

Children's Services
222 Upper Street N1 1XR

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

Meeting of: Executive

Date: 14 March 2024

Ward(s): Caledonian

Appendices B, C and E to this report are exempt from publication

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

1. Synopsis

- 1.1. The objective of this paper is to recommend that Islington Council discontinue Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School on 31 July 2024 in accordance with the statutory proposal published on 18 January.
- 1.2. Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School is the smallest primary school in Islington and has been significantly impacted by falling rolls over several 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 are not filled. This year, there are only six pupils in reception, nine pupils in year 1, and eight pupils in year 2.
- 1.3. The School Organisation Plan was agreed by Islington's Executive in October 2022 to address the significant impact of falling rolls across the borough by reconfiguring the school estate to support schools to be financially viable. It is imperative that the council takes assertive action to tackle this because falling rolls are making many schools across Islington financially fragile and this is contributing to a projected cumulative deficit of between £13m and £15m. Ultimately, if this is not addressed, this deficit will have to be absorbed by the council's general fund.
- 1.4. The proposal to close Blessed Sacrament is part of the phased implementation of the School Organisation Plan and has been prioritised for action because it is the most impacted school in Islington with the level of surplus places equating to a loss of income for the school of more than £750,000 a year.

- 1.5. Because pupil numbers are so closely tied to how schools are funded, high levels of vacancies affect the financial viability of individual schools. Across Islington, 46% of schools are projecting deficit budgets by the end of 2025-26, potentially creating a £13 million deficit in Islington if no action is taken. We 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.
- 1.6. Each surplus place is equivalent to a £5,700 loss of income and so a surplus of 64% of places creates financial pressure for the school who are missing out on over £750,000 worth of funding annually. If left unchecked, this may impact the school's ability to deliver quality education because this loss of funding creates a pressure on the school budget, including its staffing costs.
- 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 that has contributed to an unsustainable school estate.
- 1.8. The Local Authority has 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. By closing Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School, we can reduce surplus capacity and therefore ensure the long-term viability of other schools in the local area.
- 1.9. Before closing a school, a decision-maker must follow the Department for Education's statutory guidance, 'Opening and Closing Maintained Schools' January 2023 that includes a requirement to consult affected parties before publishing a proposal and then run a four-week representation period after publishing the proposal. This process was followed with all impacted parties consulted with before issuing a formal proposal to discontinue Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School on 18 January. The representation period for that proposal has now concluded. The Executive must now decide whether to proceed with the proposal. This report recommends that the proposal proceed with an additional recommendation to support parents with the cost of new school uniforms.

2. Introduction

- 2.1. Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School is a voluntary-aided school and under Section 15 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (as amended by the Education Act 2011) and the School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013, Islington Council has the power to discontinue voluntary aided schools in accordance with the statutory guidance for Opening and Closing Maintained Schools.
- 2.2. It is a statutory requirement to consult any parties the proposer thinks appropriate before publishing a proposal to close a school. In accordance with this requirement, we carried out an informal consultation on this proposal from 7 November to 15 December 2023.
- 2.3. 96 people completed the consultation questionnaire online. [Most respondents to the consultation](#) disagreed with the proposal to close Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School: 30 people (31%) 'definitely' or 'somewhat' agreed, 64 (67%) 'definitely' or 'somewhat' disagreed and two (2%) neither agreed, nor disagreed with the proposal. Of the total respondents, 29 said that they were a parent or carer of a child from the school. Four (12%) of those 'definitely' agreed with the proposal and 25 (88%) 'somewhat' or 'definitely' disagreed.

