

**OUTCOME OF THE CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSAL TO CLOSE
ST. TERESA'S CATHOLIC INFANT SCHOOL AND THE RELATED PROPOSAL
TO ENLARGE OUR LADY OF LOURDES CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL**

ONLINE AND WRITTEN RESPONSES TO THE CONSULTATION

A total of 422 responses were received; 318 from Sefton webforms, 60 from emails, 44 were written responses and most of these were submitted on the form attached to the consultation document. There were many individual responses but collective responses were received which were also submitted by individuals via the Sefton webform and email by parents, staff, governors and local residents.

Who responded?

Parent/carer 155

Staff 70

Governor 13

Local resident/Other 184

There were very few responses in favour of the current proposal to close St Teresa's Catholic Infants and enlarge Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary. Most of the responses were against it. Those in favour said they would prefer St Teresa's to remain open in its own right but would support the proposal if this was the only way the school could continue.

Key themes from all responses:

More than one option should have been presented during the consultation.

Criticism of how the proposal had been announced in the local media which is believed to have exacerbated lack of confidence in both schools.

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.

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.

Summary of Issues raised during the consultation

Minutes of all the consultation meetings were posted on the Sefton webpage at www.sefton.gov.uk/stteresas

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.

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 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.

Operating on two sites would mean additional costs for Our Lady of Lourdes.

Concern that Our Lady of Lourdes will lose more pupils if the proposal goes ahead. Staff said that parents at Our Lady of Lourdes do not want their children educated on two sites and are already questioning whether they would continue to place their children there and whether they would send younger siblings to the school. They want continuity and proven results for their children. At a recent open morning for early years prospective parents were asking questions about the proposal and made it clear that they would not choose the school if this were the case.

Staff pointed out that there was already sufficient capacity at Our Lady of Lourdes to educate the Catholic pupils who currently attend St Teresa's school.

Operating costs and staffing levels have already been reduced. Teaching Assistants at Our Lady of Lourdes have already had their hours cut due to falling pupil numbers. This has had a detrimental effect on children in their care already as they are no longer able to support pupils who need to access interventions outside the classroom. It has also impacted on the teachers' workloads. Further cost reductions will be required to balance the budget in future and taking over an additional school site and staff will only exacerbate this.

Staff were disappointed that elected Members did not attend the consultation meetings.

There was concern about the negative focus on both schools in the recent press.

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. It has been necessary for them to pay for supply cover as they have needed to pull other members of the SLT out of class for the day. It was also stated that the two schools are also sharing a caretaker.

Concern at the current level of stress on staff which will impact on pupils. Morale in school is already low.

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

Concern about how they will be portrayed in the local community and particularly in the Parish of St Teresa's by being forced to reject a proposal which would impact on their own financial viability, staffing levels, morale and ability to provide good quality education in the future.

Concern and disappointment was expressed that only one option has been presented during the consultation. Staff requested that the Archdiocese and Local Authority work in collaboration to present a financially viable alternative rather than

place Our Lady of Lourdes in an extremely difficult position by providing a proposal which cannot be seriously considered.

Many staff suggested, with regret, that a hard closure of St Teresa's was the only option.

It was also suggested that in order to look after the Catholic community that all Catholic primary schools in the borough share the burden and take their fair share of children and staff.

Main issues raised by Governors at St Teresa's

There were some responses in support of the proposal if this was the only way that St Teresa's could be kept open.

Response from Governors of St Teresa's Infant School

The following joint response to the consultation was received by email from the Governing body of St Teresa's Catholic Infant School and has been reproduced here in full:

The governing body of St Teresa's School is **against** the Sefton Council proposal for the closure of St Teresa's Catholic Infant School and the expansion of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School,

Rationale

As a governing body, we are of the opinion that the above Consultation proposal isn't suitable for a number of reasons, including the following:

