



City of Westminster

Committee Agenda

Title: **Business and Children's Policy and Scrutiny Committee**

Meeting Date: **Monday 7th March, 2022**

Time: **6.30 pm**

Venue: **Rm 18.02, 18th Floor, Westminster City Hall, 64 Victoria Street, Westminster SW1E 6QP**

Members:

Councillors:

Karen Scarborough
(Chairman)
Geoff Barraclough
Christabel Flight
Lindsey Hall
Aicha Less
Eoghain Murphy
Tim Roca
Mark Shearer

Elected Representatives
Ryan Nichol, Parent Governor

**Co-opted Voting
Representatives**
Alix Ascough, CE Diocesan Rep
Marina Coleman, RC Diocesan
Rep



Members of the public and press are welcome to attend the meeting and listen to the discussion of Part I of the Agenda.

[Link to live meeting](#)

Admission to the public gallery is by ticket, issued from the ground floor reception. If you have a disability and require any special assistance, please contact the Committee Officer (details listed below) in advance of the meeting.

This meeting will be live-streamed and recorded. To access the recording after the meeting, please revisit the link.



If you require any further information, please contact the Committee Officer: Artemis Kassi (Statutory Officer/Lead Scrutiny Advisor).

**Email: akassi@westminster.gov.uk
Corporate Website: www.westminster.gov.uk**

Note for Members: Members are reminded that Officer contacts are shown at the end of each report and Members are welcome to raise questions in advance of the meeting. With regard to item 2, guidance on declarations of interests is included in the Code of Governance; if Members and Officers have any particular questions, they should contact the Head of Committee and Governance Services in advance of the meeting please.

AGENDA

PART I (IN PUBLIC)

1. MEMBERSHIP

To note any changes to the membership.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

To receive declarations of interest by Members and Officers of the existence and nature of any pecuniary interests or any other significant interest in matters on this agenda.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the Business and Children's Policy and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 2 February 2022 will be reviewed at the Committee's next meeting on 31 March 2022.

4. DECISION TO AMALGAMATE WESTMINSTER CATHEDRAL AND ST VINCENT DE PAUL RC PRIMARY SCHOOLS - CALL IN

To review the Cabinet Member Decision to Amalgamate Westminster Cathedral and St Vincent de Paul RC Primary Schools after the decision was called in by three committee members.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

To review any other business which the Chairman considers urgent.

(Pages 3 - 42)

Stuart Love
Chief Executive
25 February 2022



Business and Children's Policy and Scrutiny Committee

Date:	7 th March 2022
Classification:	General Release
Title:	Decision to amalgamate Westminster Cathedral and St Vincent de Paul RC Primary Schools
Report of:	Sarah Newman, Bi-Borough Executive Director of Children's Services
Cabinet Member Portfolio	Young People and Learning
Wards Involved:	Tachbrook and Vincent Square
Policy Context:	Vibrant Communities: Children and young people to have the best start in life, be well cared for and attend excellent schools that promote achievement
Report Author and Contact Details:	Ian Heggs, Bi-borough Director of Education ian.heggs@rbkc.gov.uk

1. Executive Summary

This report informs the Committee of the decision made by the Lead Member for Young People and Learning to proceed with the amalgamation of Westminster Cathedral and St Vincent de Paul RC Primary Schools with effect from 1 September 2022. The decision follows a four-week period of public representation in January 2022 in response to the Council issuing a statutory notice on the proposal as recommended by the governing bodies of Westminster Cathedral and St Vincent de Paul RC Primary Schools following an informal four-week consultation, led by both governing bodies, with parents and staff in October 2021.

The decision has been called in for debate and the reasons presented as questions have been provided.

2. Key Matters for the Committee's Consideration

Questions/comments provided with response:

- Q1. *Local residents – via the Council – will be left to pick up the bill for the larger £400,000 deficit of Westminster Cathedral School site when it closes. It is not clear what detailed process/discussions have been undertaken to arrive at the decision that one school site is preferable to the other.*

Both school sites are owned by the Roman Catholic diocese, not the Council. The diocese expressed a preference for the school site next to Westminster Cathedral itself to be retained for the amalgamated school, which is the St Vincent de Paul site. This decision was supported by both governing bodies, who have community and parent representatives, as set out in their informal governor-led consultation and in their subsequent recommendation to the Council to issue a statutory notice about the amalgamation proposal.

Westminster Cathedral school site will be retained for educational use. The Council will work with the diocese as the landlord to explore the potential to provide much needed provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities at the site, as well as ensuring that space will be provided for the amalgamated school from September 2022 where any year group still has two classes, rather than one, as the school moves to one form of entry.

- Q2. *The consultation process saw parents overwhelmingly reject the proposals. We want to understand how this was taken into account and how concerns raised by parents and others are being addressed properly.*

The consultation process provided parents with the opportunity to submit their views and concerns about the merger, all of which were fully considered by the governing bodies who led the informal consultation. Throughout the informal process, key questions and concerns raised by parents and staff were addressed and provided in the form of Frequently Asked Questions. These were published on each school's website with hard copies circulated at parent meetings held at each school.

Whilst there is parental opposition in respect of numbers opposing the merger, a decision cannot be made based on one aspect of the consultation feedback alone. Having considered all of the parental and

staff feedback received, both governing bodies provided a written recommendation to the Council to proceed to the formal stage of consultation. As there were no other proposals put forward during the formal consultation to address the falling rolls, current deficits and ongoing financial challenges of both schools resulting from insufficient pupil numbers (despite ongoing increases in per pupil funding), the decision has been made to implement the amalgamation with effect from 1 September 2022 and work with both schools to support parents, pupils and staff with the transition.

- Q3. *There is no detail as to why the diocese felt Option A (to discontinue both schools and open one new school) was not possible; why would the DFE stipulation that any new school have as part of its admission arrangements up to 50% of non-faith pupils be a hurdle. We would like to understand the thinking and discussions on this point, and indeed on whether exploration of changes to current admissions policies at both schools could not also reverse the decline in pupil numbers.*

Catholic schools are required to have regard to the 'Diocese Guidance on Admissions'. The diocese provides model policies that have been carefully drafted to help schools comply with admissions legislation, including the 'Admissions Code'. Schools are expected to use the diocesan model policies. This aims to minimise the risk of schools producing policies which are non-Code compliant. It also aims to ensure that governing bodies continue to provide priority to Catholic children. Offering up to 50% to non-faith pupils does not therefore conform to the diocese guidance issued to all Catholic schools. The Catholic Church has been advised that, when considering amalgamation, the correct strategy to adopt to protect the Catholic character of the remaining school is to discontinue one school and retain the other. As both schools have been, and remain undersubscribed, any applicant regardless of faith is eligible for a place. The admissions policy has not therefore excluded potential applicants.

