

Children's Services
222 Upper Street N1 1XR

Report of: Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families

Meeting of: Executive

Date: 11 January 2024

Ward(s): Caledonian

Subject: Proposal on the Future of Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School

1. Synopsis

- 1.1. Across Islington, 46% of schools are projecting deficit budgets by the end of 2025-26, potentially creating a £15 million deficit across schools in Islington if no action is taken. The Local Authority must take assertive action to remove some school places to reduce the projected large deficit as this will impact on the quality of education if not addressed.
- 1.2. The objective of this paper is to support the recommendation that Islington Council issue a statutory notice to close Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School.
- 1.3. Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School is in the Barnsbury Planning area which has the second highest vacancy rate in Islington, with 74 vacancies in Reception classes out of 245 places and 387 vacancies in total across all school years. One in three places are not taken at schools in this area. This figure is above both the Department for Education's recommendation of a 5% vacancy rate and the 10% vacancy rate used by most local authorities across London.
- 1.4. Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School is the smallest primary school in Islington and has been significantly impacted by falling rolls over a number of years. Based on the data from the October 2023 census, the school has 210 places from Reception to Year 6 but only 76 pupils, meaning 64% of places aren't filled. This year there are only 6 pupils in reception, 9 pupils in year 1 and 8 pupils in year 2.
- 1.5. Each surplus place is equivalent to a £5,700 loss of income and so this level of surplus creates financial pressure for the school, which may result in an inability to deliver quality education because resources are stretched. Less funding for the school creates a pressure on staffing budgets.

- 1.6. The responsibility for managing school budgets sits with Governing Bodies but without the plans and resources to achieve balanced budgets, ultimately, the deficit will fall to the Local Authority, creating additional pressure on an already pressurised budget.
- 1.7. No Local Authority wants to propose school closure, but like other London boroughs, Islington is impacted significantly by falling rolls which is exacerbated by the increased cost-of-living and Brexit which have contributed to an unsustainable school estate.
- 1.8. We have a sufficiency duty to plan for school places as set out in the Education Act, and in exercising this duty, a responsibility to ensure children attend good financially sustainable schools. This means that we must make some very difficult decisions.
- 1.9. By closing Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School, the children that currently attend will be dispersed to other schools (dependant on parental choice). This will contribute to the ongoing financial resilience of Islington's school estate. In this way, this proposal supports the council's ambition to strengthen the resilience of all our schools, ensuring that they are financially healthy and able to sustain a quality curriculum.
- 1.10. It is within this context that this paper is presented for decision.

2. Background

- 2.1. The School Organisation Plan approved by Islington Council's Executive on 13 October 2022 sets out how we will manage the high levels of surplus capacity in our schools to ensure the best outcomes for children and sustainable schools.
- 2.2. Phase Two of this plan was approved by the Executive on 19 October 2023, which agreed to launch an informal consultation on a proposal to close Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School.
- 2.3. This report details the process of the first stage consultation and the responses received for consideration by the Executive to determine whether to issue a statutory notice to close Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School.
- 2.4. The first stage consultation ran for five weeks from 7 November to 12 December 2023 with a series of consultation meetings held for parents and carers and staff at nearby venues.
- 2.5. Separate to this process, Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School has launched a consultation and application to the Department for Education to convert to an Academy and join the Cardinal Hume Academies Trust. The decision on whether to approve this application is made by the Secretary of State for Education advised by the London Advisory Board. Should Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School's application to convert to an academy be approved, the Local Authority would not be able to progress closure of Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School. However, we must proceed on the current legal status of the school, which is a voluntary aided school and Islington Council, as the local authority, has the power to propose the closure of voluntary aided schools.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. To review and consider the responses to the consultation.

