

## **Summary of Consultation**

### **1 Consultation Process**

- 1.1 In accordance with section 16(3) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 a proposer of a school closure must have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State. The following bodies and individuals were consulted:

Parents/carers of pupils at St Teresa's Infant School and Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School

Parents of pupils who had applied for places at the schools at the start of the consultation period

Staff at St Teresa's and Our Lady of Lourdes

Governing bodies of St Teresa's and Our Lady of Lourdes

Trade Union Representatives

Sefton schools

Ward Councillors

Directors of neighbouring local authorities

Local MP

General consultation invites on Sefton Council's website

- 1.2 The consultation process was presented to the Public Engagement and Consultation Panel on 10 October 2019.
- 1.3 All parents at both schools received a letter and a copy of the consultation leaflet mentioned above. The consultation also consisted of meetings with staff, governors and families, and provided the opportunity for discussion and written representation.

### **2. Outcome of the Consultation**

- 2.1 During the consultation period, meetings have been held with interested parties, the following is a synopsis of the outcomes as a result of the meetings. The Stage One consultation period ran from 21 October until 6 December 2019. An extra week was allowed for half term.

## 2.2 Consultation Meetings with Staff, Governors and Parents/carers at St Teresa's on 5 November 2019 and Our Lady of Lourdes on 6 November 2019

Three separate meetings were held on each evening for staff, governors and parents/carers. At all of the meetings, copies of the presentation "Proposals for St Teresa's/Our Lady of Lourdes", dated 5<sup>th</sup> November 2019 were circulated.

The background to the proposal was explained. St Teresa's Catholic Infant School has suffered from falling pupil numbers for some time and the school currently has 47% surplus places as at the October 2019 School Census. Births in Southport have been declining since 2009/10 which has affected the nursery/infant population in the area. It was explained that school finances are highly dependent on pupil numbers so as these decline, income diminishes.

Governing bodies have a duty to set a balanced budget each year and although the Governing Body has worked hard to reduce costs, this has proved very challenging. The Governing Body of St Teresa's met on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2019 to consider the financial position of the school going forward and concluded that they were unable to set a balanced budget. On 25<sup>th</sup> June 2019 they wrote to the Head of Schools and Families seeking approval for a deficit budget for 2019/20. The letter also requested that a possibility of a merger with Our Lady of Lourdes be explored.

Figures were shared on the financial impact over three years. St Teresa's is running with an unsustainable budget deficit and, like many other schools, Our Lady of Lourdes will need to review and address budget sustainability in the coming three-year period. It was explained that the proposal was to close St Teresa's and place provision with Our Lady of Lourdes and the presentation went on to give the implications of this for pupils, staff, Governors, Admissions, the building and Ofsted.

The expansion of Our Lady of Lourdes would allow for all pupils at St Teresa's Infants to automatically register there. Upon closure the St Teresa's premises would transfer to the control of the Governors of Our Lady of Lourdes which would mean that they would operate on a split site. In the short term, both sites would remain open to allow pupils to attend as before. The proposal would safeguard matters in an orderly way and ensure that there is appropriate Roman Catholic provision in the area.

Staff employed by the Governing Body of St Teresa's Infant School would transfer to the employ of the Governing Body of Our Lady of Lourdes Primary School on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2020. Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006, otherwise known as TUPE, will apply.

If the proposal to close St Teresa's is approved, then the current Governing Body would cease to exist on 31<sup>st</sup> August and all the power and responsibilities would transfer to the Governors of Our Lady of Lourdes.

If the proposal to close St Teresa's is approved, then current pupils at the school would be given the right to attend Our Lady of Lourdes. For future admission, Our Lady of Lourdes would have a planned admission number (PAN) of 90 and a single point of admission for Reception. There would be no need to apply at Y3.

St Teresa's has a current Ofsted judgement of Good which was awarded in February 2018. If St Teresa's were to close, then this judgement would be archived. Our Lady of Lourdes has a current Ofsted judgement of Good which was awarded in July 2019. This judgement would continue to apply to the extended provision.

The timescales for the statutory process were explained. Once the consultation period ends on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2019 a report will go back to Cabinet on 9<sup>th</sup> January 2020 to decide whether to proceed to the next stage. The report will be in the public domain and will be available a week before the meeting. If this is agreed the proposal will be published and there is a four-week representation period to allow people to submit their written responses. The final report would be submitted to Cabinet in April 2020 for them to make the final decision.