- Q4. *Understanding the transfer of property from the council to the diocese in advance of these consultations and the potential future of the Cathedral School site.*

The Westminster Cathedral school site was on land owned by the Council, which in turn had inherited it from the former Inner London Education Authority, which was abolished at the same time as the GLC. The school was built as part of the post-war redevelopment. Westminster

Cathedral RC Primary school was re-located there from its former home at another site. Under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, Diocesan authorities are legally entitled to have the land ownership transferred to them. Westminster has done several of these land transfers over the years. The Council had no grounds to object, and would not have done so in any event, as neither the Council nor the Diocese can use the site for other purposes without the approval of the DfE.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Council acknowledges the genuine support and concerns raised by parents/carers, the local community and educational professionals in response to the statutory notice period and the four-week informal consultation period led by the governing bodies of both schools. Whilst taking account of all representations made, the Council must consider these representations against the two key reasons for the proposal to amalgamate the two schools: falling rolls and financial viability. This approach is in line with the recommendations of the Isos Partnership with regard to reducing spare capacity and supporting the financial management of LA maintained schools; these recommendations were adopted in full by Schools Forum in autumn 2020.
- 3.2 As outlined in the informal consultation and the statutory notice, Westminster currently has 22% surplus capacity across its primary schools (October 2021 School Census). This is not contained in any particular area but across all areas of the borough. Westminster Cathedral and St Vincent de Paul are located in the 'South' planning area, which is one of six planning areas in Westminster. Currently, the surplus capacity in this area is 24.5%. Both schools have unfilled places: 31% at Westminster Cathedral RC Primary and 34% at St Vincent de Paul RC Primary. Annual projections do not indicate any increase in demand over the next 4-5 years, which will result in increasing deficits at both schools culminating in reduced resources. The Council has a statutory responsibility to not only ensure there is a sufficiency of school places in its area but to address excess surplus capacity and ensure the financial viability of its maintained schools.
- 3.3 Westminster Cathedral's deficit was £308,000 at the end of March 2021 and is estimated to be approximately £400,000 at 31st August 2022, which is the date when the school will be discontinued as part of the amalgamation. Unfortunately, although the Council supported Westminster Cathedral in producing a deficit recovery plan and supported a number of staff reorganisations, as the roll reductions

were much higher than it had previously been forecast, and over 90% of school funding is based on pupil numbers, the school's funding reduced significantly. At this stage, the school became financially unviable and was not able to reduce costs further leading to a significant worsening of the deficit.

- 3.4 St Vincent de Paul RC Primary was in deficit by £39,000 at 31st March 2021 and is estimating this deficit will increase to £79,000 by 31st March 2022. The school has not been able to produce a balanced budget plan over three years and their position is estimated to worsen to £163,000 deficit by 31st March 2024.
- 3.5 The amalgamation proposal offers the best opportunity to secure not only the current, but long-term sustainability of high-quality primary education to current and future pupils. It is a proposal that provides a guaranteed place at St Vincent de Paul RC Primary for all pupils on roll of both schools.
- 3.6 When schools are amalgamated, it will result in the discontinuation of one of the schools. When an amalgamation takes place, the children attending the discontinued school are not displaced and have a guaranteed place at the new amalgamated school.
- 3.7 An amalgamated school will also enable greater opportunity for families to be provided with a range of extra-curricular activities and ensure value for money including the retention of the current nursery offer for 3 and 4 year-olds.

If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers, please contact Report Author:

Ian Heggs, Bi-Borough Director of Education

ian.heggs@rbkc.gov.uk

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Cabinet Member Decision (also available [here](#)) and Appendices:

- Appendix A - Informal Consultation (also available [here](#))
- Appendix B - Statutory Proposal Notice
- Appendix C – Analysis of Representation

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City of Westminster

Cabinet Member Report

Meeting or Decision Maker:	Cabinet Member for Young People and Learning
Date:	15/02/2022
Classification:	General Release
Title:	Decision report following the 4-week formal statutory notice consultation period on a proposal to amalgamate Westminster Cathedral and St Vincent de Paul RC Primary Schools with effect from 1 September 2022
Wards Affected:	Not all wards – Tachbrook and Vincent Square
City or All/Policy Context:	Vibrant Communities: Children and young people to have the best start in life, be well cared for and attend excellent schools that promote achievement
Key Decision:	Key Decision (entry made on Forward Plan 14/01/2022)

Financial Summary:

Estimated cost to the Council of up to £400,000. This is not chargeable to the Dedicated Schools Grant.

Report of:

Sarah Newman, Executive Director of Children's Services

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report informs the Council of the outcome of the four-week period of public representation in response to the statutory notice on the proposal for the amalgamation of Westminster Cathedral and St Vincent de Paul RC Primary Schools. This would create a one form entry school at the St Vincent de Paul RC Primary site and Westminster Cathedral RC Primary School would be discontinued. Children at both schools will have a guaranteed place at the amalgamated school. It recommends that the Cabinet Member for Young People and Learning decides whether or not to proceed with plans for the amalgamation that would take effect from the 1st September 2022. Westminster Cathedral RC Primary School would therefore be discontinued on 31st August 2022.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Consider the report and supporting documentation, particularly the statutory notice at Appendix B and the comments and objections raised by the respondents at Appendix C.
- 2.2 Agree that the school governors will continue to work with the Council to mitigate and reduce the deficit while the Westminster Cathedral RC Primary School continues to operate. This approach is in line with that reported to Audit and Performance Committee.

Note that, in line with Section 22 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 and notwithstanding the efforts to reduce the deficit prior to discontinuation, it is the responsibility of the Council to defray all expenses of maintaining a school and that any school deficit upon discontinuation falls to the Council to be written off.

- 2.3 Agree to proceed with plans for the amalgamation of Westminster Cathedral and St Vincent de Paul RC Primary Schools to take effect from the 1st September 2022 (5.1: Option B). This will result in the discontinuation of Westminster Cathedral RC Primary School on 31st August 2022. All pupils on the roll of Westminster Cathedral RC Primary will have guaranteed places at the amalgamated school. No pupil will be displaced.
- 2.4 Carry out capital works at St Vincent de Paul RC Primary School site to improve accessibility at the entrance of the school .

3. Reasons for Decision

- 3.1 The impact of falling rolls across the borough and the number of schools in financial deficit present several challenges. It has therefore been necessary to consider making changes to ensure that we do not have excess surplus primary capacity going forward. Provision that can be well resourced and is of high quality enables schools to continue to thrive

and offer the opportunities that children deserve: a strong curriculum with excellent teaching, enriching activities and a joyful experience at primary school. The joining of the schools will provide pupils with a full and enriched curriculum as the school will be fully subscribed and fully funded per pupil.

- 3.2 A review of primary school provision was commissioned by Schools Forum in summer 2020 and led by the Isos Partnership. The review identified schools considered to be at risk due to low or falling pupil numbers and/or budget deficit and the subsequent risk to standards.
- 3.4 Westminster Cathedral RC Primary and St Vincent de Paul RC Primary were identified as schools at risk both with falling rolls and a budget deficit. Westminster Cathedral RC Primary has a considerable budget deficit. The schools are led by the headteacher of St Vincent de Paul as the Interim Executive Headteacher.
- 3.5 The informal consultation at Westminster Cathedral and St Vincent de Paul RC Primaries about the proposal was carried out in partnership with the Roman Catholic Diocese of Westminster and in liaison with the Council's Education Partnership Board (EPB). The EPB plays a key role in enabling schools to meet the challenge of ensuring that all children and young people in Westminster achieve the best possible outcomes and can flourish if schools are working in effective partnerships. The EPB also seeks to ensure that steps are taken to address excess surplus capacity in primary schools in Westminster.

4. Background, including Policy Context

- 4.1 Demand for school places is driven by population growth and housing development. Falling birth rates, changing resident demographics and young families migrating out of the borough have resulted in a significant surplus of primary school places across most of the borough.
- 4.2 Westminster Council's Schools Forum, with the support of the Isos Partnership, have undertaken a high-level review of primary school provision working with its schools and respective diocesan bodies to seek strategies and mitigations to address the current surplus capacity in the primary sector and the financial management of schools that have falling rolls.
- 4.3 The risk related to falling schools' rolls has been noted by the Audit and Performance Committee most recently in the papers to the 2nd December 2021 meeting.