- 3.2. To recommend that the Executive proceed to the next stage and issue a statutory notice to close Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School on 31 July 2024. An outline draft statutory notice is attached as Appendix D.
- 3.3. Based on the feedback received during the consultation, this report recommends that the council also make the following commitments:
 - 3.3.1. To offer and provide individual support to pupils and their families with transition from the point a decision is taken through to the settling into a new school
 - 3.3.2. To work with local headteachers of nearby Islington schools, including Islington Roman Catholic primary schools, to provide support to the school and its families. There are places available for every child at Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School in nearby Islington schools, all of which would provide this support should the proposal to close proceed.
 - 3.3.3. To separately offer to all parents of current Year 5 pupils the option to move this class together to another school, either to join another Year 6 class in September 2024 or as a separate bulge class in another school. This is because this is the largest year group at Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School and will have only one year of primary schooling left. Moving the pupils together as a group would mitigate the impact of their transition ahead of a further transition when they move to Secondary School.
 - 3.3.4. To provide early dedicated professional support for pupils with Education, Health and Care plans to support all aspects of transition. The SEND team will work with individual children and their parents/carers to support their transition, including identifying a tailored list of alternative schools suitable to the child's needs as set out in their plans if required.

4. Introduction

- 4.1. Birth rates in Islington have reduced significantly and this decline is projected to continue. This is leading to falling rolls and a high level of surplus capacity in Islington's primary schools with vacancies in reception of 25% in October 2023. This has increased from 20% in October 2022.
- 4.2. The School Organisation Plan sets out our approach to confidently manage this surplus capacity in our schools to ensure the best outcomes for our children and young people and the long-term sustainability of our schools. The plan sets the strategic direction for pupil place planning across the borough and has been developed alongside the Education Plan. It ensures that the principles applied to managing our school estate reflect our corporate and political commitment to driving educational excellence through inclusive and sustainable schools and supports the delivery of a quality educational experience for all children and young people through a diverse curriculum offer.
- 4.3. We have a duty to ensure that sufficient schools are available at primary and secondary stages of education in the local area and for children with special educational needs. Decisions to change the organisation of Community and Voluntary aided schools are made by the council, and for academies, by the Secretary of State, advised by the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC).
- 4.4. Reducing the number of school places in a planned way will support schools to manage change within their national funding formula allocations. Department for Education (DfE)

guidance on school closures includes a presumption not to close. Therefore, all options have been exhausted to avoid school closure but when there is no alternative, long-term option, this does have to be considered.

- 4.5. The specific proposals of the second phase of the School Organisation Plan agreed by Executive on 19 October 2023 were to: launch an informal consultation on a proposal to close Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School; a separate informal consultation on a proposal to amalgamate Duncombe and Montem Primary Schools; and a consultation on reducing the Published Admission Numbers (PAN) for Prior Weston, Rotherfield and Tufnell Park Primary Schools.
- 4.6. We ran an informal consultation on the proposal to close Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School from 7 November to 12 December 2023. This report provides the detail of the consultation and the responses to the consultation.

5. The Proposal

- 5.1. We are proposing to close Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School on 31 July 2024.
- 5.2. We plan school places by dividing Islington into six different planning areas. Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School is in Planning Area 4, Barnsbury, which currently has one of the highest levels of surplus capacity in the borough with 30% vacancies in reception as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: the number of vacancies by planning area

Vacancies by planning area for September 2023 based on offers	No. of places available	Vacancies	Vacancy rate
Planning Area 1: Holloway	465	108	23%
Planning Area 2: Hornsey	465	150	32%
Planning Area 3: Highbury	360	62	17%
Planning Area 4: Barnsbury	245	82	30%
Planning Area 5: Canonbury	340	72	21%
Planning Area 6: Finsbury	300	70	23%
Totals	2,175	536	25%