- 2.4. The level of opposition to the proposal was 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 which has a surplus capacity in Reception of 30%. This will ensure the financial and long-term viability of other schools in the local area.
- 2.5. Further, 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 where faith is a deciding factor.
- 2.6. Having concluded the informal consultation process, the statutory process requires the proposer to publish a statutory proposal within 12 months of the initial consultation period. We published a statutory proposal on 18 January 2024 at our consultation website, Let's Talk Islington, along with a statement setting out: how copies of the proposal could be obtained; how anybody can object to; or comment on the proposal; the dates for the representation period, and the address to which objections or comments should be submitted. A brief notice was also published containing the website address of the full proposal in the Islington Gazette on 18 January and the Islington Tribune on 19 January.
- 2.7. The Representation period ran for four weeks, from 18 January to 15 February 2024 inclusively. We received five representations during this period, including a response on behalf the Diocese of Westminster. The Executive should consider these representations in making its final decision.
- 2.8. Now that the representation period has ended, the final stage in the statutory process for closing a school is to make a final decision. The decision maker can: reject the proposal; approve the proposal without modification; approve the proposal with such modifications as they think desirable; or approve the proposal, with or without modification, subject to certain conditions being met.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. This report recommends that the Executive approve the proposal and close Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School on 31 July 2024.
- 3.2. This report also recommends that the Executive make the following commitments to mitigate the impact of closing Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School on existing pupils, which includes an additional modification to support parents with the cost of new school uniforms:
 - 3.2.1. 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.
 - 3.2.2. 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.
 - 3.2.3. 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.

3.2.4. 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.

3.2.5. To offer financial support to all parents with the cost of purchasing new uniform for their children in their new school.

4. Background

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.

4.2. The Local Authority has 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. This includes ensuring there is not a significant surplus so that schools remain financially viable. 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).

4.3. 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.

4.4. 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.

4.5. Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School is the smallest primary school in Islington and has been significantly impacted by falling rolls over several 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 six pupils in reception, nine pupils in year 1, and eight pupils in year 2.

4.6. 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.

4.7. 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 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.

- 4.8. 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. This 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. A copy of the comments received during the informal consultation are included as Appendix E for completeness.
- 4.9. The Executive then [agreed to issue a formal proposal](#) to close Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School on 11 January 2024. This proposal was published on 18 January and a four-week representation period ran from 18 January to 15 February 2024. The Executive must now decide whether to implement that proposal.
- 4.10. Separate to this process, Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School 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. Ordinarily, this decision would be made on the date of the Board meeting that was scheduled for 22 February.
- 4.11. The application was discussed at a meeting of the Advisory Board on 22 February. Officers were advised that the decision will be escalated to the Secretary of State. The timing of the academy application has implications for this proposal. If the Secretary of State agrees to the school's request to convert to an academy in advance of the final determination on school closure on 14 March at Executive, an academy order would be put in place and the closure would not progress.
- 4.12. Should the Secretary of State decide to support the academy application after the meeting of the Executive on 14 March and the Executive supported the decision to close the school; the guidance is not definitive. However, Islington Council will have concluded a process that is in line with the Department for Education guidance, 'Opening and Closing Maintained Schools'.

5. The reasons for the proposal

- 5.1. 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%

Vacancies by planning area for September 2023 based on offers	No. of places available	Vacancies	Vacancy rate
Planning Area 2: Hornsey	465	150	32%
Planning Area 3: Highbury	360	62	17%
Planning Area 4: Barnsbury	245	74	30%
Planning Area 5: Canonbury	340	72	21%
Planning Area 6: Finsbury	300	70	23%
Totals	2,175	536	25%

5.2. Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School has the highest number of vacant 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.

5.3. By closing Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School, we will reduce the number of available places in the Barnsbury area by 210.