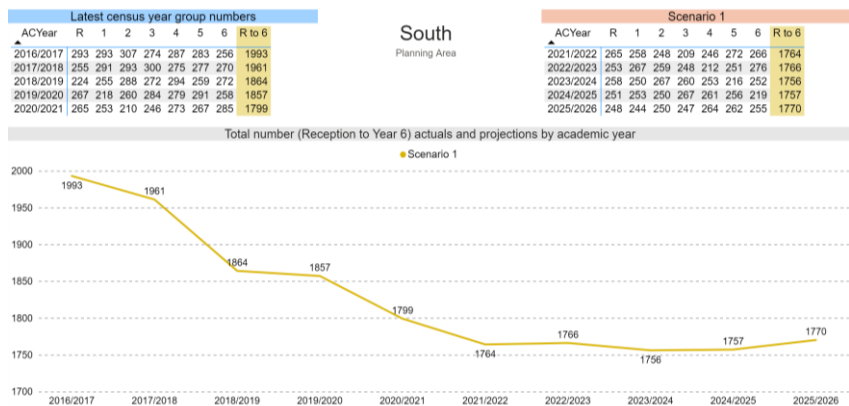
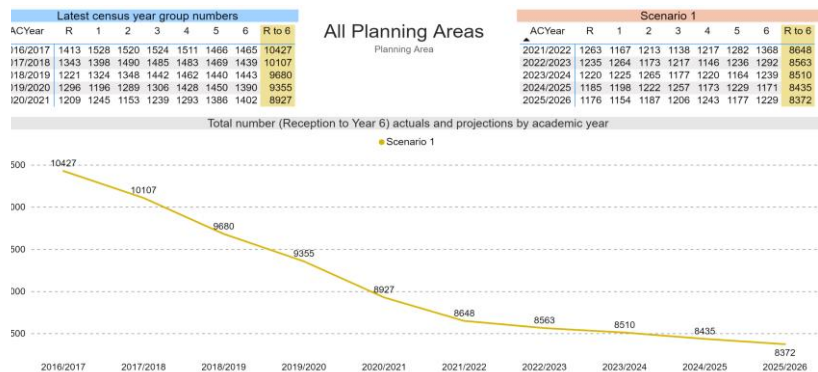
- 4.4 As of the October 2021 School Census, there is a 22.1% surplus in primary school places (2523 are unfilled of 11336 places). This is significantly higher than the recommended 5-10% surplus that the Department for Education suggests local authorities to operate within. Spare capacity within this range, but no more than that, allows local authorities to meet their statutory duty to provide sufficient school places, yet still enable parents to have some choice of schools.
- 4.5 Both schools have falling rolls making it more difficult for them to have the financial ability to be sustained in the medium to long term. Both are one form entry but their current entry levels are below 30 children (the average class size is 22 students per class, with vacancies in all years). The number of children entering reception classes across Westminster dropped by 8% in September 2021 compared to the previous year, so this continues to be a borough-wide issue.
- 4.6 The closing date for reception application for the forthcoming September 2022 entry was 15th January 2022. The process for reception application is operated in accordance with the Pan London coordinated scheme. The Pan London exchange of applications across boroughs was on 4th February. Parents can list in their preferred order up to six schools and will receive the highest potential offer following a Pan London iterative process on National Offer day, 19th April. The only application figures that are guaranteed to result in an offer are those listed as a 1st preference. Lower preferences may be offered one of their higher preference schools. The table provides the applications submitted broken down by 1st to 6th preferences and total. 2021 figures are provided as a comparison.

2022	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	Total
St Vincent de Paul	12	6	5	5	2	2	32
Westminster Cathedral	5	5	4	4	5	1	24
2021	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	Total
St Vincent de Paul	12	9	8	4	3	2	38
Westminster Cathedral	10	8	7	8	5	6	44

- 4.7 School Roll Projections (SRP) are carried out annually as Local Authorities have a statutory responsibility to ensure there is not only a

sufficiency of school places, but that there are strategies in place to address excess surplus capacity, particularly if forecasts indicate that demand is not projected to rise. Westminster uses the GLA modelling for its forecasting; data sources are school rolls, births, population and developments, and inward/outward migration trends.

4.8 The first table shows the latest forecasts for the whole of Westminster. The second table shows the forecasts for the planning area where both schools are located.



5. Options

5.1 The most appropriate option that was approved and recommended to the Council by both governing bodies is to amalgamate both schools to achieve a one form entry school that will take effect from the first point of entry from September 2022. This will work its way through the school each year. Year groups that exceed a class of 30 will be organised as two classes until numbers reduce over time. This option does not leave any pupil displaced and enables a better transition for children at both schools and helps ensure that strong educational outcomes continue to be delivered.

As a reminder, the DfE regulation provides two options for an amalgamation:

Option A: to discontinue both schools and open one new school (no requirement for the new school to be an academy or free school, but the admissions policy would be amended as set out below).

Option B (recommended): to amalgamate two schools by formally discontinuing one of them and retaining the other (sometimes referred to as 'enlarging' the school, but in this case there would be no enlargement for the remaining school).

- 5.2 The Diocese indicated that the former was not an option because DfE Admissions Code regulations stipulate any new Catholic school must have as part of its admission arrangements up to 50% of non-faith which is not an option for the future of Roman Catholic schools located in the Westminster Diocese.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 If a school discontinues as part of an amalgamation, the deficit remains with the Local Authority, to be funded from its core budget. School deficits are not an allowable charge to the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). Technically it would be possible for the Schools Forum to de-delegate a contingency provision to cover this cost, however this is not proposed as it would be unlikely to be agreed as it would be funded by maintained schools, who are already expected to continue to fund ongoing school redundancy costs.
- 6.2 Westminster Cathedral's deficit was £308,000 at the end of March 2021 and is estimated to be approximately £400,000 at 31st August 2022. This estimate will change as costs and income change, for example if the school has ongoing contract commitments in August 2022 and more agency staff are needed if permanent staff leave. Contract commitment information is being obtained from the school. Finance will continue to work with the school to monitor their deficit position and identify any necessary mitigating actions should the financial position worsen.
- 6.3 The £400,000 estimated deficit in August 2022 will be charged to the Council's core budget.
- 6.4 The cost of any redundancies can be supported within the DSG either from the DSG reserves or by contributions from all maintained schools'

budgets to fund re-organisation costs, to be proposed as part of decisions to be taken by Schools Forum in January 2022.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1 Section 14 of the Education Act 1996 requires local authorities to provide sufficient schools for primary and secondary education in their area. Local authorities also have best value duties in the performance of their functions under the Local Government Act 1999.
- 7.2 The procedure for amalgamating schools is set out in the Education and Inspections Act 2006, the School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013, and the statutory guidance 'Opening and Closing Maintained Schools' (November 2019). The proposals set out in this report comply with the above legislation and guidance.
- 7.3 The report also sets out the Council's duties under Section 22 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

8. Carbon Impact

- 8.1 The proposal comprises the increased use of both buildings, but a limited carbon impact is resulting from this because no significant changes to the buildings are planned which would increase energy consumption. St Vincent de Paul has an energy rating of G, the lowest band. There are a number of advisory comments on the Government website to improve energy efficiency such as improved insulation. It is planned to retain the Westminster Cathedral school site to accommodate children at the amalgamated school but not to make major changes to the buildings or heating infrastructure at this stage. The energy rating is F.
- 8.2 The Council would anticipate working with the Catholic Diocese as owner of the buildings to implement improvements such as replacement boilers and insulation during their anticipated lifespan and apply for any available grant support.

9. Consultation

- 9.1 The schools' governing bodies carried out an informal consultation between 11th October 2021 and 12th November 2021. A consultation document, agreed with the Local Authority and the Catholic Diocese of Westminster, was circulated via email, paper versions and placed on the schools' websites. Parent and staff sessions were held at both

schools.