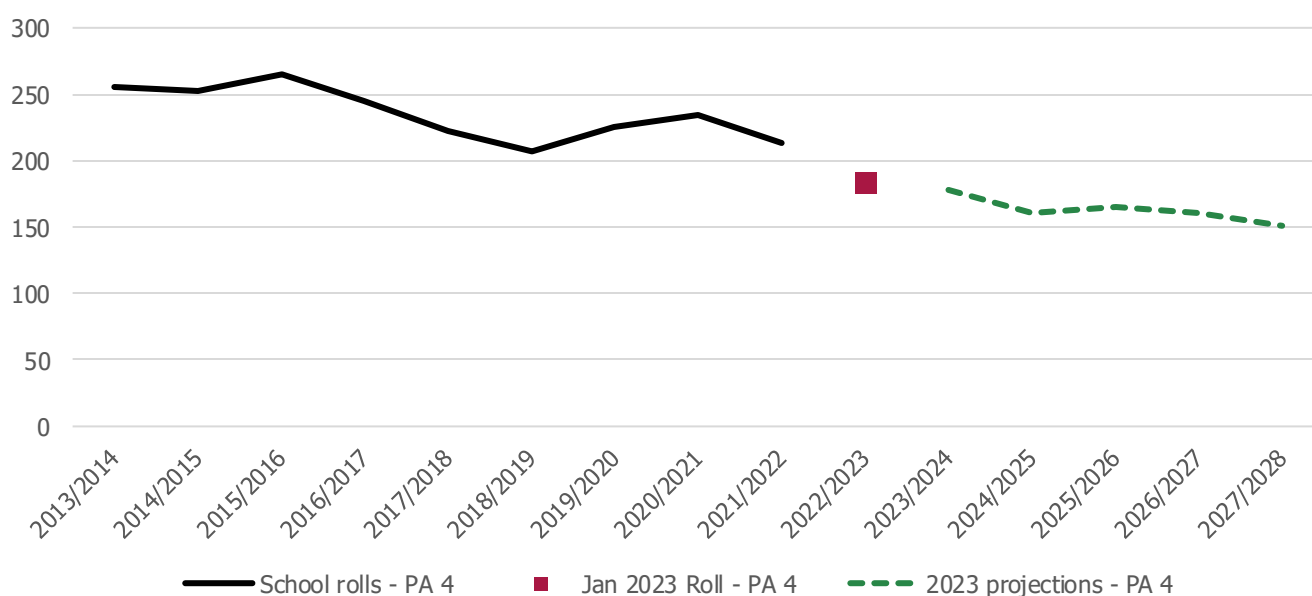
- 5.3. Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School has the most spare places in the Barnsbury area as shown in table 2. Further, Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School has the highest vacancy rate of all schools in Islington. As of October 2023, from Reception to Year 6 the school had 210 places but only 76 pupils, meaning 64% of places aren't filled. This number has continued to decline since this point.

Table 2: Spare places by school in the Barnsbury Planning area

School Name	Published Admission Number for Reception	Number of places taken in Reception (October 2023)	Percentage vacancy in Reception (October 2023)	Total number of pupils from Reception to Year 6
Blessed Sacrament	30	6	80%	76
Laycock	50	36	28%	254
St Andrews	30	22	27%	172
Thornhill	60	60	0%	415
Vittoria	45	20	56%	220
Winton	30	27	10%	191
Total for the planning area	245	171	30%	1,328

5.4. Roll projections for the Barnsbury Planning Area show a reduction in pupil numbers since 2015-16. This trend is expected to continue, with a further reduction projected each year in the coming years.

Chart 1: Roll projections for Planning Area 4 - Barnsbury, Reception year



5.5. There are several neighbouring Islington schools which have spare capacity which are within walking distance of Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School, including the recently

amalgamated Vittoria school which is immediately next door, and three Roman Catholic primary schools within 1.5 miles.

- 5.6. This means that all pupils will be guaranteed a school place at a good Islington school. It would be possible for groups of children and even whole year groups to move together due to the very high level of surplus places in the area.