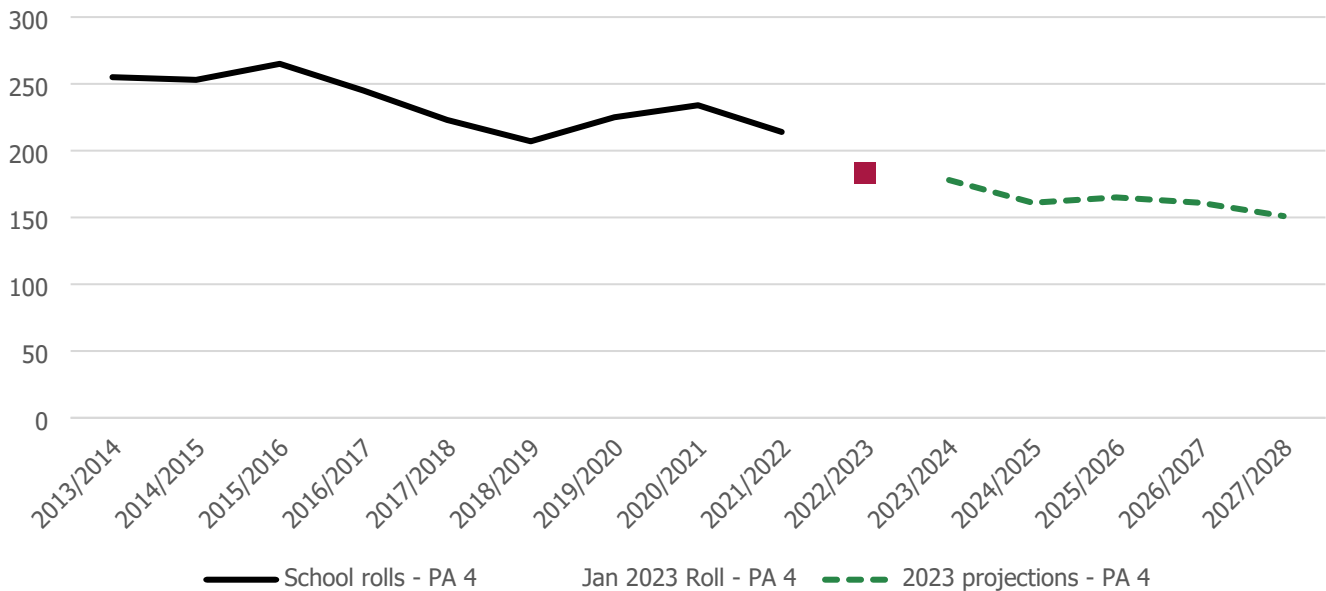
Table 2: Spare places by school in the Barnsbury Planning area.

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

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
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. 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 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.

5.7. 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 representation period

- 6.1. We published a formal proposal to close Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School on 18 January 2024 at <http://letstalk.islington.gov.uk/blessed-sacrament>
- 6.2. In accordance with statutory requirements, the proposal included:
 - 6.2.1. The name and contact address of the local authority publishing the proposal and the name, address, and category of Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School
 - 6.2.2. The date on which it is proposed to close Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School
 - 6.2.3. A statement explaining the reason for closure.
 - 6.2.4. The numbers, age range, sex, and special educational needs of pupils at Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School
 - 6.2.5. A statement indicating that there is sufficient capacity to accommodate displaced pupils from Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School at other local schools.
 - 6.2.6. A statement about the impact on the community of closing Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School
 - 6.2.7. A statement about the impact of the proposed closure on the balance of denominational provision in the area and the impact on parental choice
 - 6.2.8. Details of length and journeys to alternative provision
- 6.3. The proposal also included a statement setting out how copies of the proposal could be obtained, how anybody can object to, or comment on the proposal, the dates for the representation period, and the address to which objections or comments should be submitted.
- 6.4. We published a notice about this proposal in the Islington Gazette on the same day it was published (18 January) and the following day in the Islington Tribune (19 January) and wrote to all parents and carers and staff informing them of the proposal and including a web link to the full proposal.
- 6.5. We arranged two meetings for parents and carers to discuss the proposal at the Lewis Carroll Children's Library on Tuesday, 30 January from 6-7pm and Thursday, 1 February from 2.15-3.15pm and wrote to parents to invite them to these meetings on 19 January.

7. Comments received.

- 7.1. Two people attended the parent/carer meetings, and we received five written comments on the proposal, including a response on behalf of the Diocese of Westminster.
- 7.2. We received no requests for the proposal in a different format and received no comments by post.
- 7.3. **Respondent one:** this respondent asked if Islington Council will support parents with the cost of purchasing new uniforms for displaced pupils. The same respondent also asked about the long-term future of the school building and how the existing staff will be supported.

