



## Formal consultation on the proposed closure of Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior School

### Representation (formal consultation) Outcomes Report

#### 1 Proposal

1.1 The proposal is to close Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior School from August 2021 following completion of Year 11 GCSE examinations. The reason for the proposed closure is because the school is no longer viable. There are several reasons contributing to this shared view, chiefly:

- the majority of the buildings estate needed for a viable 11-16 secondary school is unfit for purpose and is in poor repair (these portions of the estate are currently out of use due to health and safety concerns)
- the pupil roll has fallen consistently over the past several years
- the school budget has been in deficit over the past several years with the school now in significant debt.

#### 2. Representation Consultation outcomes report

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the council's cabinet, Virgo Fidelis Interim Executive Board (IEB), Archdiocese of Southwark and respondents to the consultation with the results of the consultation. The council cabinet is the decision maker on the proposed closure of the school and the report will be submitted to cabinet for a decision on 18 January 2021.
- 2.2 This report is based on the responses received during the representation period when those with an interest were provided with an opportunity to comment or object to the proposed closure of the school. The representation period lasted four weeks from 12 November to 10 December 2020.

#### 3. Background

- 3.1 Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior School is a Roman Catholic voluntary aided secondary school for girls aged 11–18 located in Upper Norwood in the London Borough of Croydon. The school is part of the educational provision of the Archdiocese of Southwark and the London Borough of Croydon. The school is situated at 147 Central Hill, Upper Norwood, London, SE19 1RT.
- 3.2 The Office of the Schools Adjudicator approved the suspension of entry to Year 7 for September 2020. Year 7 pupils who accepted a place at Virgo Fidelis have been offered an alternative school place at Notre Dame High School, an all-girls' Roman Catholic comprehensive school situated in

Elephant and Castle; or another school of choice. Year 10 students are being taught on the site of St Mary's Catholic High School. Subject to approval of the proposed closure of Virgo Fidelis, the governors of St Mary's Catholic High School have agreed to retain the Year 10 pupils as they move into the final year of their education in a COVID-secure and single-sex location away from the rest of the school. The pupils who remain will be enrolled at St Mary's for Year 11.

- 3.3 The current pupils - Years 8 and 9 - will be offered alternative places at other schools, subject to approval of the proposed closure of the school. Year 11 pupils will have completed their GCSE examinations in July 2021, and the proposed closing date of the school is August 2021.

#### **4. Statutory requirement**

- 4.1 The process for decision making regarding school closures is set out in the Department for Education's (DfE) statutory guidance 'Opening and Closing Maintained Schools' November 2019. The statutory process consists of:
- Pre-publication consultation
  - Publication of statutory notice
  - Representation / formal consultation
  - Decision by the council's cabinet on the school closure proposal

#### **5. Pre-publication consultation**

- 5.1 From 01 October to 23 October 2020, stakeholders were invited to share their views on the proposal to close Virgo Fidelis from August 2021.
- 5.2 A total of 60 responses were received during the pre-publication consultation period;
- 57 (95%) of the 60 responses were received via the online survey and 3 (5%) were received via email;
  - Of the 57 online respondents;
    - 32 do not support the proposed change.
    - 12 do support the proposed change
    - 12 were not sure
    - 1 was not affected/did not wish to answer the questions
  - The 3 email respondents did not specifically state whether or not they support or do not support the proposed closure.
- 5.3 The pre-publication consultation outcomes report ([www.croydon.gov.uk/getinvolved](http://www.croydon.gov.uk/getinvolved)) contains the Diocese and council's response to the issues raised.
- 5.4 The Leader of the Council delegated authority to the Interim Executive Director - Children, Families & Education, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Learning to consider the outcomes of the pre-publication consultation on the proposed closure of Virgo Fidelis

Convent Senior and decide whether to proceed to the next stage of the process – publication of statutory notice and representation period.

- 5.5 Approval was given to proceed to the publication of the statutory notice, starting a 4 week representation period when any person could send objections or comments to Croydon Council on the proposed closure of the school.

## **6. Publication of statutory notice**

- 6.1 A notice was published in the Croydon Guardian newspaper and on the Council and school's website. A copy of the notice was also displayed on the school's gates.

## **7. Representation period**

- 7.1 The representation period lasted four weeks from 12 November to 10 December 2020 which allowed any person to send objections or comments to the LA within 4 weeks from the date of publication of the proposal.

## **8. Decision making**

- 8.1 The council's cabinet is the final decision maker on the proposed closure of Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior School and must make a decision within a period of two months of the end of the representation period, otherwise the proposal must be referred to the Schools Adjudicator for a decision.
- 8.2 The representation outcomes report will be submitted to the council's cabinet on 18 January 2021.