- 9.2 The governing bodies of both schools met separately on 9th December 2021, discussed and considered in detail the consultation feedback and notified the Council on 10th December of their recommendation to proceed with the proposal to amalgamate. In accordance with statutory guidance [Opening and closing maintained schools](#), the Council is the decision-maker and responsible for issuing a statutory notice about the proposal for a four-week period during which further representations can be made.
- 9.3 The statutory notice (**Appendix B**) was published on 6th January 2022 to run for a four-week period to end on 3rd February 2022. A summary analysis of responses is included at **Appendix C**.
- 9.4 In total, the Council received 47 responses during the notice period. Respondents identified themselves as parents and staff from both schools, governors and a local councillor. Four agreed with the amalgamation proposal, 16 disagreed and 27 did not indicate either way.

The Council response is included in the analysis report and presented here as follows:

9.4.1 Council response to representations following the Statutory Notice

'The Council acknowledges the genuine support and concerns raised by parents/carers, the local community and educational professionals in response to the statutory notice period and the four-week informal consultation period led by the governing bodies of both schools. Whilst taking account of all representations made, the Council must consider these representations against the two key reasons for the proposal to amalgamate the two schools: falling rolls and financial viability. As outlined in the informal consultation and the statutory notice, Westminster currently has a 22% surplus capacity across its primary schools. This is not contained in any particular area but across all areas of the borough. Westminster Cathedral and St Vincent de Paul are located in the 'South' planning area, which is one of six planning areas. The current surplus capacity in this area is currently 24.5%. Both schools have unfilled places at 31% and 34%. Annual projections do not indicate demand over the next 4-5 years, which will result in a continuing increase in deficit at both schools culminating in reduced resources. The Council has a statutory responsibility to not

only ensure there is sufficiency of school places in its area but to address excess surplus capacity and ensure the financial viability of its maintained schools.

Westminster Cathedral's deficit was £308,000 at the end of March 2021 and is estimated to be about £400,000 at 31st August 2022, the date of proposed closure (as part of the amalgamation). Unfortunately, although the Council supported Westminster Cathedral school in producing a deficit recovery plan and supported a number of staff reorganisations, as the roll reductions were much higher than it had previously been forecast, and over 90% of school funding is based on pupil numbers, the school's funding reduced significantly. At this stage, the school became financially unviable and was not able to reduce costs further leading to a significant worsening of the deficit.

St Vincent de Paul were in deficit by £39,000 at 31st March 2021 and are estimating this deficit will increase to £79,000 by 31st March 2021. The school has not been able to produce a balanced budget plan over three years and their position is estimated to worsen to £163,000 deficit by 31st March 2024.

We believe that this amalgamation proposal offers the best opportunity to secure not only the current, but long-term sustainability of high quality primary education to current and future pupils, and is a proposal that provides a guaranteed place at St Vincent de Paul for all pupils on roll of both schools.

When schools are amalgamated, it will result in the discontinuation of one of the schools. When an amalgamation takes place, the children attending the discontinued school are not displaced and have a guaranteed place at the new amalgamated school.

An amalgamated school will also enable greater opportunity for families to be provided with a range of extra-curricular activities and ensure value for money including promoting the current nursery offer for 3 and 4 years olds.

10. Staffing implications

- 10.1 A new staffing structure will need to be developed as part of the planning for September 2022 if a decision to amalgamate the schools is taken. In both schools, staffing changes have already had to be made due to reduce per pupil funding as roll numbers decline, and the impact this

has had on staffing and resources. The exact structure for the future cannot be clear until we know whether the schools are amalgamating and the numbers of children and, therefore, the numbers of staff required.

- 10.2 Should the amalgamation go ahead, existing staff at both schools will be consulted on a proposal to create a new staffing structure for the amalgamated school. As part of the consultation process, governors will work with the Council, staff, and their unions, and an HR consultant to determine the best ways to manage any changes needed. The Council, Diocese and governors are committed to avoiding compulsory redundancy.
- 10.3 In the Autumn term 2021, informal meetings were held with staff to notify them of the potential amalgamation. If a decision to amalgamate is made, the two governing bodies will conduct a full consultation with all affected staff. Amalgamation provides greater protection for staff because more posts will be retained than would be the case if one school discontinues without being part of an amalgamation.

11. Final decision: Appeal process

11.1 In accordance with Department for Education statutory guidance Opening and closing maintained schools, the Council must publish its decision within one week on its website. It must also notify the below organisations of the decision who can submit an appeal within four weeks of the decision being taken. Appeals are referred by the Council to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA).

- Bishop of any Roman Catholic church in the relevant area
- Diocesan Board of Education of any Church of England Diocese in the relevant area
- Governing Body of each school.

If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers, please contact:

Wendy Anthony, Head of Place Planning and Access Education

APPENDICES

- *Appendix A - Informal consultation paper on the proposed amalgamation Westminster Cathedral and St Vincent de Paul Catholic Primary Schools*
- *Appendix B - Full Statutory Proposal Notice*
- *Appendix C – Summary of representations to the full Statutory Notice*

LIST APPENDICES ABOVE BACKGROUND PAPERS

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NB: For individual Cabinet Member reports only

For completion by the **Cabinet Member** for Young People and Learning

Declaration of Interest

I have <no interest to declare / to declare an interest> in respect of this report

Signed: _____

Date: _____

NAME: **[add Cabinet Member's name]**

State nature of interest if any:

(N.B: If you have an interest, you should seek advice as to whether it is appropriate to make a decision in relation to this matter)

For the reasons set out above, I agree the recommendation(s) in the report entitled

INSERT REPORT TITLE and reject any alternative options which are referred to but not recommended.

Signed: _____

Cabinet Member for (add portfolio title)

Date: _____

If you have any additional comment which you would want actioned in connection with your decision you should discuss this with the report author and then set out your comment below before the report and this pro-forma is returned to the Secretariat for processing.

Additional comment:

If you do not wish to approve the recommendations, or wish to make an alternative decision, it is important that you consult the report author, the Director of Law, City Treasurer and, if there are resources implications, the Director of People Services (or their representatives) so that (1) you can be made aware of any further relevant considerations that you should take into account before making the decision and (2) your reasons for the decision can be properly identified and recorded, as required by law.

Note to Cabinet Member: Your decision will now be published and copied to the Members of the relevant Policy & Scrutiny Committee. If the decision falls within the criteria for call-in, it will not be implemented until five working days have elapsed from publication to allow the Policy and Scrutiny Committee to decide whether it wishes to call the matter in.

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INFORMAL CONSULTATION

Proposal to amalgamate St. Vincent De Paul Catholic Primary School and Westminster Cathedral Catholic Primary School

Background

The last three years have seen unprecedented changes to our lives and communities. The combination of a multitude of factors means that there are fewer pupils in primary schools across London. This has led to significant financial pressure on schools, as government funding is predominantly on a per child basis. Regrettably this means that at current pupil numbers, both St. Vincent De Paul Catholic Primary School (SVP) and Westminster Cathedral Catholic Primary School, are financially unsustainable.

The welfare and education of our pupils is our pupils is key to providing them with a secure future. The following proposal has been made to ensure we offer the most sustainable and beneficial educational environment and continue to best support pupils and parents.

The Proposal

The Governors of St. Vincent De Paul and Westminster Cathedral Catholic Primary Schools are proposing to amalgamate (also referred to as merging) the two schools to form a 30-place (one form) entry primary school for 3 to 11-year-olds. The proposal is supported by the Diocese of Westminster and by Westminster Local Authority. An amalgamation will create a single primary school from the start of September 2022 on the current site of St. Vincent De Paul Catholic Primary School.