- 7.4. **Respondent two:** this respondent opposed the proposal as it is one of few Roman Catholic schools in the area.
- 7.5. **Respondent three:** this respondent wrote in support of the proposal due to low pupil numbers and the impact this is having on the resources at the school. However, this respondent was concerned about the impact closure would have on the existing Year 5 and agreed that supporting this group to move together as one class would be in their best interests. They also spoke highly of mental health support provided by 'Place 2 Be' and asked if this support could continue for the displaced pupils.
- 7.6. **Respondent four:** this respondent wrote in concern of the impact on the current Year 5 and reflected on their own experience of moving school in Year 5 and the negative impact of being away from their peer group. They said moving the children together would be the best option for this group.
- 7.7. **Response from the Diocese of Westminster:** The Diocese of Westminster does not support the proposal to close Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School on the following grounds:
- 7.7.1. Distance to other Roman Catholic schools, and their capacity to absorb families with multiple siblings.
 - 7.7.2. Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School is judged 'Good' by Ofsted and considered 'Good' in all 11 judgements by the Catholic School Section 48 Inspection completed in December 2023
 - 7.7.3. The school has a balanced budget and is not projecting a financial deficit in its three-year budget forecast.
 - 7.7.4. The Diocese's approach to secure Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School's future is to convert the school to an academy, in line with the Diocesan Academy Strategy launched in 2017, and for the school to join the Cardinal Hume Academy Trust

8. Response to comments received.

- 8.1. **School uniform:** We understand that transitioning to another school will be challenging and disruptive for children and their families and understand that the cost of a new uniform will be a new and unexpected cost. As such, we will commit to offering financial support to all families with the cost of purchasing a new uniform and have included this commitment in the amended proposal.
- 8.2. **Buildings:** We cannot comment on the long-term future of the building, as the land and buildings are owned by the Diocese of Westminster.
- 8.3. **Impact on staff:** We will offer support to all staff at Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School, including offering CV advice and interview workshops.
- 8.4. **Year 5:** We will offer 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.
- 8.5. **Mental health:** Our CAMHS in Schools and School Wellbeing Service will continue to offer support to pupils displaced to another Islington school to ensure they continue to

receive any mental health support currently offered by them at Blessed Sacrament RC primary school.

- 8.6. **Catholic provision:** closing Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School will reduce the number of Roman Catholic places in the local area. However, existing pupil numbers show that there is not demand for these places and there are other Roman Catholic schools nearby which all have vacancies. As such, we do not believe closing Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School will have an impact on parental choice.
- 8.7. **Attainment:** quality of education is determined by Ofsted, and in the case of Catholic schools, there is an additional Catholic School inspection framework, and is not the primary factor driving the proposal to close Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School. Unfortunately, the school has too few children and is not projected to increase pupil numbers, which will affect the long-term viability of the school and will impact the viability of other schools in the local area. It is for these reasons that we are proposing to close Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School.
- 8.8. **School budget:** 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 due to support from the Catholic Diocese. We do not believe this is sustainable and does not address the issues with falling pupil numbers and the high level of vacancies at the school.
- 8.9. **Academy conversion:** The decision on whether to approve Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School's application to convert to an academy and join the Cardinal Hume Academy Trust is made by the Secretary of State for Education advised by the London Advisory Board. The application was discussed at a meeting of the Advisory Board on 22 February. Officers were advised that the decision will be escalated to the Secretary of State. The timing of the academy application has implications for this proposal. If the Secretary of State agrees to the school's request to convert to an academy in advance of the final determination on school closure on 14 March at Executive, an academy order would be put in place and the closure would not progress. Should the Secretary of State decide to support the academy application after the meeting of the Executive on 14 March and the Executive supported the decision to close the school; the guidance is not definitive. However, Islington Council will have concluded a process that is in line with the Department for Education guidance, 'Opening and Closing Maintained Schools'

9. Implications

9.1. Financial Implications

- 9.1.1. 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, but their fixed costs and school management overheads remain. Per pupil funding in Islington is currently on average £5,700 a year depending on the characteristics of its pupils. The high and increasing level of pupil place vacancies across Islington's schools will lead to reducing levels of Government grant funding through the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocations for the borough. This will detrimentally impact schools, and therefore pupils, and brings financial risks for the Council.