- Despite requests from the governing bodies of both schools, the budgetary information required to analyse the actual financial impact of a merger was only received in mid-November. The consequence of this is that Our Lady of Lourdes governing body (GB) has recently made the decision to oppose the consultation proposal on the basis of concerns over its financial viability, making any decision to the contrary by St Teresa's GB untenable and unworkable in practice.
- The way in which the proposal was made public by the local authority (without any consultation or prior notice to either school) has created a significant lack of confidence in St Teresa's. This has caused further damaging uncertainty, that has been compounded by the erroneous advice in the consultation proposal document to parents considering enrolling their child at St Teresa's, to actually apply to Our Lady of Lourdes school (see Frequently Asked Questions No.11).
- Following the poorly managed announcement of the consultation proposal, there has been a demonstrable rallying of parents and the parish community to keep St Teresa's school open in its own right.
- Since the beginning of this academic year, St Teresa's has not had its own dedicated Headteacher; nor in the last few years, has the stability of staffing been as governors would have wanted. However, we believe that the current

cohort of staff are fully committed to ensuring the pupils achieve the required standard in all subjects and to enable the more capable pupils to excel.

- Prior to its Ofsted report in 2016, St Teresa's did not need to actively promote the school as the numbers on roll defied the demographic trend of decline in the region. This is now no longer the case so governors, staff and parents recognise this challenge and are currently working together to promote the school more effectively.
- As recently as 2018, positive changes in the school saw the OFSTED rating improve from "Inadequate" to "Good". More time is required to market this improvement and draw new pupils to the school.
- The closure of St Teresa's, without any consideration of exploring further options to allow the school to remain operational, would result not only in any budgetary deficit falling to the local authority, but also substantial costs associated with staff redundancies including significant capital costs relating to staff nearing pensionable age.
- Many parents appreciate the option of being able to walk their children to St.Teresa's school rather than adding to traffic congestion and the associated environmental issues that exist in travelling greater distances.

The governing body has already demonstrated a willingness and determination to balance the school budget. We would like the local authority and the Archdiocese to consider, with an open and informed review of finances, that the provision we value at both St Teresa's and Our Lady of Lourdes, remains. Consequently, we request a period of grace to give the governing body the opportunity to increase pupil numbers and secure the financial stability of St Teresa's school. We are indeed actively formulating and analysing financially viable alternative proposals for consideration with the advice of the Archdiocese. Unfortunately, the late submission of the budgetary information required has severely impacted on the governing body's ability to propose a viable alternative within the consultation period. Consequently, this will now have to be submitted before the end of the Autumn term.

Alternative Proposal

For the above reasons, we strongly believe that a better solution for the whole community would be that St Teresa's school remains open, in its own right. It would be led by its own Headteacher, as a recognised senior leader, sufficiently equipped and in a position to instil confidence in parents, the parish and the local community in re-establishing St Teresa's as the school by which all may recognise it; that is, for its caring, personal approach, its high quality provision of education, and a school that is inextricably linked to the parish church.

We would request that a reasonable period of time is allowed for this to happen (a "period of grace") so the financial security of the school can be assured, with three years being the minimum amount of time required for us to address the problems we know need resolving.

St Teresa's school has been an integral part in the education and the nurturing of generations of children in Birkdale, and the Catholic community in particular, for 150

years. With your support, it can look forward to embarking upon the next phase in its history with renewed optimism.

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.

Operating on two sites would mean additional costs for Our Lady of Lourdes.

Concern that Our Lady of Lourdes will lose more pupils if the proposal goes ahead.

Teaching Assistants at Our Lady of Lourdes have already had their hours cut due to falling pupil numbers. This has had a detrimental effect on children in their care already as they are no longer able to support pupils who need to access interventions outside the classroom. It has also impacted on the teachers' workloads.

There was concern about the negative focus on both schools in the recent press.

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

Concern and disappointment was expressed that only one option has been presented during the consultation. Governors requested that the Archdiocese and Local Authority work in collaboration to present a financially viable alternative rather than place Our Lady of Lourdes in an extremely difficult position by providing a proposal which cannot be seriously considered.

Concern about how they will be portrayed in the local community and particularly in the Parish of St Teresa's by being forced to reject a proposal which would impact on their own financial viability, staffing levels, morale and ability to provide good quality education in the future.

Governors requested that Sefton support St Teresa's to remain open in its own right with its own Head for at least three years to try and turn it around.

The school has had a period of instability in terms of staffing and has not had its own dedicated Head teacher since the beginning of the current academic year. They requested that the school be given the opportunity to actively market themselves.