Having considered the long-term viability and sustainability of the existing school sites, the governing bodies, in conjunction with the Diocese and Westminster City Council, have concluded that the intimate relationship between the SVP site and Westminster Cathedral affords the best opportunity to offer sustainable Catholic Formation.

There are many benefits of becoming a single primary school including greater investment in facilities and more effective use of funding to better support our pupils' needs and provide further enrichment activities (more detail provided later in the document), and we are excited about the potential of this new venture.

Parents play a key part in our school community and your feedback is important to us. The Governors of both schools are now seeking, and welcome, parents' views on this proposal (details on how to share feedback are provided later in the document).

Why are we proposing the change?

Demand for primary school places has been falling over the last few years for the majority of London boroughs. The borough of Westminster has experienced a significant drop across all year groups with an 8% fall in reception applications for September 2021 compared to the previous year, and this trend has significantly impacted reception class enrolment at both St. Vincent De Paul and Westminster Cathedral Catholic Primary Schools in recent years. A borough-wide review of primary school provision was initiated in response, with the result that a number of schools are considering reducing in size or joining together, so that the amount of provision matches the need coming through.

Our two schools do not have sufficient numbers of children to fill two forms of entry from September 2022, and we have vacancies across all year groups. For example, the average class size at Westminster Cathedral Catholic Primary school currently is approximately 22 students per class. As our pupil numbers fall, the school's budget allocation falls, resulting in less money being provided to educate our children, pay salaries and manage the upkeep of our buildings. School budgets are mainly funded by pupil numbers and our schools have already been working together closely, sharing our Interim Executive Headteacher, Mr Nathaniel Scott Cree. This is one example of how the schools have been trying to manage under a reduced budget allocation.

The Governors of both schools are clear that now is the right time to move to becoming a single primary school in order to secure sustainable and high quality Catholic education for our children and into the future, whilst minimizing the impact of the change.

What are the benefits of becoming a single primary school?

By running only one school site, funding can be used more efficiently to provide an appropriate educational environment, rather than in having to stretch budgets to maintain two school buildings which take financial resources away from the children and staff. Projections show that pupil numbers are likely to continue to decline. By amalgamating, we would create stability for pupils, parents and teachers to focus on delivering the best educational outcomes.

By amalgamating into one school, we will be able to allocate more funding towards resuming and providing continued access to enrichment activities above and beyond the usual curriculum for pupils and their families, both before, during and after school.

There will also be more continuous professional development opportunities for staff – which will benefit the children - such as shared training and the chance to work more closely across the curriculum in order to gain experience and understanding of all key stages.

By becoming a single primary school there will be the opportunity for the communities from both schools to keep improving and moving forward, and to be part of an exciting new

future together.

What will it mean for our children?

The objective is for all children currently attending both schools to be together on the St. Vincent De Paul school site. Currently the combined pupil numbers on roll exceed a one form entry school. Whilst these numbers will gradually reduce by September 2022, it will not be known until nearer the time if there will need to be arrangements for some classes to remain at the Westminster Cathedral school site until the numbers reduce. It is very much a priority for us to ensure that children and staff can be safely accommodated. The Westminster Cathedral school site will be retained for educational use and will therefore be available to accommodate any additional classes that may be needed on site in September.

It will also mean that:

- children at the merged school on the St. Vincent De Paul School site will see new investment in buildings and facilities to ensure that there will be excellent accommodation for all the children;
- children from both schools will have the opportunity to make new friends in a school which has a sustainable future;
- on a day-to-day basis, arrangements in the school will feel very similar for the children. The differing needs of each age group will continue to be met;
- the Pastoral care given to each individual child within the Catholic ethos which is a strength of both schools, will always remain paramount. The merged school will be the parish school for both The Holy Apostles and the Cathedral with priests from both parishes celebrating liturgies and sacraments with the children and staff.

What will happen to our Headteacher?

Mr Nathaniel Scott Cree will remain as Headteacher. Mr. Scott Cree is an effective Executive Headteacher who has been working for both our schools and has been essential in establishing the partnership between the two schools. The Governing Bodies from St. Vincent De Paul and Westminster Cathedral agree that the headteacher post for the new school is, in effect, not vacant and therefore not subject to advertising or selection requirements. This will provide stability in leadership through this period of change.

This would mean that a single Headteacher and a single Governing Body would collectively oversee the running of the amalgamated school. A single primary school would bring both schools together to become one community which we believe will be the best for the children and their education.

What will it mean for the staff?

A new staffing structure will need to be developed as part of the planning for September 2022 if a decision to amalgamate the schools is taken. In both schools, staffing changes are already needing to be made because of falling numbers of children.

The exact structure for the future cannot be clear until we know whether the schools are amalgamating and the numbers of children and therefore, the numbers of staff required.

If numbers at either school continue to fall, or children do not move to the amalgamated school, this could lead to further staff losses. Staffing structures for September 2022 will be clarified once numbers of children are known, and will, initially, be based on the staff structure required to support the numbers of children from each school. Existing staff at both schools will have an equal opportunity to apply for posts at the amalgamated school on the St. Vincent De Paul Site.

As part of the consultation process, Governors will work with the Local Authority, staff, and their unions, and an HR consultant to determine the best ways to manage any changes needed. The council, diocese and Governors are committed to avoiding compulsory redundancy.

Consultation meetings for staff will be held during the Autumn Term and throughout any agreed change processes.

Amalgamation provides greater protection for staff because more posts will be retained than would be the case if one school closed without being part of an amalgamation.

Consultation process

There are two stages to the consultation process. Firstly, the '**informal consultation**' which will run for five weeks from October to November 2021 (inclusive of the half-term break).

If it is agreed that the proposal will move to the next stage following this informal consultation, there will be a statutory notice published by the Local Authority with the '**formal consultation**' open for four weeks from early January 2022 before a final decision is taken on the amalgamation.

If we open as a newly formed school in September 2022, the Governors would like to mark the commencement and welcome your ideas and suggestions on launching the new amalgamated school and the start of this exciting new venture. The Governors of both schools welcome your views on ideas such as:

- How best to recognise the coming together of the two schools
- A plaque celebrating the coming together of the schools
- Other ways in which the history of the two schools could be preserved
- The new name of the amalgamated school

Admissions

If the proposal is agreed, a primary school would be created on 1 September 2022 and the following would apply:

- Children at St. Vincent De Paul Catholic Primary School will be automatically enrolled at the newly amalgamated school and receive a guaranteed place.
- Children at Westminster Cathedral Catholic Primary School will be automatically enrolled at the newly amalgamated school and receive a guaranteed place.
- First admissions: Children who have applied for reception or nursery places at St. Vincent De Paul Catholic Primary School or Westminster Cathedral Catholic Primary School for September 2022 would be offered places through the standard admissions process.
- Children with siblings at St. Vincent De Paul Catholic Primary School or Westminster Cathedral Catholic Primary School would be given sibling priority for September 2022 and later years.
- Belonging to either parish of Westminster Cathedral or Holy Apostles would carry equal weight in the admissions criteria.
- After all other priorities have been considered if there are further, non-Catholic, applicants requesting places, a distance criterion would need to be used in a tie-break. St. Vincent De Paul's School entrance would be used to measure home-school distances.
- A grace period will be facilitated to align pupil uniforms/implement a new uniform.

Governors, the Diocese, and the Local Authority strongly recommend that children remain at St. Vincent De Paul Catholic Primary School and Westminster Cathedral Catholic Primary School, transferring together to the newly merged school at the St. Vincent De Paul site, as we believe this is the least disruptive move for our children.

