

Frequently asked questions: 20th October 2021

Westminster Cathedral Catholic Primary School and St Vincent de Paul Catholic Primary School - amalgamation proposal

Q: Is this a formal proposal or only one possible option for a way forward

A: This is the first phase of the consultation, and it is informal and is an opportunity for ideas to be submitted. Ideas will be given serious consideration. The governing body have been considering the matter for some time and view the amalgamation proposal as the most effective way to ensure future funding and standards of education.

Q: The proposal has come as a surprise. Is it the case that St Vincent de Paul Catholic Primary School is having to have a school folded into it?

A: The position has been known for some time and the proposals have now been made public once all the evidence and alternatives were explored and it became clear that this is the best option for the school. Our belief is that the amalgamation proposal is the solution rather than the risks associated with both schools trying to continue with increasingly limited funding. A school that runs at a deficit for three years is at risk of being forced into being taken over by a non-Catholic entity and the risk of closure and the loss of the asset.

The diocese would prefer that the parents and pupils at Westminster Cathedral Catholic Primary School to continue to have a catholic education under the new arrangements rather than lose them to other local schools.

Across central london there is an oversupply of places and lack of pupil numbers/demand.

Q: Why do teachers at the school have to compete for their jobs?

A: As a result of reducing pupil numbers the projections are that both schools will only fill one class with one teacher for each year group. Our view that it is counterproductive to dismiss the skills and experience of staff at Westminster Cathedral Catholic Primary School. Decisions on staffing will be a competitive process by the governing body and will be looking for the best candidates.

Q: With concerns over staffing will parents begin to look for other schools and will there then be damage to the school community?

A: Amalgamation creates a full school and therefore full funding and staffing rather than having the risk of losing staff due to reduced funding from lower pupil numbers. The governing body is always concerned about the well-being of the staff and is aware of their achievements.

Q: Why is the target date for amalgamation in September 2022 so soon with pupils just starting to find stability again after issues such as Brexit and the pandemic?

A: The diocese has had to undertake this same process at several schools in different areas. It is important to find clarity as soon as reasonably practicable rather than setting a date further in the distance and creating more doubt.

There is nothing to be gained from delaying a decision and it would increase risk to the school. The governing body have looked at many options to keep things as they are, but it has become clear that amalgamation ensures the school's future financial stability.

Q: Will the parents votes make any difference to the outcome?

A: This is not a vote. As an informal consultation we will listen to all ideas especially those that may not have come up previously when coming up with the amalgamation plan.

Q: Would children not do better in the existing smaller classes?

A: The smaller classes across both schools are not financially viable in the long term. Teachers must be paid, and the building maintained. 30 is the maximum infant class size allowed and this is the standard for a class. A full class enable full staffing as the funding model means that the school receives set funding for every child on roll. With reduced class sizes comes a reduced budget and reduced staffing.

Q: What happens if the year group at both schools is over 30 in number?

A: If amalgamation goes ahead the site at Westminster Cathedral Catholic Primary School is being retained for as long as it is needed for additional classes where they cannot be merged immediately. It is expected that pupil rolls will continue to reduce until they do reach 30 in the future. Also it may be that not all Westminster Cathedral Catholic Primary School parents wish to remain and move to other schools.

Q: While a full school is preferable and that aim is fulfilled by the amalgamation, the school has a good reputation and community so why is there the need to rebrand?

A: The governors of St Vincent de Paul Catholic Primary school would be happy to continue with the current brand and encourages parents to feedback to the consultation. Whatever the outcome the school culture is embedded and will not disappear in an amalgamation. These are two catholic schools a mile apart and should not be viewed as so different.

Q: Why is there not a school closure for one school rather than an amalgamation?

A: The diocese would not put a school through that and would not want to force the closure of one its schools.

Q: Is there any chance that pupils would have to move to the Westminster Cathedral Catholic Primary School site in the future if that became the preferred site?

A: The preferred site for the diocese is St Vincent de Paul Catholic Primary School as it is next to the Cathedral.

General

- The surplus over places is currently an issue across London. In Westminster there have already been measures taken in other schools with the closure of two primary schools and the reduction in the number of forms in each year group at others. As St Vincent de Paul Catholic Primary School and Westminster Cathedral Catholic Primary Schools are both one form entry schools, reduction in class numbers is not an option.
- Regarding accessibility there have been discussions about the possibility of capital funding to improve accessibility within the St Vincent de Paul building. These are discussions that will further develop dependant on the decision from the consultation at which point the planning and decisions required will become clearer.