6. The Consultation

6.1. The consultation process

- 6.1.1. We completed an informal consultation from 7 November to 12 December 2023 on a proposal to close Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School in line with the statutory guidance on Opening and closing maintained schools. The consultation document is at Appendix A.
- 6.1.2. Officers supported several consultation meetings for parents and staff. Unfortunately, the school and Roman Catholic Diocese did not support or cooperate with the consultation and meetings did not take place at the school. Instead, we organised meetings at nearby venues, including NRC Medical School (Half-Moon Crescent) and the Lewis Carroll Children's Library (Copenhagen Street). We also organised a public meeting at the Town Hall.
- 6.1.3. To ensure parents and carers were aware of the proposal, we wrote to them directly with information about the consultation and the meetings and sent a reminder letter one week in advance of the consultation closing.
- 6.1.4. We provided translated versions of the consultation document in Amharic and Turkish.
- 6.1.5. All documentation was also shared with statutory consultees including local schools, admission authorities, MPs, and other interested organisations. All the documentation was published online at a dedicated webpage. The consultation was reported on in the local press.
- 6.1.6. We held seven meetings for parent and carers and organised a public meeting. 10 people attended the parent and community meetings where they asked questions and fed back their views and concerns. No persons attended the public meeting.
- 6.1.7. 96 people completed the consultation questionnaire online. 29 (30%) of those said they currently had children at Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School.
- 6.1.8. Respondents to the questionnaire could make additional comments through a dedicated question. 71 respondents chose to leave additional comments.
- 6.1.9. We also invited respondents to send their comments to us by email to a dedicated mailbox. We received no comments by email.

6.2. Main themes from the consultation

- 6.2.1. 96 respondents completed the online consultation questionnaire. We asked respondents to select an option that described who they were. 34 respondents (35% of

the total) said they were parents of children at Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School. 7 respondents (7%) said they were staff members and 4 (4%) were governors. The remaining 51 respondents (53%) selected 'Other'.

- 6.2.2. As can be expected from a proposal of this nature, most respondents disagreed with the proposal to close Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School: 31% 'definitely agree' or 'somewhat agree' with the proposal to close Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School, 67% 'definitely disagree' or 'somewhat disagree' and 2% neither agreed or disagreed.
- 6.2.3. When filtering the responses to include only parents and carers from the school (34 respondents), 12% 'definitely agree' with the proposal and 88% 'somewhat disagree' or 'definitely disagree'.
- 6.2.4. 10 people attended the consultation meetings.
- 6.2.5. A report on the responses to the consultation are provided at **Appendix B**.
- 6.2.6. We received a dedicated response from the Diocese of Westminster.
- 6.2.7. The main themes from the consultation comments and meetings and our responses to them are set out as follows:

6.2.8. Response from the Diocese of Westminster

- 6.2.8.1. The Diocese of Westminster submitted a response to the consultation. The Diocese does not support the proposed closure of Blessed Sacrament Catholic Primary School on the following grounds:
 - 6.2.8.1.1. Blessed Sacrament has successfully been able to adapt their provision whilst maintaining standards, being rated 'Good' by its most recent Ofsted Inspection.
 - 6.2.8.1.2. 87% of applications to the school are first choice preferences.
 - 6.2.8.1.3. The school has returned a balanced budget because of the staffing and curriculum changes they have undertaken and is not projecting a financial deficit within the school's 3-year budget forecast.
 - 6.2.8.1.4. The Diocese wishes to maintain an education provision in the area and the Diocesan Academy Strategy launched in 2017 includes a plan to convert Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School into an academy.
- 6.2.8.2. **Response:** We are proposing closure of Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School due to falling numbers and projections showing no increase in these numbers. The 87% first choice preferences for the school that were made for September 2023 admission equates to 8 children, and only 6 children took up a place. Closing Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School will contribute to the ongoing financial resilience of Islington's school estate by dispersing the children to local schools. In this way, this proposal supports the council's ambition to strengthen the resilience of all our schools, ensuring that they are financially healthy and able to sustain a quality curriculum. Stretched staffing budgets can impact on the ability to provide a diverse and quality curriculum. Blessed Sacrament's last Ofsted inspection was in 2018. Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School is a voluntary aided school. Under section 15 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, a local authority can propose