In the event of any parent preferring to apply for a place at another school, there may be vacancies at other local schools which could be applied for through the termly In-Year Admissions process.

Why are we consulting you?

We value your thoughts highly and want to gather your views because you are part of our school community.

The Governing Bodies, the Diocese and the Local Authority cannot simply decide to make changes to schools without first seeking the views of parents, staff, and other stakeholders.

There is also a legal process which must be followed before changes can be made, and

it is important that the Governing Bodies, the Diocese, and the Local Authority hear your views before deciding whether and how to proceed.

We are organising opportunities for parents, carers, and other stakeholders to share views at meetings of both schools.

At St. Vincent De Paul Catholic Primary School (for SVP parents)	At Westminster Cathedral Catholic Primary School (for WCPS parents)
Date Weds 20th October at 6 p.m.	Date Weds 13th October at 5:30 p.m.
Date Thurs 4th November at 6 p.m.	Date Mon 18th October at 5:30 p.m.

Information will also be

- published on the school websites;
- publicised at the schools;
- shared via newsletters sent home with children over the next few weeks;
- available at the school offices (available either by phone or in person).
- available at Holy Apostles church and at Westminster Cathedral.

What happens next?

The informal consultation period ends on Friday 12th November 2021 at 3:30 p.m. An Informal Consultation Response Form can be found at the end of this document for you to share your feedback on the proposal. Completed forms should be returned to the consultation boxes in your school's reception area. The same form is also available on the school websites and when submitted will be forwarded to the Governors.

Following the consultation process, a steering group, including Governors, will review your feedback and use it to make a response to the Local Authority on whether or not it recommends proceeding with the school amalgamation proposal.

The full Governing Body of each school will also consider your feedback in its representations if the Local Authority decides to move to a formal statutory notice consultation in January 2022.

If the Local Authority decide to proceed, a public notice will specify details of the final proposal and there will be a period of at least four weeks when representations can be made (January to February 2022). This will be the final opportunity to make any comments on the proposal. It is then anticipated that a final decision on whether to amalgamate the schools will be made by the end of March 2022.

How can I get more information on the proposal?

Parents are warmly invited to visit St. Vincent De Paul Catholic Primary School. Further details will be provided of open mornings at the school when you will have the opportunity to visit.

If you have any additional queries or questions, these can be posted in the consultation boxes in each school's reception area.

We understand that you may have concerns and queries and will be happy to answer your queries. We respectfully ask that you direct any questions or feedback as outlined in this document, and not by questioning school staff, who themselves are being consulted in a similar way.

Governors are committed to giving parents, children, and staff as much information as possible and will update you regularly. Please note that we may not be able to answer some questions until after a decision is made.

This document, and other information, is also available on both school websites:

[St. Vincent De Paul Catholic Primary School](#)

[Westminster Cathedral Catholic Primary School](#)

If the Local Authority decide to publish a public statutory notice, further details of this proposal will also be available in the Consultation sections of the council's website. Feedback from the statutory consultation will also be published on the council's website during the Spring Term.

How do I respond?

You can either complete the Informal Consultation Response Form on the following page and return it to the consultation box in your school's reception area, or you can complete it electronically and email it to:

admin@svpschool.co.uk (St. Vincent de Paul parents)

consultation@westcathsch.co.uk (Westminster Cathedral parents)

Your views and feedback is important to us and we would encourage you to come along to one of the meetings (details provided earlier in this document). Responses not received on the below form will also be considered.

Thank you for taking the time to consider our proposal, we look forward to hearing your perspective.

John Moruzzi
Chair of Governors
St. Vincent De Paul

Seb Wallace
Co-Chair of Governors
Westminster Cathedral

Will Kenney
Co-Chair of Governors
Westminster Cathedral

INFORMAL CONSULTATION RESPONSE FORM

Proposal to Amalgamate St. Vincent De Paul Catholic Primary School and Westminster Cathedral Catholic Primary School

Our proposal is to bring St. Vincent De Paul and Westminster Cathedral Catholic Primary Schools together as one all-through primary school from 1st September 2022 at the St. Vincent De Paul school site. We welcome your views on this proposal. Please fill in this form and return it to the school office no later than 12th November 2022, 3.30pm. You can also download the form online and email it to the relevant address given above.

- 1) Do you agree with the proposal to amalgamate our two schools to become one school?

Please circle/ delete as appropriate:

YES

NO

- 2) If you like the proposal, please say why you think it is a good idea?

- 3) If you dislike the proposal, please tell us why you are concerned?

- 4) Any other comments, issues, or questions? (please feel free to use the back of this form if you need more space)

	St. Vincent De Paul	Westminster Cathedral
I am a child attending	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have child/ren attending	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am a staff member at	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am a Governor at	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please describe)		

Please note: If you are completing this form jointly, or for more than one role, please tick each box that applies so that your views are included within each group you are part of.

Your Name (Optional) _____

Please return this form to the relevant school by 12th November 2021. Feedback from question one will be summarised numerically. Comments will be typed-up and anonymised. This information will be made available to the public (via the school website), but all respondents' comments and information will be anonymised.

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City of Westminster

Statutory Proposal to amalgamate St Vincent de Paul and Westminster Cathedral Roman Catholic Primary Schools – 6 January 2022

Proposal to amalgamate St Vincent de Paul Roman Catholic (RC) Primary School and Westminster Roman Catholic (RC) Primary School from 1 September 2022.

The proposal is to amalgamate Westminster Cathedral RC Primary School and St Vincent de Paul RC Primary School as a one form entry RC Primary School on the St Vincent de Paul school site. No pupils will be displaced as there will be a guaranteed place for pupils on the roll of both schools at the amalgamated school.

Part 1: Westminster Cathedral RC Primary School

Westminster Council hereby gives Notice in accordance with section 15(1) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 that it intends to discontinue Westminster Cathedral RC Primary School on 31 August 2022.

Part 2: St Vincent De Paul RC Primary School

That Westminster Council will seek to incorporate pupils from Westminster Cathedral RC Primary School into St Vincent de Paul RC Primary School with a planned Published Admissions Number of 30 pupils from reception entry September 2022.

1. Contact details

Name and address of Local Authority publishing the proposal:

Westminster City Council, City Hall, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP

Name, address and category of schools proposed to be amalgamated:

- i) Westminster Cathedral RC Primary School, Bessborough Place, Pimlico, London, SW1V 3SE
- ii) St Vincent de Paul RC Primary School, Morpeth Terrace, London, SW1P 1EP

2. Implementation

Date on which it is proposed to amalgamate the schools:

1 September 2022

It is proposed to implement the amalgamation as follows:

St Vincent de Paul RC Primary will be a one form entry school from September 2022 from the reception intake. Year groups that have more than 30 on roll will be organised as two classes until the numbers reduce to 30 per year group.

The Westminster Cathedral school site is to be retained for educational use which will include accommodating additional classes for the amalgamated school. The final arrangements for each class will be determined in the summer term 2022, when it will be clearer how many pupils will be on roll in each year group.

All children attending Westminster Cathedral RC Primary will have a place at St Vincent de Paul RC Primary from 1 September 2022. Children currently attending St Vincent de Paul RC Primary will continue to do so.

3. Reason for amalgamation

The proposal arises for two key reasons; a fall in pupil numbers across Westminster that has impacted both schools and current and future financial viability. Both schools have a deficit budget that is projected to increase. Westminster Cathedral RC Primary has a considerable and unrecoverable budget deficit. Both schools have a surplus of over 30% with low reception numbers.