The final slide explained how to respond to the consultation in a variety of ways by using the online comment form, by email or by completing the form on the reverse of the consultation document and posting it to the address shown. Comments needed to be received by 6<sup>th</sup> December 2019.

Copies of the minutes of all the consultation meetings have been posted on the Council website on the School Organisation page within Schools and Learning.

## 2.3 Online and written responses to the consultation

A total of 422 responses were received to the consultation; 318 from Sefton webforms, 60 from emails and 44 were written responses submitted on the form attached to the consultation document.

A breakdown of these responses is shown below:

Parent/carer - 155

Staff - 70

Governor - 13

Local resident/Other - 184

### **Key themes from all responses:**

Following receipt of consultation responses the following key themes have been identified:

- More than one option should have been presented during the consultation.
- There was some criticism of how the proposal had been announced in the local media which is believed to have exacerbated lack of confidence in both schools.
- There was some criticism of how aspects of the consultation had been conducted.
- Both schools are highly valued by parents and their local community. Support for the independence of both schools was very passionate.
- The current proposal is not financially viable.
- The current proposal will result in financial problems for Our Lady of Lourdes and could seriously jeopardise its future.
- Proposal that St Teresa's should be closed.
- More time is required for all options to be explored.
- Following a recent period of instability, St Teresa's should be given a period of grace to allow them to market themselves.

## **2.4 Responses from other statutory consultees**

During the consultation period, a response was received from a neighbouring local authority. The School Planning Team at Lancashire County Council responded by email. They confirmed that their nearest school is Scarisbrick St Mary's at 2.92 miles which is over their 2-mile radius for primary school catchment (derived from DFE home to school transport guidance). They stated that as the proposal is for no additional places and no reduction of school places either, they would not expect this to have any adverse impact on Lancashire County Council provision of school places. They therefore offered no comment on the proposal.

## **2.5 Summary of Issues raised during the consultation by the staff and Governors of each school**

### **2.5.1 Main issues raised by staff at St Teresa's**

Staff at St Teresa's were concerned about their jobs and whether the building would still be used as an infant school. They asked about the feasibility of keeping both buildings open, whether parents could still apply for places and could these be guaranteed. They asked questions about redundancy, possible reduction of working hours and what would happen to their budget deficit.

Responses to the consultation indicated that they did not want St Teresa's to close and would prefer it to operate independently of Our Lady of Lourdes. However, a few responses also indicated that they were in favour of the proposal if this is the only way the school would be able to continue.

### **2.5.2 Main issues raised by staff at Our Lady of Lourdes**

Staff at Our Lady of Lourdes had great empathy for the staff and pupils at St Teresa's especially in view of the close links between the two schools but were against the proposal which they feel is not financially viable. All staff said that they "fiercely rejected" the proposal and believe that this would lead to the "financial ruin" of Our Lady of Lourdes.

Staff expressed their concern that the Council was trying to pass the debt from St Teresa's onto Our Lady of Lourdes by placing this responsibility on the governors of Our Lady of Lourdes.

Concern was expressed that the current financial position and the pupil numbers at both schools will not support an expansion to an admission number of 90. There is no guarantee that all pupils from St Teresa's would transfer to Our Lady of Lourdes. Even if they do transfer this would not be enough to alleviate the financial cost of additional staff moving over to Our Lady of Lourdes.

### 2.5.3 Main issues raised by Governors at St Teresa's

A response to the consultation was received by e-mail from the Governing Body of St. Teresa's Catholic Infant School The full response has been reproduced in full within the Background Papers.

In essence though, the Governing Body of St. Teresa's School is against the Sefton Council proposal for the closure of St. Teresa' Catholic Infant School and the expansion of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School. St. Teresa's Governing Body believe that a better solution for the whole community would be that St. Teresa's School remains open, in its own right.

### 2.5.4 Main issues raised by Governors at Our Lady of Lourdes

The responses received did not support the proposal although they had not taken this decision lightly as the schools have close links and great empathy was expressed for the staff and parents of St Teresa's.

Governors were concerned that the Council's proposal was not financially viable and will have a significant financial impact on Our Lady of Lourdes if the schools are merged as they believe its future could be seriously jeopardised.

