

DIOCESE OF SHREWSBURY EDUCATION SERVICE

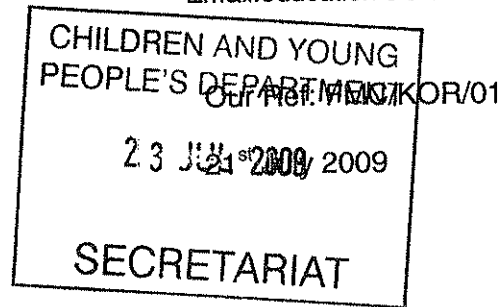
- committed to encouraging 'fullness of life'

MP/DA/SG/ML



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Mr H Cooper
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Dear Mr Cooper

PRIMARY PLACES REVIEW : PROPOSAL TO CLOSE ST LAURENCES CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Further to the above the Diocese has considered the options put forward by the Authority for provision of primary school places in North Birkenhead including that for the closure of St Laurence's Catholic Primary School and, in relation to the latter, those issues raised by parents and other stakeholders during the public consultation meeting on Thursday July 2nd 2009.

Arising from the above the Diocese would wish to draw the following matters to the attention of the Cabinet via the Primary Places Review process. Your good offices in progressing this will be much appreciated.

- 1) St Laurence's is currently achieving good standards of education and has made a valuable contribution to meeting the educational and spiritual needs of children under its care for many years.
- 2) It has achieved such in an area of high socio-economic deprivation. Within the current school 77.3% of children are entitled to Free School Meals, 33.3% have Special Needs, 6.7% are in care and 5.3% do not have English as a first language. To deliver what is recognised as high quality education provision against this background is a credit to all concerned with the school and is a strong argument for its continued existence.
- 3) Whilst one cannot disguise that St Laurence's is a small school evidence from OFSTED and others show that small schools in both urban and rural settings can be highly effective. It is notable that OFSTED's survey of 1,780 small schools reported that:
 - Compared with larger schools small schools are equally capable of providing an effective education and many are amongst the most effective in the country.
 - It is well within the capacity of small schools to teach the full range of the National Curriculum.
 - The good ethos of the great majority of small schools is one of their strengths and inspectors invariably described very good provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils ESPECIALLY in Church schools.
 - Inspectors noted that costs can be higher but they concluded that a good case emerged for the place of small schools in the education system as a whole when the quality of their educational performance is added to the broader contribution they make to their communities, particularly in areas of urban socio economic deprivation.

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- 4) St Laurence's serves not only Catholic parents but also those from other or no faiths who want a Catholic education for their children. It thus makes an invaluable contribution to community cohesion and by doing so provides a stable and well used focal point for that community. Also on the school site, and with the agreement of the Trustees, is an Annex occupied by the Local Authority's Adult Learning Team and a unit to the main Children's Centre at St Werburgh's Catholic Primary School. Both also contribute to community cohesion.

The Diocese appreciates the pressures on the Authority to reduce surplus places and provide education in a cost effective manner. We recognise too, though with no reflection on the school, that numbers are low. However the Diocese requests that the positive messages set out herein are balanced against those pressures.

Should Cabinet still come to a decision not to maintain St Laurence's Catholic Primary School the Diocese would very much hope for confirmation that the Authority will work with it and the Governing Bodies at St Werburgh's Catholic Primary School and Our Lady & St Edward's Catholic Primary School to ensure that sufficient places are available at those two schools for children from St Laurence's whose parents wish them to go there, including additional accommodation if so required. If closure is upheld then the Diocese believes this is best planned for August 2010.

Please do not hesitate to contact me where any further information might prove useful to the purposes of the Cabinet.

Yours sincerely

F. M. Clarke

F M Clarke
Director of Schools

- cc. Sister Frances Guiney, Acting Chair of Governors, St Laurence's Catholic Primary School
Mr John Walsh, Acting Headteacher, St Laurence's Catholic Primary School
Sister Patricia Goodstadt, Assistant Director of Schools