A four-week period of informal public consultation, led by the governing body at each school and including meetings with staff, governors, and parents was undertaken from 11 October to 12 November 2021. The consultation and associated documents can be viewed here:

<https://www.westminster.gov.uk/children-and-families/education/statutory-proposal-amalgamate-st-vincent-de-paul-and-westminster-cathedral-roman-catholic-primary>

4. Pupil numbers and admissions

The numbers for whom provision is currently made at the school:

St Vincent de Paul RC Primary: This school is a co-educational mainstream RC Primary School for pupils aged 5 to 11. The school has a Published Admission Number of 30 for each year group, giving a total of 210, as well as a nursery class. As of October 2021 the school had 144 pupils on roll, with 15 children in the reception class.

Westminster Cathedral: This is a co-educational mainstream RC Primary School for pupils aged 5-11. The school currently has a Published Admission Number of 30 for each year group. As of October 2021 the school had 139 pupils on roll with 19 children in the reception class.

The current Reception to Year 6 pupil numbers for each school based on the October 2021 school census are shown below. The current spare capacity, excluding nursery, at St Vincent de Paul RC Primary is 33.8% and at Westminster Cathedral RC Primary, it is 31.4%.

Year group	St Vincent De Paul	Westminster Cathedral	Totals
Reception	19	15	34
Year 1	23	21	44
Year 2	23	20	43
Year 3	18	20	38
Year 4	21	20	41
Year 5	17	22	39
Year 6	18	26	44
Total	139	144	283
Spare capacity	33.8%	31.4%	

*based on October census 2021

The admissions criteria for the amalgamated school will give priority to Roman Catholic applicants born in the Westminster Cathedral and St Vincent de Paul Parishes. The Published Admission Number will be 30.

5. Displaced pupils due to amalgamation

No children will be displaced because all pupils will have places at the amalgamated St Vincent de Paul RC Primary School from September 2022.

Provision will be made to accommodate all pupils that are on roll of both schools. As the current combined numbers of 283 exceed the capacity of 210 (Reception to Year 6), arrangements will be made to accommodate any overspill of classes at the Westminster Cathedral school site. The organisation of classes will need to be determined in the summer term 2022 to take account of mobility that may occur.

During the informal consultation, it was indicated that some families have preferences for other local schools and may live closer to other schools. Some schools in the surrounding areas have vacancies in some year groups; parents who wish will be supported to apply for them and the local authority will endeavour to meet parental preferences for school places, where possible.

Current pupil projections indicate there are sufficient places for future cohorts following the closure of Westminster Cathedral RC Primary. The local authority will continue to monitor the projected need for future school places and propose changes, if required, to ensure sufficient places are available.

6. Impact on the community of the amalgamation

Westminster Cathedral RC Primary has been linked with the Holy Apostles Church over many generations and is seen as the linked school for the local Catholic community. Many of the local Catholic community have attended the school and will be disappointed that it is no longer a financially viable school.

The proportion of Westminster Cathedral RC Primary Catholic families is approximately 80% and 93% at St Vincent de Paul. Both schools attract Catholic families even though undersubscribed.

7. Rural Primary Schools Not applicable

8. Balance of denominational provision

The LA is under an obligation to consider the impact on the balance of denominational provision in the area before it determines the outcome of school closure proposals. As there are other Catholic Schools, as well as other faith schools in Westminster and surrounding areas, and St Vincent de Paul remains an option for parents, the proposed amalgamation will have minimal impact on the balance of denominational school provision.

9. Maintained nursery schools

Westminster Cathedral RC Primary does not offer nursery provision; this will be available for parents at the amalgamated St Vincent de Paul RC Primary, which already offers nursery provision.

10. Sixth Form Provision not applicable

11. Special Educational Needs provision

There are 26 pupils on roll at St Vincent de Paul RC Primary who have been identified as having special educational needs, of which there are 7 pupils with an Education Health and Care Plan. There are 26 pupils on roll at Westminster Cathedral that have been identified as having special educational needs, of which there are 5 pupils with an Education Health and Care Plan. These numbers exclude Year 6 that will transition to secondary school from September 2022. St Vincent de Paul RC Primary is an accessible building with a lift. In order to improve accessibility and suitability further at St Vincent de Paul RC Primary, particularly at the entrance of the school, the local authority will fund a programme of capital works at St Vincent de Paul RC Primary in 2022.

12. Travel

For the period where some pupils may need to be located on the Westminster Cathedral site, arrangements will be made to organise one drop off and pick up point for parents that may have siblings located at both school sites

13. Making representations about the proposal

Within four weeks from the date of publication of this proposal any person may object to or make comments on the proposal by contacting:

Email: school.organisation@westminster.gov.uk

Post: Head of School Place Planning and Access to Education, Borough Education Service, Kensington Town Hall, Hornton Street London, W8 7NX

The closing date for responses is 3 February 2022

We will not be able to consider any responses received after this date. All responses received during the representation period will be fully considered by the local authority and a final decision will then be made by the local authority on whether to implement the school amalgamation proposal or not with effect from 1 September 2022.

Appendix C

A summary of the representations received in response to the Statutory Proposal to amalgamate Westminster Cathedral and St Vincent de Paul RC Primary Schools from the 1 September 2022

Consultation Response Analysis

Westminster Council consulted the following stakeholders and interested parties directly to inform them of the publication of this statutory proposal:

- ✓ Secretary of State
- ✓ Parents, Carers and Pupils of Westminster Cathedral and St Vincent de Paul
- ✓ Staff at Westminster Cathedral and St Vincent de Paul
- ✓ Governors of all Westminster schools
- ✓ Diocese of Westminster (Roman Catholic)
- ✓ London Diocesan Board for Schools
- ✓ Westminster Schools Forum and Education Partnership Board (EPB)
- ✓ Headteachers of all Westminster schools
- ✓ Local MPs
- ✓ All Westminster councillors
- ✓ All neighbouring boroughs' local authorities
- ✓ Published on Westminster website / social media accounts
- ✓ Westminster local paper

By the formal close of the statutory notice, the following written responses were received:

Total Responses	Agreed with the Proposal	Neither agreed or disagreed	Did not Agree with the Proposal
47	4	27	16

Respondents identified themselves as:

- Parents of Westminster Cathedral RC Primary School x 6
- Parents of St Vincent de Paul RC Primary School x 2
- Staff at Westminster RC Primary School x 9
- Staff at St Vincent de Paul RC Primary School - 23
- Governor x 2
- Local Councillor x 1
- No identity provided x 4

Under key headings, a summary of questions and comments is provided.

Organisation of classes

I understand the need for the amalgamation and why it is necessary. My concern is how will the classes be divided and mixed. Will they be organised by ability? Can you guarantee that friendship groups will not be broken? How will it work if there are more than 30 children in the year group?

What reassurances are there that there won't be an increase in class sizes to the detriment of pupils?

In previous years, St Vincent de Paul has operated as a one and half form entry school and therefore has the capacity to accommodate the projected numbers. Current school layout allows for flexibility to increase capacity which would accommodate the numbers of pupils they understand. There are areas that could be utilised for extra classroom use to ensure that all pupils are placed on one site. This will ensure that siblings are located on the same site and will lead to a successful cohesive school.

Engagement with Community

This is all very rushed and has come as a genuine bolt from the blue for families. The informal consultation was lamentable and not the way to genuinely garner views from those effected. It has seemed from the start that this merger was going to be rammed through no matter what local residents had to say.

What weight has been given to the overwhelming rejection of the merger by parents at both schools during the consultation process?