Concern was expressed that the current financial position and the pupil numbers at both schools will not support an expansion to an admission number of 90 especially as there are surplus places in Southport. There is already sufficient capacity at Our Lady of Lourdes to educate the Catholic pupils who currently attend St Teresa's school. However, there is no

guarantee that all pupils from St Teresa's would transfer to Our Lady of Lourdes. Even if they do transfer this would not be enough to alleviate the financial cost of additional staff moving over to OLOL.

Concern that if staff from St Teresa's were transferred under TUPE that there would be too many staff leading to an immediate need to restructure with subsequent disruption, redundancy and pension costs which would have to be met by Our Lady of Lourdes and would put current staff at Our Lady of Lourdes at risk.

#### **2.5.5 Response of Governors and Staff from Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School**

The Governors and Staff of Our Lady of Lourdes School cannot support the Sefton Council Proposal "for the closure of St Teresa's Catholic Infant School and expansion of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School." This decision was not taken lightly as the schools have close links and we have great empathy for the entire community of St Teresa's but, figures provided by Sefton make it clear that, the proposal put forward by the Council and the Archdiocese would have significant financial implications for Our Lady of Lourdes. Indeed this was confirmed by Sefton Council's Head of Finance at two of the Consultation Meetings.

#### **2.5.6 Main Issues raised by parents at St Teresa's**

Parents of Pupils at St Teresa's supported the school and did not want it to close. They spoke very highly of the support that they and their children had received. Parents said that their children have grown in confidence since attending there. The school invests highly in their pupils' mental health. Children feel valued and cared for and have benefitted from the family atmosphere, smaller class sizes and the bond they have with their teachers. They felt that losing this provision in Birkdale would be a huge mistake for the welfare and education of young people in the area.

Many members of the community and parents of pupils currently attending St Teresa's were educated there and highly valued the education they received.

Parents valued the small size of the school and chose to send their children there for that reason as they believe that not all children do well in larger schools. They said that their children were encouraged to develop a strong

sense of self which they felt would not have happened in a larger school. All teachers, teaching assistants and admin staff at St Teresa's were always helpful and caring. They worried that if the school closes it will have a detrimental effect on the progress their children had made there.

Many parents referred to a "one size fits all" approach to education which they felt was not appropriate for all children.

Parents were worried about how their journeys to school would be affected as this could have a big impact on their family life.

Parents of pupils who were receiving one to one support were worried that the funding for this could be taken away.

Parents valued the strong Christian grounding and moral ethics taught at the school.

Parents said that St Teresa's should be used as an example of good teaching practice.

Parents felt that both schools need to remain open as pupil numbers may rise particularly with all the housebuilding taking place in the area. There was concern that there would be no Catholic places available.

Parents believed that the decline in numbers was due to inappropriate management and changes in leadership in the past not falling birth rates in the area and, under the right management and with more marketing, numbers could be improved.

Concern was raised that the school is now at a disadvantage in trying to attract pupils due the publication of the proposals in the local press as parents may now feel that the school is not a valid option.

The school had received a bad press due to a bad Ofsted but it was rated 'Good' for a long time and is now rated 'Good' again. Parents felt that St Teresa's should have been given more help sooner and more should be done



to promote the school. Many parents wanted the opportunity to help the school by being involved in fundraising.

Concern that the process has been rushed and there was no evidence that the proposal was going to save money as there were no financial forecasts provided at the consultation meetings.

Questions were asked about why no alternative proposals were being considered.

There was concern that the building would no longer be available for community use.

Parents were concerned that there would not be enough places available once the schools had merged.

Concern was raised about the implications that closing St Teresa's would have on traffic, parking and the effect on the environment.

Some parents said although they would prefer St Teresa's to remain as a separate school if the only way to keep it open was to "amalgamate" with Our Lady of Lourdes then they would be in favour rather than see it close completely.

Parents requested that St Teresa's should be given an adequate period of grace to allow governors with the strong support of parents, the parish and the Archdiocese to reverse the fortunes of the school and return it to the position it has enjoyed for the majority of the last 150 years. Many of them said they had been unaware that the school's finances were in deficit. They want to keep infant education in place and continue to offer the "small school feel" of St Teresa's so that children can continue to flourish there. Parents were willing to dedicate their time and effort to help St Teresa's achieve this.