Joint response of Governors and Staff from Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School

The following joint response to the consultation was received by email from the Governing body and staff of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School and has been reproduced here in full:

Against the proposal:

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.

Reasons:

The current financial position and the pupil numbers at both schools do not support an expansion to an admissions figure of 90. The combined pupil numbers would amount to less than 60 - indeed the Reception class places in the whole of Southport in September 2019 which were surplus to requirements totalled around 120. To propose that Our Lady of Lourdes expands to a 90 pupil intake and takes on the site and staff of St Teresa's to accommodate this, when there are at present insufficient pupils to fill the available spaces, is completely unrealistic.

Our Lady of Lourdes pupil numbers have decreased in the last two years partly due to falling pupil numbers across Southport and partly due to the impact of Nursery entitlement and the decision to open the Nursery to pupils requiring 30-hour provision. We are attempting to address this through marketing, targeted at the Reception intake.

Our Lady of Lourdes has a forecast budget surplus for both 2019/20 & 2020/21, although we are currently operating an in-year deficit. In order to address the year on year reduction in funding, we have had to reduce operating costs and staffing levels. Our Teaching Assistants have recently reduced their hours (on a voluntary

basis) to avoid potential redundancies. We are aware further cost reductions will be required to balance our budget in the future and taking over an additional school site and staff would only exacerbate this.

There is no guarantee that all the existing pupils at St. Teresa's would transfer to OLOL as this would be subject to parental choice. However, the current staff would transfer under TUPE as part of this proposal. This would result in the immediate need to restructure with subsequent disruption, redundancy and pension strain costs, which would create an even greater and potentially catastrophic deficit for Our Lady of Lourdes. In addition we would be faced with the added operational difficulties and costs of running a split site school.

Our Lady of Lourdes has been a consistently successful school and this proposal could significantly impact on the ability to maintain high quality education going forward.

If the concern is genuinely for the provision of Catholic education then it should be noted that there is already sufficient capacity at Our Lady of Lourdes to educate the 37 Catholic pupils who currently attend St Teresa's School.

Alternative proposal:

We request 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 cannot be seriously considered.

We are very concerned about how we will be portrayed in the Local Community and particularly in the Parish of St. Teresa's by being forced to reject a proposal which would impact on our own financial viability, our staffing levels and morale and our ability to continue to provide quality education in the future.

For the following reasons, it seems a better solution for the community if Sefton supported St Teresa's to remain open in its own right, with its own Head, for at least three years to try to turn it around:

- Prior to 2015 St Teresa's was a school where the numbers on roll went against the demographic decline and there was no need to actively market themselves. Going forward this is an area where parents and Governors need to be very proactive and energised.
- Since the beginning of this school year the school has not had its own dedicated Head and in the previous years the stability of staffing was not as the Governors would have wanted.
- The manner in which Sefton Council announced the proposal has exacerbated the lack of confidence in both schools.

- The maladministration in the production of the proposal document which contained incorrect advice to parents in respect of frequently asked questions (No 11), and which took a month to correct, has caused confusion and further upset. Indeed parents with a paper copy still have incorrect information and many active links on Sefton's website link to the original and incorrect document.

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 to 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.

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.

Response received from Our Lady of Lourdes Parents Consultation Group

The following joint response was received by email from the Our Lady of Lourdes Parents Consultation Group which has been reproduced here in full and was also submitted by individual parents:

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 (LOL) 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."

Concerns with the Archdiocese and Local Authority Proposal

- The Sefton/Archdiocese proposal states on page 8, that for any proposal to be seriously considered, 'it would need to establish, in a sustainable way, an approach to setting a balanced budget'. Therefore, by its own criteria, the proposal presented to us should not have been put forward. **It does not present an approach to setting a sustainable balanced budget.**
- Furthermore, the proposal to operate a twin site school and TUPE transfer staff could create a catastrophic deficit and jeopardise the future of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School.