We would welcome and encourage links with both Westminster Cathedral and Holy Apostles parishes and know that both clergy teams would be an integral part of the Catholic school community. Once again, this would ensure a successful amalgamation.

Pupils, parents and staff have repeatedly been told that Westminster Cathedral School is not closing but amalgamating to create a new Catholic primary school. This new proposal seems to contradict those initial conversations. As it states clearly in the Cabinet Member report: 'The agreed way forward with both governing bodies, who led the informal consultation, is for the amalgamation of both schools, with Westminster Cathedral RC Primary formally closing at the end of August 2022 and St Vincent de Paul RC Primary to be retained as one-form entry school. A process of amalgamation enables a better transition for children at both schools and helps ensure that strong educational outcomes continue to be delivered'.

The site and travel

What guarantees have been obtained from the diocese that the Westminster Cathedral site will be retained for educational purposes? As local taxpayers are being asked to plug the £400,000 deficit, they should at the very least be assured that the site is retained as a continuing educational asset for our communities.

Your proposal does not explain why the St Vincent site has been retained over the Westminster Cathedral site, which is more easily accessible and closer to the Underground Network. Your proposal also shows that today more students attend Westminster Cathedral than St Vincent. Thus, by retaining the St Vincent site, you will impact more families than if you kept the Westminster Cathedral site.

Travel between schools will just not be at the beginning and end of the day. Children located offsite will not have the opportunity to participate fully in school life (e.g. assemblies, workshops, monitor roles, across year group relationships, specialist teachers, wraparound care, instrumental lessons). If particular year groups were based at the satellite locations, this would result in loss of learning time when travelling to and from the main site to particular elements of school life. Including all children on one site offers a secure, ideal and positive learning environment for pupils to thrive academically, emotionally and spiritually as one school community.

Your proposal does not address logistical challenges that parents will encounter: for many parents this will result in longer commutes - will the Council be there to ensure that wrap around solutions will be offered to parents to address this?

Provision for Children with Special Educational Needs

There are concerns about the adequacy to SEN provision and the disruption this process may cause. What reassurances are there that these are being taken into account and properly mitigated for?

It is imperative that the needs of pupils with EHCPs transitioning to St Vincent de Paul are at the forefront of the amalgamation process. They require their needs to be met fully (e.g. adaptations to the building, resourcing, staffing and timetabling). Establishing a definitive timetable is crucial and will assist the school in this process. Parents need to be reassured that the school understands the background of these children and that the SENCO can meet and plan for a stable and successful transition.

School identity

Will there be guarantees of support in purchasing new uniforms for families that need it? So far there has only been the suggestion this will be 'looked at'. Parents struggling with already increasing costs of living need this information.

As long as the new school has to operate on two sites, I believe the issue of school uniforms should be delayed till all of the school is on one site.

Children at Westminster Cathedral are losing their school and the new identity of the amalgamated school is important.

There is no mention of a new name, new uniform, new emblem or new identity. It reads like St Vincent De Paul are taking our pupils in; which is not the case as that school is also in trouble financially and slightly more unsubscribed than Westminster cathedral.

During the informal consultation meetings, it was made clear that a new name would be given to the newly amalgamated school considering both identities of the new school and this would be done in consultation with stakeholders. We were told the merge would create a new school name and uniform was told the amalgamated school will have a new school name.

This amalgamation, despite being on one site should be seen to be just that – an amalgamation; an amalgamation of two sister schools, two equals; no one school having favourable treatment over the other, either over admissions of the children from the two parishes or in deciding the futures of existing staff in both schools. I am pleased to see that children in both schools are guaranteed a place in the newly amalgamated school. This amalgamation will need a newly appointed board of governors, some of whom can

be from the existing two schools. And that this newly formed governing body should then elect their chairman from among its members.

Staffing

There is no mention of staff retention. Pimlico is a small community and I have been advised that staff at St Vincent De Paul have been assured their jobs are safe. At the present time I am finding it challenging to see how this process is fair. As again, parents were assured that there would be a fair process for all staff retention, not just for one school. The proposal does not mention how this is going to be actioned and we were told it would be included in the formal proposal. We would like clarity on the following statement:

Statement made during informal consultation process – ‘The schools will ensure that a thorough and fair recruitment process is undertaken and staff at both schools will have an equal opportunity to apply for posts at the amalgamated school’. When we had an NEU meeting alongside St Vincent de Paul staff they were told that they would be redeployed. Westminster Cathedral RC Primary School were not told this. This has raised concerns that potentially staff at St Vincent De Paul will be prioritised for staffing roles

Whilst I agree that the merger of equals amalgamation is the best way to secure a strong provision for catholic education in south Westminster, I want to highlight some of the challenges regarding the successful execution of this. It is very much my hope and expectation that the amalgamation will be successful. The two schools already share an executive head, which in some ways is an advantage as they are familiar with both schools. There is a great deal of responsibility on this individual across both schools, exacerbated by the Covid situation. The senior leadership teams have a lot of responsibility and workload without an amalgamation to execute on or a pandemic to navigate there are a number of tasks that need attention. Expediting clarity on areas such as the staffing structure and amalgamation practicalities will aid staff and parents in getting transparency about the future. Such clarity should provide greater certainty and help maintain pupil numbers at the combined school.

Addressing the deficit

The amalgamated school will still have to address a huge debt problem. Your proposal does not explain how this will be resolved.

Summary and conclusion of representation

The Council acknowledges the genuine support and concerns raised by parents/carers, the local community and educational professionals in response to the statutory notice period and the four-week informal consultation period led by the governing bodies of both schools. Whilst taking account of all representations made, the Council must consider these representations against the two key reasons for the proposal to amalgamate the two schools: falling rolls and financial viability. As outlined in the informal consultation and the statutory notice, Westminster currently has a 22% surplus capacity across its primary schools. This is not contained in any particular area but across all areas of the borough. Westminster Cathedral and St Vincent de Paul are located in the 'South' planning area, which is one of six planning areas. The current surplus capacity in this area is currently 24.5%. Both schools have unfilled places at 31% and 34%. Annual projections do not indicate demand over the next 4-5 years, which will result in a continuing increase in deficit at both schools culminating in reduced resources. The Council has a statutory responsibility to not only ensure there is sufficiency of school places in its area but to address excess surplus capacity and ensure the financial viability of its maintained schools.

Westminster Cathedral's deficit was £308,000 at the end of March 2021 and is estimated to be about £400,000 at 31st August 2022, the date of proposed closure (as part of the amalgamation). Unfortunately, although the Council supported Westminster Cathedral school in producing a deficit recovery plan and supported a number of staff reorganisations, as the roll reductions were much higher than it had previously been forecast, and over 90% of school funding is based on pupil numbers, the school's funding reduced significantly. At this stage, the school became financially unviable and was not able to reduce costs further leading to a significant worsening of the deficit.

St Vincent de Paul were in deficit by £39,000 at 31st March 2021 and are estimating this deficit will increase to £79,000 by 31st March 2021. The school has not been able to produce a balanced budget plan over three years and their position is estimated to worsen to £163,000 deficit by 31st March 2024. We believe that this amalgamation proposal offers the best opportunity to secure not only the current, but long-term sustainability of high-quality primary education to current and future pupils, and is a proposal that provides a guaranteed place at St Vincent de Paul for all pupils on roll of both schools.

When schools are amalgamated, it will result in the discontinuation of one of the schools. When an amalgamation takes place, the children attending the discontinued school are not displaced and have a guaranteed place at the new amalgamated school.

An amalgamated school will also enable greater opportunity for families to be provided with a range of extra-curricular activities and ensure value for money including promoting the current nursery offer for 3 and 4 years olds.

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