

ARCHDIOCESE



OF LIVERPOOL

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30 June 2015

Colin Pettigrew  
Director of Children's Services  
Sefton Council  
Merton House  
Merton Road  
Bootle  
L20 3JA

Dear Colin,

It is with regret that I am writing to you to ask the Council to start a statutory consultation proposing the closure by August 2016 of St. Ambrose Barlow Catholic High School, Netherton. I believe, for the reasons I will outline below, that it is in the interests of the children and parents of Sefton that such a consultation be started as soon as possible.

Before outlining my reasons for writing with such a request, I want to pay tribute to the Governors, the staff and the students at the school for the quality of education provided at the school and for the considerable achievements pupils have made while at the school, with sustained progress year on year. I believe the Governors and Headteacher have done everything humanly possible, given the very meagre budget available to them, to sustain a school so rich in ethos, so caring for the vulnerable and so aspiring of attainment for its pupils.

Unfortunately, as the funding of schools is now almost wholly based on the number of pupils on roll, Governors have been managing with a budget that is half the size of the average Secondary school budget at a time when the Government is insisting on the highest attainment in the broadest choice of subjects. It is simply not possible for the school to cover these increased expectations within the budget available to them. Nor are they able to set a deficit budget as the law does not allow them to do this.

You will be aware of the Governors deliberations on this matter as they wrote to you in November 2014 stating:

*"The Governing Body are also aware that the decline in the student population in associated primary schools is highly unlikely to increase in the mid-term.*

*As a consequence the school is now in a position where it cannot make any further reductions in by far the most significant area of spend, that of staffing. Many subject areas are now single person departments and, with the advent of 'best 8' judgment, it is more imperative than ever that the school can provide a broad and balanced curriculum and the appropriate levels of support for our students and their families....*

*...The Governors fully recognise their core function to oversee the financial performance of the school and to ensure best use of resources and have worked with the Local Authority over the*

*past four years to ensure that a balanced budget was achieved. However, we believe that we cannot make any further significant financial savings to reduce the predicted budget deficit of approximately £470k by 2016-17. "*

There has been a reduction in this estimated deficit, which was defined by the local authority, but quite simply there are too many places left empty in Catholic schools in the South Sefton area due to the decline in pupil numbers over many years. As few as 64 pupils, 20 of whom are Catholic, are due to start school at St. Ambrose Barlow in September 2015. There now has to be a rationalisation and reduction in the number of Catholic Secondary School places in the area and it is the Council's duty to make appropriate proposals to enable that to happen. I met with Governors last night to inform them that I would be writing this letter to you today and I will be writing to parents of pupils once I have briefed staff to alert them to my actions.

It goes without saying that should the Council commence the consultation I have requested, you will have the full co-operation of the Archdiocese during that consultation. The Archdiocese would also be seeking to ensure that the consultation results in responses to a number of key issues that should be an integral part of that consultation. These include:

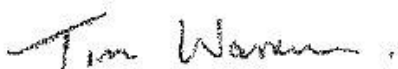
- Alternative provision for the forthcoming September 2015 intake
- Alternative provision from September 2015 for the existing Y9 so they can be certain of completing their two year GCSE courses in a single school
- Appropriate support with travel and uniform for existing pupils if they have to be admitted to other schools as a result of the proposals
- Future designation of the parishes served by St. Ambrose to be served by other catholic Schools, which the Archdiocese will provide
- The need for significant investment in the buildings used by other Catholic Schools in the area so they are able to serve effectively the children of South Sefton.

The Archdiocese will provide to the Council more detailed proposals on these issues both before and during the consultation and would expect the consultation to include proposals from the Council on some of these matters.

On the last point in particular a pro-active and positive approach is required from the Council if Catholic Schools are going to deliver what the South Sefton area's parents and pupils deserve. Catholic Schools in Sefton have rejected the Government's Academy model and remained loyal to Sefton Local Authority, but unlike in Liverpool where our schools have been prioritised by the Council for substantial investment, in Sefton our school buildings leave a lot to be desired and require millions of pounds of investment just to remain adequately maintained. Meanwhile huge amounts of money have been spent on other schools which are now outside the remit of the local authority. We need to work together to rectify this situation and ensure some real sustainable benefits come out the sad situation I am forced to write to you about now.

I look forward to hearing from you as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,



Tim Warren  
**Diocesan Director of Schools and Colleges**