the closure of a community, foundation, voluntary, community special, foundation special or maintained nursery school. Parents will still be able to choose a Catholic school for their children as there are 3 other Roman Catholic schools within walking distance that can accommodate all existing and prospective pupils: St John Evangelist RC Primary School (0.9 miles), Sacred Heart RC Primary school (1.1 miles) and St Peter and St Paul RC Primary School (1.4 miles). Local Authorities cannot decide on whether schools are converted to Academies, this is determined by the Secretary of State for Education advised by the London Advisory Board.

6.2.9. Catholic provision and parental choice (19 comments)

6.2.9.1. Some respondents were concerned that closing Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School would limit parental choice due to few other Roman Catholic schools in the local area. One respondent commented that the school had lost its connection with the Catholic diocese and that not many Catholic families sent children to the school anymore.

6.2.9.2. **Response:** We are proposing closure of Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School due to falling numbers and projections showing no increase in these numbers. There are other schools within walking distance that have capacity for existing pupils at Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School. There are three other Roman Catholic schools nearby to Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School which have vacancies: St John Evangelist RC Primary School (0.9 miles), Sacred Heart RC Primary school (1.1 miles) and St Peter and St Paul RC Primary School (1.4 miles). Collectively, these three Catholic schools have 267 places which can easily accommodate all current pupils from Blessed Sacrament. The nearest Roman Catholic schools to Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School are St John Evangelist RC Primary School (0.9 miles) and Sacred Heart RC Primary School (1.1 miles) and as an example, these schools both have seven vacancies in Reception which could accommodate all current Reception pupils at Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School.

6.2.10. Academisation (16 comments)

6.2.10.1. The Roman Catholic Diocese and school leadership are opposed to closure and are instead advocating for the school to voluntarily convert to an academy and join the Cardinal Hume Academies Trust. Many respondents were in support of this suggestion and criticised the council for not explaining this option or explaining how this would avoid closure. Some comments said that the council should support the application for the join to join the Trust, because Department for Education guidance says that the presumption should be not to close a school. Some also criticised the decision to open another academy nearby and why this was allowed when pupil-numbers are decreasing.

6.2.10.2. **Response:** We do not have the power to convert schools to academies or to decide whether any new academies open in the local area and therefore cannot consult or comment on these points. We believe closing Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School is in the best interests of the pupils and the local community, as children will instead move to a nearby school which is financially viable with a more secure long-term future.

6.2.11. In support of the proposal (15 comments)

- 6.2.11.1. Some respondents left comments in support of the proposal and recognised that the proposal was necessary due to declining pupil numbers, falling birth rates in the local area, and because of the lack of funding for the school. Seven respondents criticised the current leadership.
- 6.2.11.2. **Response:** We are proposing closure of Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School due to significantly falling numbers and future projections showing no increase in these numbers.

6.2.12. Mental health and wellbeing (8 comments)

- 6.2.12.1. Some respondents were concerned what impact closure would have on staff and pupils' mental health and wellbeing and the stress associated with moving to another school.
- 6.2.12.2. **Response:** we recognise that closing the school will have a profound impact on the school community. Our Health and Wellbeing team in conjunction with the NHS will offer individual support to parents and children should the proposal proceed. We will also offer the option for children to move together with their friends to another nearby school.

6.2.13. Finance (5 comments)

- 6.2.13.1. Some respondents said that because Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School is a voluntary aided school with financial support from the Roman Catholic Diocese, it is not in deficit. They therefore don't understand why Islington is proposing closure when the school is financially viable. However, in contrast some respondents suggested that the school had few resources and recognised that falling pupil numbers meant the school is no longer financially viable.
- 6.2.13.2. **Response:** We are proposing closure of Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School due to falling numbers and projections showing no increase in these numbers. School funding is closely tied to pupil numbers and the long-term financial viability of the school is at risk due to falling rolls. As seen in Table 3, the older year groups have larger class sizes, therefore once they leave, funding will be reduced even further. It will be increasingly difficult for Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School to remain financially viable.

