the school, this will risk the financial viability of the school. For this reason, it is appropriate to explore options that maintain viability in the future.

Statement from Patrick Landsborough

The Governing Body at Manor Primary School vehemently oppose the proposal to amalgamate the school with Hillside Primary, and have many concerns, principally:

1. We cannot see the educational benefits for our children.
2. We are concerned about the impact of such a disruption to the learning environment of children with SEMH and SEND issues, who benefit significantly from small classroom environment.
3. Staff at Manor work tirelessly to understand and help both their pupils and family needs. Such vital familiarity would be lost on amalgamation.
4. The school has continued to grow over the past 9 years and has a healthy, stable budget, at no point has the school had to plan and request a licensed deficit
5. We are concerned about potential safety issues with travelling to a site that could treble the journey time for parents/carers/children, some with SEND and mobility issues, and would increase reliance on cars, which contradicts the Council's pledges to reduce both driving, and obesity! There is already a recognised shortage of public transport on both Estates.
6. The community that the school sits within is a vulnerable community and we are concerned as to whether the risks to this community have been properly considered.
7. There is significant gang rivalry and activity between the Beechwood and Noctorum Estates, and we fear that an enforced amalgamation would exacerbate this, making community cohesion difficult to achieve and maintain.

8. With already stretched resources, additional resources will be needed to support and ensure community cohesion. The intervention of a Home Office project is already in the pipeline.
9. The impact of Covid 19 on mental health of our children and families has been significant, emotionally and financially, and feel that such a significant upheaval to their family lives, would exacerbate their stress.
10. We have had meetings with our supportive Ward Councillors, making it clear that we strenuously oppose this proposal. We will be contacting our MP to appraise him of this proposal and our significant concerns.
11. The school has been working closely with an accredited MAT to move the school forward and we are in the process of looking at academisation.

If these proposals go ahead this will de-stabilise an already disadvantaged and vulnerable community.

Statement from Michael Brown

In response to the proposals put forward in terms of the closure of St Paul's through amalgamation I would like to offer the following on behalf of the Governors of the school.

In the Wirral Pupil Place Planning Strategy 2021 -2026 (March 2021) it states that on Wirral smaller schools tend to be the ones who have fallen into Ofsted categories of concern, have poorer outcomes than bigger schools, are unable to offer a rich curriculum with enhancement opportunities for all children and are challenged in terms of the budget. All data concerning St Paul's refutes these representations.

Despite the school being situated in highly deprived area – 174 out of 32,844 (on the index of Social Deprivation) we can state that at St Paul's

We **do** offer a high quality education – Ofsted 2013 and 2017 – good outcome

We **are** efficient and viable – we are not in debt and never have been. In fact, this year we do not even have an in year deficit

We achieve good outcomes because we meet the needs of all children including those with complex additional needs and disabilities

In addition to this we offer impressive enrichment experiences for our children in all areas of the curriculum – school visits, art, drama, music, sporting competitions and a varied programme of after school activities as well as a summer holiday club. The leasing of our minibus supports these endeavours including those with mobility issues as it has disabled access. The building also has enhanced wheelchair provision

Vulnerable children are offered free places in our successful Breakfast Club, and we have plans for an after school club to support working parents.

Our staff are skilled and experienced to support and work with those with additional needs, poor mental health and physical disabilities. The establishment of a SEND hub in September will further enhance this facility.

The data published in the papers for this committee is incorrect. We do not have a capacity of 150, it is 117. Paperwork has been submitted to show this. We have a thriving preschool Twos' Room and F1 facility. Although these age groups are not part of this review, the children are enrolled in the school, and we have figures to show that the numbers into F2 will continue to rise as they have done this year and will do for the next three years.

Our FSM is 64%, not 46% as stated in the papers.

As a Catholic School we exist to promote Gospel Values and the teaching of the Church for all children. This is what the St Paul's parents want for their children. Last summer we were accredited with the School of Sanctuary Award. This evidenced that our school is a hub of safety, support and nurture for the whole community.

A testimonial from a local stakeholder towards the award said

"The team at St Pauls never cease to amaze me with their never-ending passion and commitment to make sure that no child or parent is ignored, and every voice is heard so that the best possible education and pastoral care is delivered. I have personally noted that each child is made to feel part of a family when they enroll into St Pauls, and when they leave the school for the last time, I have witnessed it as being a gut-wrenching time for the staff, the pupils and their families, as they felt a sense of safety and understanding whilst their children were there

The area is so fortunate to have St Paul's, and to validate this my mind goes to what would life be like for everyone if it was never there, I would dread to think"

This echoes what we and the community at large feel about St Paul's which they as a parent/pupil safe and easily accessible school. It is financially viable as the LA financial projections confirm and pupil numbers are set to rise from the increase in uptake of the 2- and 3-year-old provision. We would therefore ask that the proposal does not go forward for consultation and St Paul's is left to continue to shine as a beacon in the Beechwood community.

As a result of this meaningful consultation, we wait for the follow up meeting to discuss the findings.