- If staff TUPE transfer to OLOL, the school will have more staff than they require. This will lead to an inevitable restructure, and redundancies.
- Having additional staff will increase the deficit for OLOL in 2020/21.
- A major concern for the school is the possible outcome of a restructure. Any staff over 55 who are made redundant, or take voluntary redundancy, are entitled to their full pension benefits immediately. **The school simply cannot afford to absorb any associated costs.** If there is a **hard closure** of the St Teresa's site and staff do not transfer, **responsibility for all pension costs will fall upon the local authority.**
- Our understanding is that the school are also liable for redundancy payments after a **restructure**. If there is a **hard closure** of the St Teresa's site and staff do not transfer, **responsibility for all redundancy payments will fall upon the local authority.**
- A twin site proposition means that a merged school will have combined deficits of 101k by the end of 2020/21. (based on 66k + 35k). The unsustainable annual deficit puts the future of OLOL school and its children at unacceptable risk.
- There is uncertainty over the geographic placement of children under a twin site proposal, following the closure of St Teresa's school. This has led several parents to question whether they would continue to place their children within OLOL and whether they would send younger, currently preschool siblings to the school. Any reduction in future intake, or loss of current pupils, places OLOL at greater risk.

Parents Proposal

Parents of OLOL would like to propose that St. Teresa's be allowed to remain open for at least four years to give them time to increase their pupil intake and return to a financially sustainable level of funding.

The following bullets summarize the reasons for this proposal:

- It was left until very late to inform the school governors of the severity of the funding crisis. This is acknowledged by Sefton council.
- Governors of St Teresa's have been disadvantaged in promoting the school to increase admission numbers because **they were told not to discuss the situation openly** when it came to light a year ago.
- Pupil numbers prior to the Ofsted report in November 2016 (which rated the school as inadequate) were sufficient to maintain a balanced budget. The school's intake figures between 2015 and 2016 were defying an overall demographic decline in birth rates.
- The school experienced a three-year period of instability from September 2016 following the retirement of the long serving head teacher. Low staff morale and high levels of staff attrition had a negative impact on the public/parental perception of the school. Intake figures declined rapidly during this time, and we have many examples of where parents opted to send children directly to Our Lady's despite their siblings having attended St.Teresa's.

- The appointment of an executive head in 2019 has returned stability to the school and public/parental perception of the school is now very good. We expect this to have a positive impact on applications to St. Teresa's.
- Despite the above point, we believe the intake figures for September 2020 have been compromised by the mismanagement of the consultation process and press leaks about the closure of St Teresa's.
- **Stating that the school has a four-year grace period gives stability, and very importantly it means that parents applying for places in the school in September 2021 know that the school will remain open for the duration of their child's key stage 1 education.** We know from the consultation meetings at both schools, that parents would be averse to submitting an application to a school if there is a possibility they could be uprooted.
- The grace period gives governors, staff, and parents adequate time to promote the school ahead of applications for the September 2021 intake.
- The consultation meetings highlighted that parents are happy with the provision of St Teresa's. There is a clear appetite from everyone to promote the school, maintain a continuity of provision, and safeguard Catholic education in Birkdale.
- The grace period would allow governors to have the opportunity to look at other revenue streams that might support the school. These might include 2+ nursery provision, non-term time nursery provision, and 'wrap around' care. Another school in Southport, Bishop David Sheppard, proved that this is a possible route to reverse a deficit.

Secondary Proposal

If the proposal to grant a grace period to St Teresa's is rejected by Cabinet, then the parents of OLOL regretfully propose the **hard closure** of St Teresa's Infant school site.

The following bullets summarize the key aspects of this proposal:

- St. Teresa's site on Everton Road closes.
- Pupils can apply for a place at OLOL school in Grantham Road.
- Staff do not TUPE to OLOL.
- St Teresa's staff will be made redundant at the end of the 2019/20 school year or apply for roles at alternative schools.

