

Appendix 4

Meeting at St Peter's and St Gildas' Catholic primary school on Wednesday 5th February 2025 6pm-7pm

Attendees: Circa 22 parents/carers along with school staff, representatives from the council and the Catholic Diocese (see below)

Headteacher: Peter O'Shannessy

Chair of Governors: Francis Booker

Diocese of Westminster Education Service: Peter Sweeney (Director of Education)

Local Authority: Jane Edwards (Assistant Director, Schools & Learning Service), Carlo Kodsi (Head of Admissions and School Organisation), Nick Shasha (School Place Planning Lead)

Question & Answer

Head teacher (Peter O'Shannessy): This is an issue that is impacting throughout London. We are a small school now but we will offer the best education possible. You will have a better understanding of what will happen next after tonight.

Peter Sweeney: Again, this is happening across London. Cabinet members of the Council will make a decision on the future of the school and it's important you respond to the consultation. Less pupils equals less funding. When a school falls below 80% occupancy it can be in trouble. Around a third of Diocese schools are at this level around 80%. We know the history of the school, but we are where we are in terms of demographic shifts. London Councils data is showing future low projections as well.

Jane Edwards: Describes the Cabinet process, tonight's meeting is informal. We want responses from people here today. I spoke to staff last night and the message I wanted to get across is that this is nobody's fault, it is circumstance. We are surprised by the scale of the decline in births, and this was something I witnessed in previous roles. I have shared my concerns with the school about the budget and future projections. The school did make an application to join a multi-academy trust. As soon as I realised this wasn't going to happen, I concluded that a school consultation on the future had to be launched. The National Funding Formula has changed how pupil funding works, it's now based on how many pupils are on roll at the school. Less pupils = less funds. One of the schools is already in deficit, the other school has a falling surplus. We will have more meetings coming up so there will be more opportunities to talk to us.

Carlo Kodsi: Intro about how we plan for school places and the local issues and have we done enough to tackle recent falls along with the timeline. Birth rates is the key issue. We have a legal duty to provide school places to all residents. School funding is on a per pupil basis. Smaller schools find it more difficult to meet needs.

Nick Shasha: Data – 80% determinant school places long term decline Birth rates are the lowest on record. This decline is happening across London, not unique to Haringey or this school.

Jane Edwards: We have done lots of things to reduce this oversupply, but we have got the point where we have to take further action. There aren't more children out there.

Parent/Carer: But some schools on the ladder are over-subscribed.

Jane Edwards: Very few are.

Carlo Kodsi: The cut-off distance is growing. Ofsted can have an impact.

Jane Edwards: Our Catholic schools have seen a significant reduction in rolls

Carlo Kodsi: We have supported schools on their governance and partnership modelling. Some schools are federated, have restructured their classes, capping of in year classes. It hasn't been enough.

Carlo Kodsi: Decline in faith places has been huge. Demand for faith places isn't where it was. New models of working have been developed. Amalgamations and Federations have been developed to share staff to reduce costs. We have quite a few schools working in partnership already. Schools are still not viable. We still have too much surplus capacity.

Jane Edwards: Catholic has reduced more than CofE. We have to do an equalities assessment as well. Timeline discussed. This is an informal meeting. If Cabinet agree on the consultation we will proceed to consultation. Jane goes through dates of schedule.

Carlo Kodsi: We will have a consultation page on our site called Commonplace where we collect your views and comments.

Jane Edwards: We will get comments from stakeholders which will be taken into account. Cabinet will then make a decision on this evidence. Consultation and Statutory Notice. This does appear quick because we don't want to close the school in the middle of the academic year as it isn't helpful for pupils. My professional view is that a mid-year close is not helpful to children. It does make things untidy for teaching staff in terms of resignation date. I met with staff last night informally as a duty of care as they are our employees.

If we get to the stage of closing the school and we still have pupils here the council will appoint a dedicated Admissions Officer to help you to find another school place as quickly as possible. Some schools will be asked to go slightly over-number where it helps to keep families together.

Parent/Carer 1: If the school closes should we apply in-year as Reception applications are already done?

Jane Edwards: We have to apply the Admissions Code. It would be for an immediate start. In the Cabinet paper we have listed all the schools that currently have vacancies.

Carlo: OLM has places as well as Tetherdown. Place planning is very dynamic, so the mobility of pupils increases a lot.

Parent/Carer 2: In Rokesly some classes have taken beyond class sizes of 30.

Jane: I don't recognise that number. If you want to know about a particular school let us know. We are committed to helping the school provide the best education possible at the moment.

Parent/Carer 3: If the numbers radically change could the school be saved?

Jane Edwards: We have to go through the end of the year. The school will stay open until at least the end of the academic year.

Parent/Carer 4: I love this school, and I want to keep my child here as long as possible.

Parent/Carer 5: When were you worried about this school?

Jane Edwards: As soon as I arrived in 2023, I was worried about this school.

Parent/Carer 5: When classes were combined, we could see the school was in trouble as we had 2 Reception classes of 15. This school has been very popular historically.

Parent/Carer 5: You talked about a messy situation with regard to teachers.

Jane Edwards: We have to give them notice but we won't be able to give it to them until September which means they'll be employed until December. You have a very committed staff here. They are obviously upset about the proposal.

Parent/Carer 5: Chair of Governors: Could this school be sustainable if we lost the Catholic element?

Jane Edwards: It's difficult to say, we are expecting a further fall in places. We have schools that have reduced their PANs in these areas and still have spaces. It's parental preference.

Peter Sweeney: All schools have seen a fall in demand. The movement of children in-year last year was 300,000. Carlo: 96% of parents are getting one of their first 3 preferences.

Frances Booker (Chair of Governors): Managing the change, what will this look like? Some staff may still be on payroll without children to teach.

Parent/Carer 5: Last week our children were told not to say the school is closing. Will our Year 6 children cope well? It's a big deal for these kids.

Frances Booker: We want your children to have the best finish in this school that they can have. We are linking up with other local Catholic primary schools to fill in the gap. I don't want this to happen, and we will take care of the children and we will utilise any surplus staff to help year groups work together. We hoped the academy would be our lifeline, but it wasn't meant to be. We haven't given up and we won't give up on our children. Please be assured that we have talked about this. We are there for your children.

Peter Sweeney: Thank you for all coming tonight. None of us really want to be here. We closed a school which only had 50 pupils left. I have no doubt that Peter (Headteacher) and the team here will offer the best education possible.

Frances Booker: Next year will be the 110-year anniversary of the school and we will extend an invite to all previous pupils at the school. Peter Sweeney has seen the Sisters of the school earlier today to offer assistance.

Parent/Carer: Is there anything we can influence or help the school staff.

Jane Edwards: That's my job, to look after the staff. We have to help Peter (Head) to help the other staff. We know how much so many of them have given to this school.