Table 3: Number of pupils at Blessed Sacrament by year group (October 2023)

Year Group	Nursery	R	1	2	3	4	5	6
Number of Pupils	3	6	9	8	13	9	19	12

6.2.14. Impact on the current Year 5 (4 comments)

- 6.2.14.1. The largest year group affected by this change is the current Year 5 who will need to move to another school for Year 6 should the proposal go ahead. Parents are concerned that this will be particularly disruptive for this group of children, who will

then have to face another transition when moving to secondary school a year later. Some parents are concerned about the impact this will have on their children's mental health and their resilience with facing this change.

- 6.2.14.2. **Response:** there are currently 19 children in Year 5, and should all parents agree, we would look to facilitate another nearby school offering a 'bulge' class to accommodate these children, or to assimilate them as a group into one class. Although this will still require a transition for the group to another school, it would ensure that the group are still with their classmates and surrounded by children they already know. We have included this as a recommendation for the formal proposal.

6.2.15. SEND (2 comments)

- 6.2.15.1. Two respondents were concerned about the impact of closure on children, especially those with Special Educational Needs (SEN), as it could cause distress and unsettle them. They also said that small classes were beneficial to children with SEND and their families as they can build good relationships with staff.

- 6.2.15.2. **Response:** Our SEND team will support the transition of pupils to another good local school. We will work closely with parents, including those of children with Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans, and with those eligible for Free School Meals. An initial assessment of children with EHC Plans shows that their needs can be met at neighbouring schools. The SEND team will work with individual children and their parents/carers to support their transition, including identifying a tailored list of alternative schools suitable to the child's needs as set out in their plans if required. Our Bright Futures service will support those families who may need additional support.

6.2.16. Housing (2 comments)

- 6.2.16.1. Two respondents called for more social housing to build up the Islington community and prevent school closures.

- 6.2.16.2. **Response:** our pupil projections consider factors including new housing and planned housing developments. Even with these, we do not believe there will be an increase in pupil numbers which will offset the need to close Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School.

6.2.17. Long-term plans (2 comments)

- 6.2.17.1. Two respondents asked about the long-term plans for the school site should the school close. One suggested that the site be used for Alternative Provision.

- 6.2.17.2. **Response:** any decision about the long-term plans for the site would be determined only if the proposal proceeds. As Blessed Sacrament is a voluntary aided school, the future of the site would be the responsibility of the Diocese of Westminster and not the Local Authority.

6.2.18. Published Admission Numbers (2 comments)

- 6.2.18.1. Two respondents suggested that the Published Admission Numbers (PAN) at nearby schools be reduced so that children instead are required to go to another school, including Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School.

6.2.18.2. **Response:** this proposal is part of the wider School Organisation Plan which includes other proposals, including proposals to reduce the PAN at those schools with spare capacity. The PAN reductions that are proposed do not create demand for school places elsewhere as the number of pupils in the whole area has fallen so significantly.

6.2.19. Distance to other schools (1 comment)

6.2.19.1. One respondent was concerned about the distance to other schools, and how the closure could increase local traffic as parents had to drive children to another school.

6.2.19.2. **Response:** There are other schools within walking distance from the Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School site, including Vittoria Primary School which is immediately next door. Should parents choose to attend another Roman Catholic school, three others are within 1.5 miles of the school site, which is under the maximum walking distance of two miles set by the Department for Education.

6.2.20. UCL IOE (1 comment)

6.2.20.1. One respondent commented that the school has very strong partnership with the UCL Institute of Education and closing the school would impact this.

6.2.20.2. **Response:** These comments are noted.

7. The next steps

7.1. Based on the feedback received during the consultation we recommend that the Executive agree to issue a statutory notice of our intention to close Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School on 31 July 2024.