Present Situation

Current pupil numbers on the two sites:

OLOL					St Teresa's		
Group	Max	In Class	space/surplus	ASD base	Group	Max	In Class
ASD	24	21			ASD	0	0
Nursery	40	29			Nursery	30	7
Reception	60	42	-18	3	Reception	30	17
1	60	43	-17	0	1	30	13
2	60	56	-4	5	2	30	18
3	90	76	-14	1			
4	90	81	-9	3			
5	90	89	-1	6			
6	90	81	-9	3			
Totals	540	468	-72	21			

Current Financials

- St. Teresa's if it continues to operate with its present pupil levels will have a deficit of 66k at the end of 2019/20. Sefton have stated in their proposal document that they expect St Teresa's to accrue an annual deficit of 66k. This is after reducing its budgets, as far as possible, and after agreeing to share a head teacher from September 2019 with Our Lady of Lourdes.
- Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic primary school has a forecast surplus balance for 2019/20 but is running with an in-year deficit and eating into its reserves. OLOL is expected to go into a deficit position of £35,000 by the end of 2020/21.
- The soft closure proposed by Sefton\Archdiocese and pupil\staff merger means the local authority would write off the 66k deficit from 2019/2020.

Outcome of a hard closure

With a **hard closure** of the Everton Rd site, and on the assumption that all St Teresa's pupils apply for OLOL, we will have the following pupil numbers in **Sept 20/21**.

Combined OLOL and St. Teresa's			
Group	Max	In Class	space/surplus
Nursery		35 to 37	
Reception	60	36	-24
1	60	59	-1
2	60	56	-4
3	90	74	-16
4	90	76	-14
5	90	81	-9
6	90	89	-1
Totals	540	471	-69

*Reception figure is an assumption based on 2019/20 nursery figures

- ASD numbers will not change.
- OLOL and the Archdiocese have confirmed that the 48 children can be accommodated within the year groups at Grantham Rd. This is illustrated in the table above.

- OLOL have also confirmed that they can do this without the need for additional staff.

Future Financials

- The annual deficit of 66k for maintaining the Everton Rd site no longer exists.
- The additional 48 pupils (assuming they apply to OLOL), plus the combined reception intake of 36 pupils, minus the 81 year-6s who would move to secondary, would give OLOL a net increase of 3 pupils.
- At an estimated £3500 per child when variations like IDACI are considered, the additional income for the school is 10.5k. The £3500 figure was provided by OLOL.
- OLOL governors should continue to examine other revenue streams such as increasing nursery provision, non-term time nursery provision, and 'wrap around' care to aid deficit reduction.

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.

St Teresa's was described as a "gem" in the local community which had provided a high quality education over the last 150 years. The school was praised for its nurturing environment and Christian ethos where pupils had progressed and grown in confidence. Pupils can thrive there in a safe and secure environment. Local residents and former pupils stressed the need for this provision in the area. Parents in Birkdale seeking a Catholic education currently have a choice of provision depending on their child's needs. If St Teresa's closes this choice will be taken away and there will be only one "one size fits all" option.

Many of the people who responded referred to the history of the school and mentioned that there were families in Birkdale who have been attending the school for generations. They said Church members cherished the link with the school and valued the contribution of the staff and pupils who regularly take part in family Masses. The school hall is used for tea after Mass, meetings, social and fundraising gatherings and the Summer and Christmas fairs. They felt that the school benefits the whole community in that area of Birkdale. If the school closes it will rip the heart out of the local community.

Leadership issues since 2015 were blamed for the decline in pupil numbers and subsequent budget deficit.

Local residents stressed the importance of having local provision for nursery and infant pupils which allows pupils to walk to school which reduces carbon emissions and is better for the environment. Concern was expressed about the distance

between St Teresa's and Our Lady of Lourdes as not everyone has a car and there is no bus service. It would be a long walk for nursery and infant children.

Local residents confirmed that the area around Our Lady of Lourdes was already severely congested at school drop off and pick up times.

The housing developments at Kew and Birkdale were cited as a reason for keeping the school open as residents felt that more school places would be needed in the future.

Concern about what would happen to the building if St Teresa's closes.

There was concern about how this proposal could directly affect future pupil numbers at Christ the King Catholic High School in Southport.

St Teresa's is an excellent example of providing a Catholic education as an integral part of a thriving and committed Parish community. A strong Parish community revolving around church and school is essential when communities are struggling to survive. A school closure can have a negative impact on this.

St Teresa's and Our Lady of Lourdes are good schools with strong links and good relationships but they serve two very distinct communities.