- 9.1.2. Individual school balances stood at a total surplus of £6.291m at the end of 2022-23, with 15 schools in deficit. The present forecast for schools' balances as at the end of 2023/24 is a total surplus of £3.430m, indicating an overall reduction in-year of £2.861m (45% reduction). Forecasts received from schools in January 2024 estimate that overall schools' balances will fall into deficit by the end of 2024/25, and reach an estimated total deficit in the region of between £13m to £15m in 2025/26 without action being taken to significantly reduce the number of vacant pupil places in the borough. School balances in Islington have been in decline since 2018-19 when they stood at a total surplus of £11.732m. The main driver of declining school balances is falling pupil numbers alongside increasing cost pressures, such as energy costs and pay. These costs have increased over the last few years at a rate in excess of the increases schools' have received from government funding allocations.
- 9.1.3. Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School's pupil numbers have fallen from 93 children to 76 children (18% reduction) from October 2022 to October 2023. As a result, the school's 2024/25 budget funded from DSG is set to reduce by £68,000 from its 2023/24 DSG funding level. 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.
- 9.1.4. 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 both an emerging regional and a national issue.
- 9.1.5. If a school closes, the local authority usually must meet the cost of any deficit balance from the General Fund. This means the deficit must be paid out of funding that would otherwise be available for providing Council services.
- 9.1.6. 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.
- 9.1.7. 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, this would mean that the present level of pupil place vacancies across the borough would continue to increase overall, leading to increasing deficit balances for Islington's schools and increased future financial risk for the Council and the services it provides.

9.2. Legal Implications

- 9.2.1. Section 14 of the Education Act 1996 requires local authorities to provide sufficient schools for primary and secondary education in their area.
- 9.2.2. 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. Decision makers must have regard to the statutory guidance when deciding proposals to discontinue a school. They should be satisfied that the requirements of the

statutory process have been met and should have due regard to all responses received during the representation period.

- 9.2.3. The council has followed the prescribed DfE guidance in regard to the proposal to close Blessed Sacrament School. The application for academisation has been escalated to the Secretary of State and a decision is pending. If the academy order is supported by the Secretary of State in advance of a decision by Executive on 14 March, the proposal for school closure could not progress.

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

- 9.3.1. 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:

- 9.3.1.1. **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.

- 9.3.1.2. **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.

9.4. Equalities Impact Assessment

- 9.4.1. 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. An Equalities Impact Assessment was completed on 13 December 2023 and updated on 16 February 2024.

10. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

- 10.1. This report recommends that the Executive approve the proposal and close Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School on 31 July 2024.

- 10.2. 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 and will support our ambition to strengthen the resilience of all our schools, ensuring that they are financially healthy and able to sustain a quality curriculum.
- 10.3. This report also recommends that the council make the following commitments to mitigate the impact of closing Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School on existing pupils, which includes an additional modification to support parents with the cost of new school uniforms:
- 10.3.1. 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.
- 10.3.2. 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.
- 10.3.3. 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.
- 10.3.4. 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.
- 10.3.5. To offer financial support to all parents with the cost of purchasing new uniform for their children in their new school.

11. Appendices

- Appendix A – Statutory Proposal to discontinue Blessed Sacrament RC Primary School (Boadicea Street, London N1 0TB)
- Appendix B – Representation from the Diocese of Westminster: **exempt from publication** (exemption two: Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual)
- Appendix C – Comments received during the representation period: **exempt from publication** (exemption two: Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual)
- Appendix D – Equality Impact Assessment

- Appendix E - Comments received during the informal consultation: **exempt from publication** (exemption two: Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual)

Final report clearance:

Signed by:

Cllr Michelline Safi-Ngongo

Executive Member for Children, Young People, and Families

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