7.2. If agreed, we will issue a formal statutory notice in accordance with the prescribed process. An outline draft statutory notice is shown at Appendix D. A four-week formal representation period will follow once the full notice is published.

7.3. Should the Department for Education agree to convert Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School to an Academy, the proposal won't be implemented.

7.4. The timeline recommended to proceed with the next stage is set out in table 4.

Table 4: Timeline for next steps

Stage	Process and time required
Issue statutory notices	Following consideration of this report by Executive formal publication of notices stating council's intent to implement proposals

Stage	Process and time required
Formal Consultation	Four-week statutory representation period if the proposal is agreed to take place from 18 January to 15 February 2024.
Determination	Executive to consider public report of the response received during the representation period.
Implementation	July 2024

7.5. Impacts and risks

- 7.5.1. Islington has a statutory responsibility to manage and make appropriate offers of education, within a reasonable distance, to all children affected by changes at their schools.
- 7.5.2. We would need to do this in a way that safeguarded access to high quality education especially for vulnerable pupils and communities and those pupils with special educational needs. We will identify the needs of the existing cohort, especially for those pupils with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and identify appropriate mitigation to ensure that the right levels of support are in place and aid a smooth transition. An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed and is at Appendix C.
- 7.5.3. Should the Department for Education agree to convert Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School to an Academy, the proposal cannot proceed and will not be implemented. Until that time, we will continue to progress the proposal based on the current status of Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School as a voluntary aided school. Senior council officers have shared the evidence base for this proposal with the Department for Education, including the current level of surplus places, the projections showing a further decline, and the spare capacity at other Roman Catholic primary schools in Islington.

8. Implications

8.1. Financial Implications

- 8.1.1. It is becoming increasingly difficult for schools to remain financially viable when pupil numbers are falling as most school funding is pupil-based in line with the School's National funding Formula. Therefore, as pupil numbers decline, schools receive less funding. Per pupil funding in Islington is on average £5,700 depending on the characteristics of its pupils.
- 8.1.2. Individual school balances stood at £6.291m at the end of 2022-23, with 15 schools in deficit. School balances are forecast to reduce further over the course of this financial year, where more schools are projected be in deficit. School balances in Islington have been in decline since 2018-19 when they stood at £11.732m. The main driver of declining school balances is falling pupil numbers alongside increasing cost pressures such as energy costs and pay.

- 8.1.3. Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School had been projecting to go into deficit from 2023-24 onwards with a deficit projected of £197K by 2025-26. The school is now projecting a small surplus of £4.5K in 2025-26 with support from the Diocese.
- 8.1.4. Schools that are in deficit or are set to go into deficit are required to complete deficit recovery plans to bring their budget back into balance and eliminate their deficit within three years. This is becoming increasingly challenging for schools in the light of falling pupil numbers and increasing cost pressures and is a national issue.
- 8.1.5. If a school closes, the local authority meets the cost of any deficit balance from the General Fund.
- 8.1.6. In the event of academisation, there are two scenarios: for convertor academies (those that voluntarily convert) the deficit is repaid to the local authority by the DfE and recouped from the academy; for sponsored academies (forced conversion due to the school being assessed as inadequate) the deficit remains with the local authority to be paid from the General Fund.
- 8.1.7. If Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School were to convert to an academy this would be a voluntary conversion, therefore any deficit on conversion would be repaid to the council by the DfE. However, there would not be a benefit for other schools in the area from existing pupils at Blessed Sacrament transferring to other local schools.

8.2. Legal Implications

- 8.2.1. Section 14 of the Education Act 1996 requires local authorities to provide sufficient schools for primary and secondary education in their area.
- 8.2.2. The Education and Inspections Act 2006, the School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013, the statutory guidance 'Opening and closing maintained schools' (November 2019), sets out the procedure for closure of schools.
- 8.2.3. The proposals set out in this report comply with the legislation and statutory guidance. The outline draft statutory notice at appendix D will require completion in accordance with the Regulations and Guidance set out above.