Local residents also requested a period of grace for St Teresa's to allow them to consolidate, market themselves and investigate other possible additional funding sources and determine if they can offer additional services to parents such as wrap around care and holiday clubs. They felt that, as there is now a new hierarchy and a more stable staff, positive marketing could attract more pupils to the school. It was highlighted that both main political parties have pledged additional funding to schools in their election manifestos and this mandate was a further reason for the Council to give St Teresa's more time. It was suggested that any decisions regarding the long-term future of St Teresa's should be made in a longer time frame to allow a detailed and robust analysis of emerging issues including proposed plans for housing in the area. It should be part of a policy plan for Catholic education.

Other alternative proposals

The following proposals were also suggested during the consultation:

As previously mentioned above many respondents requested that St Teresa's be allowed a period of grace to enable them to market themselves and increase their pupil numbers.

Close St Teresa's and teach all children at Our Lady of Lourdes with 60 places per year group from Reception to Year 6.

Keep St Teresa's open and allow pupils to stay there until Year 6. 15 places per year group with four split year group classes e.g. Nursery/Reception, Y1/Y2, Y3/Y4, Y5/Y6. This would mean 75 places per year group between both schools and each

school could run independently. Birkdale would have a “real” village school which would appeal to many and have something different to offer.

There are a considerable number of pupils with special needs, emotional and social and behavioural difficulties struggling to cope in our local schools. Could St Teresa’s and its hardworking and dedicated staff be better utilised by the Authority to address this need and offer places to children who need a more specialised setting.

Close St Teresa’s and turn it into a pupil referral unit or education centre for pupils who can’t cope in a mainstream setting. This would create jobs for some of the St Teresa’s staff. The building could be used to support children with mental health issues (not necessarily SEN) who require a nurturing -based education. Such provision is much needed in the Southport area

St Teresa’s Governing Body Alternative Proposal

The following full alternative proposal was received from the governing body of St Teresa’s Catholic Infant School on 18th December 2019:

Dear Ms Davies

Governing Body Alternative Proposal - Sefton Council Consultation

The governing body has considered various options to secure the future of our school and has decided the best way forward would be to increase the provision of education at St Teresa’s from year 2 up to year 6. This would mean that pupils would no longer need to move to a junior school in year 3 but instead continue their education here. This process would roll out with year 3 initially in September 2020.

There would need to be a reduction in the number of Reception places available in September 2020 from 30 to 15, to ensure that there would be enough room for this increased provision. We have also requested that the Archdiocese second an experienced head teacher to lead our school in this exciting time of change.

As a governing body, we consider this new proposal will enable us to continue to invest in high quality staff and maintain our high standards of education. In spite of the new increased educational provision, St Teresa’s will remain the same small village school that parents have chosen to entrust their children to, but this proposal will safeguard the future of the school, allowing it to go from strength to strength. It also offers parents a choice of provision for their children at junior school level that doesn’t currently exist.

The changes in provision outlined above are obviously subject to any necessary consultation and require the agreement of Sefton Council. We do consider it to be financially viable and attach budget projections which have been produced by Sefton Council Finance to illustrate this. It must be noted that it may take four years for the new provision to be fully embedded in the school and during that time, the anticipated in year deficit budget will drop dramatically from 69,000 in 2020/21 to a surplus of 33,000 in 2023/24. At this stage, the school will be able to reduce and then clear the estimated deficit balance. We appreciate that is a medium-term plan but this is because the roll out of the extended education provision will take four years.

We do anticipate attracting income in addition to that already included in the budget forecast produced. We are actively seeking out opportunities for letting the school premises, and the

parents of children in the school, along with members of the Parish community, are forming a "Friends of St Teresa's Association" which will actively fundraise for the school. We are extremely fortunate to have such proactive parents and such a supportive parish community.

We feel that this alternative proposal for St Teresa's school is financially preferable to closing the school in August 2020. Such a closure would mean that the council would immediately have to meet the costs of any budget deficit at that point (likely to be in the region of £100,000) and the substantial redundancy and capital costs associated with the loss of 18 jobs which have been estimated by Sefton Personnel at £214,000.

Yours sincerely,

Laura McCormick
Chair of Governors
St Teresa's School