#### 2.5.7 Main Issues raised by parents at Our Lady of Lourdes

Parents from Our Lady of Lourdes had great empathy for the entire community of St Teresa's but they were unable to support the proposal for the

closure of St Teresa's and the expansion of Our Lady of Lourdes mainly due to concern that the Council's proposal was not financially viable and will have a significant financial impact on Our Lady of Lourdes if the schools are merged as they believe its future could be seriously jeopardised.

Concern that the Council is trying to pass the debt on to Our Lady of Lourdes.

Parents highlighted that, due to falling pupil numbers, Our Lady of Lourdes had already reduced operating costs and staffing levels. Teaching Assistants have had to reduce their hours on a voluntary basis to avoid potential redundancies.

Concern that the current financial position and the pupil numbers at both schools do not support an expansion to the admissions figure of 90 especially as there is no guarantee that all pupils from St Teresa's would transfer to Our Lady of Lourdes. Even if they do transfer this would not be enough to alleviate the financial cost of additional staff moving over to OLOL.

If the proposal goes ahead staff from St Teresa's will transfer to Our Lady of Lourdes under TUPE regulations. Concern was raised that this would require an immediate restructure with subsequent disruption, redundancy and pension costs which would create an even greater deficit for Our Lady of Lourdes. On top of this they would also have the operational difficulties and costs of running a split site school.

Concern that the current arrangement of the Head teacher of Our Lady of Lourdes acting as Executive Head of St Teresa's is creating strain on the Leadership and Management Team at OLOL and is having a detrimental effect on the daily running of the school.

Concern that the proposal could significantly impact on the ability of Our Lady of Lourdes to maintain high quality education.

Questions were asked about how a split site would operate and where pupils would be placed. Concern was expressed that a key stage would be taken away from Our Lady of Lourdes as this would take so much away from the school community and change the family atmosphere.

Concern about having to drop pupils off at two sites and that children would be transported by bus from one school to another each morning. Home school partnerships and daily contact with teachers would suffer. Walking to school should be promoted.

Parents stated that all pupils from St Teresa's could already be catered for at Our Lady of Lourdes.

Parents stated that they wanted continuous primary education in the same environment.

Concern about class sizes and whether these would increase.

Concern about outside space to accommodate additional pupils and whether break times will have to be staggered to allow pupils to have enough space to play and develop physical skills.

Parents felt that the proposal doesn't address any of the problems encountered by St Teresa's but was simply passing on the problem to Our Lady of Lourdes. They said this is a short-term solution which is not financially sustainable.

Parents felt that St Teresa's needs to be given the opportunity to promote themselves and increase their pupil intake.

Concern that Our Lady of Lourdes is already stretched and does not have the capacity to effectively enlarge.

Concern for one to one support for pupils with SEND at Our Lady of Lourdes which is already overstretched. Cuts in funding may mean that this support is no longer available.

Concern that increasing the size of Our Lady of Lourdes will increase the traffic volume and add to parking problems and environmental issues.

A request was made that the Archdiocese and the Local Authority work in collaboration to present a financially viable alternative rather than place Our Lady of Lourdes in an extremely difficult situation by providing a proposal which they feel can't be seriously considered. They were very concerned about how the community of Our Lady of Lourdes Primary School will be portrayed in the local community and the Parish of St Teresa's by being forced to reject a proposal which would impact on their own financial viability, staffing levels and morale as well as their ability to provide quality education in the future.

#### **2.5.8 Response received from Our Lady of Lourdes Parents Consultation Group**

A Parent Consultation Group was formed following the meeting with the Archdiocese and representatives of Sefton council on 6th November 2019. Parents were very concerned about the merger outlined in Sefton's proposal and the impact it would have on Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School (OLOL) and its pupils.

The Parent Consultation Group cannot support the Sefton council proposal "for the closure of St. Teresa's Catholic Infant School and expansion of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School."

#### **2.5.9. Main Issues raised by Local Community/Residents/Other**

There was some support for the current proposal amongst the local community as a way of keeping the St Teresa's building open but many wished to see St Teresa's kept open as a school in its own right. Many of the local residents who responded did not support the proposal which they felt was not financially viable and would have a detrimental effect on Our Lady of Lourdes Primary School. They mentioned all the same issues raised by the staff and parents of Our Lady of Lourdes.