8.3. Environmental Implications and contribution to achieving a net zero carbon Islington by 2030

- 8.3.1. Islington Council declared a climate emergency in June 2019, committing the council to work towards making Islington net zero carbon by 2030. A 10-year Net Zero Carbon Strategy, with action plans, was adopted by the Executive in November 2020. The implementation of the School Organisation Plan 2022-25 will be progressed in a manner that aligns with and supports the delivery of the council's ambitions for creating a clean and green Islington. Key environmental implications that the school organisation plan impact is:
 - 8.3.1.1. **Improving the energy efficiency and reducing the level of carbon emissions of all buildings and infrastructure:** schools form a crucial element of our non-residential buildings and infrastructure net zero carbon workstream given their number, size, and distribution across the borough. Decarbonisation Feasibility Studies have already been completed for 22 of our schools with a

further 14 taking place during 2022-23. The impact on the environment and the findings from these decarbonisation reports will be fully considered in developing plans, and where there are falling rolls in making better use of the spare capacity thereby optimising energy efficiency.

- 8.3.1.2. **Reducing emissions in the borough from transport:** Schools again can play their part in delivering on this priority. In proposing specific measures as part of school organisation planning, the implications on school journey distances, school streets and potential changes to vehicle journey numbers will be fully considered in consultation with schools and key stake holders.

8.4. Equalities Impact Assessment

- 8.4.1. The council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it (section 149 Equality Act 2010). The council has a duty to have due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages, take steps to meet needs, in particular steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, and encourage people to participate in public life. The council must have due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.
- 8.4.2. An Equalities Impact Assessment was completed on 13 December 2023. The full Equalities Impact Assessment is appended.

9. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

- 9.1. This report recommends that the Executive agree to issue a statutory notice of our intention to close Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School on 31 July 2024.
- 9.2. We recommend that the proposal also include a commitment to offer support to all parents with moving children to another local school and a specific recommendation to support parents of Year 5 children collectively so that they can move together to one school, should they want to.
- 9.3. There was a high-level engagement with the first stage consultation process, with 96 respondents completing the online consultation questionnaire and 10 people attending the consultation meetings.
- 9.4. Due to Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School's decision to not engage in the consultation process, we had fewer parents and carers attend the consultation meetings than we had anticipated. Nevertheless, we are confident that the community was aware of the consultation and that the responses received captured the views of the community. 34 parents responded to the consultation which is a high proportion of the 76 children on roll at the school.
- 9.5. 67% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposal to Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School which increased to 88% when filtering to responses from parents and carers. The main themes emerging from the consultation were about the impact closure would have on parental choice as the number of Catholic schools in the area would be reduced, and a

general view that academisation would prevent school closure and should be explored further.

- 9.6. Parents and carers of children in Year 5 were concerned about the impact transitioning to another school for Year 6 would have on their children, as they would need to transition to another school when they move to secondary school in year 7. We are therefore proposing a commitment to offer all children in the current Year 5 the option to move collectively to another school.
- 9.7. The level of opposition to the proposal is to be expected given the nature of the proposal, nevertheless, we maintain that closing the school is in the best interests of the school community and especially the pupils. By closing the school, we will reduce capacity in the area and ensure the financial and long-term viability of other schools in the local area.
- 9.8. We know that there are three other Roman Catholic schools with vacancies that are under 1.5 miles away from Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School and closing the school will not detrimentally impact parental choice.

10. Appendices

- Appendix A – Consultation document on the Proposal for the Future of Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School
- Appendix B – Analysis of responses to the Public consultation
- Appendix C - Equalities Impact Assessment
- Appendix D – Proposed outline statutory notice

Final report clearance:

Authorised by:

Cllr Michelline Safi Ngongo

Executive Member for Children, Young People, and Families

Date: 22 December 2023

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