## **9. Communication and consultation activities**

- 9.1 A consultation document including a questionnaire was used as a basis of informing stakeholders, including parents/carers and local residents about the educational rationale for the proposed closure of the school and inviting feedback on the proposal.
- 9.2 Stakeholders were given the opportunity to express their views in writing via a questionnaire, both electronically and via the hard copy attached to the consultation document which could be submitted by email or post.
- 9.3 Different modes and methods of communication were used to inform and facilitate feedback from stakeholders about/on the proposal. Communication activities included notice in the Croydon Guardian newspaper and the circulation of the consultation document, including a questionnaire via;
- The following websites:
    - ✓ Croydon Council
    - ✓ Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior School
    - ✓ 'Get Involved'
  - Schools Bulletin:
    - ✓ Bulletin sent to all schools in Croydon
  - Social Media/Applications:
    - ✓ Twitter

- ✓ Facebook
- ✓ 'Your Croydon'
- ✓ Press release

## 10. Equality and Diversity Monitoring

- 10.1 An initial Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA) was undertaken as part of the pre-publication consultation process which found no negative impact on protected groups, although there is acknowledgement that should the school close, this will reduce the number of Catholic/single sex schools in the borough.
- 10.2 As part of the consultation process, respondents were asked to complete an equality and diversity questionnaire, looking at Gender, Age, Ethnicity and Disability. The information collected will help identify any special requirements and promote equality and diversity.

## 11. Representation period - summary of responses

- 11.1 A total of 34 responses have been received during the representation period of which 32 were received via the Get Involved website and 2 were received via email.
- 11.2 Of the 34 responses received;
- 22 do not support the proposed closure of the school,
  - 8 do support the proposed closure of the school, of which
  - 4 were not sure
- 11.3 The top thematic issues raised by respondents and council's/Diocese response are outlined in the table below:

Key issue	Council / Diocese response
10 respondents expressed concern surrounding the loss of Catholic secondary school places in the area.	<p>As part of the proposal to close a school that has been designated with a religious character, the council is required to consider the effect that this will have on the balance of denominational provision in the area. The council must also consider the number of pupils currently on roll at the school, the medium and long term need for places in the area and whether educational standards at the school have been persistently low.</p> <p>Currently there are sufficient school places across the borough to accommodate pupils on roll at Virgo Fidelis.</p> <p>The council will continue to work closely with the Archdiocese of Southwark regarding Catholic secondary school places within the borough.</p>
9 respondents said that the proposed closure will reduce the number of	When planning the provision of school places in the borough, a key part of the council's duty is to provide diversity in its educational offers to increase

single sex secondary school places for girls in the area.	<p>opportunities for parental choice. Whilst bearing this in mind, it is important to note that there has been a declining roll at the school which has contributed to a significant financial deficit as the majority of funding received by schools is determined by the number of children on roll.</p> <p>In relation to equality and diversity, consideration must be given by the council as to whether there are any discrimination issues that arise from the proposed closure of the school. The initial equality impact assessment indicates that the proposed closure will have no negative impact on equality and diversity.</p>
5 respondents stated they are concerned about the potential disruption the proposed closure may have on students' education.	<p>It is recognised that changing schools could be viewed as disruptive for pupils who attend Virgo Fidelis. To minimise any potential disruption, subject to approval, the proposed closure will take place at the end of the academic year – 31st August 2021. This will mean that Year 10 pupils can continue their learning at St Mary's Catholic High School; Year 11 students would have completed their GCSE examinations and pupils in Years 8 and 9 at the school can start the academic year at a new school.</p> <p>We have worked and will continue to work in partnership with the school's leadership team, the Diocese and other schools to ensure that all displaced pupils have been / will be offered an alternative suitable school place.</p> <p>The council has a duty of care to ensure children in its schools are able to receive a high quality education with access to a full curriculum, and that the school's health and safety arrangements are adequate for students and staff.</p>
4 respondents highlighted the history attached to the school and its grounds.	The school's buildings will remain with the Trustees of Our Lady of Fidelity Established at Upper Norwood, London, who will look to maintain the historic buildings where possible.
3 respondents worry that the land will be sold and used for flats.	The land will not be sold for flats it will be retained as an Educational Facility and this will be ensured by the Congregation of Our Lady of Fidelity.

#### 11.4 Points made in support of the proposed closure of Virgo Fidelis

- The number of children attending the school has consistently fallen over the years, resulting in low numbers.

- It is felt that the current students are not receiving a good quality of education.
- The school has a huge deficit, as does Croydon Council.
- There are other schools in Croydon and Lambeth that offer denominational places, including single-sex schools.

## **12. Next Steps**

- 12.1 On 18 January 2021, the council's cabinet will consider the consultation results and decide on the proposed closure of the school. In making a decision, the cabinet should be satisfied that there are sufficient surplus places elsewhere in the local area to accommodate displaced pupils, and the likely supply and future demand for places in the medium and long term. The cabinet should take into account the overall quality of alternative places in the local area and the popularity of other local schools.

## Annex A

### Summary of responses

A total number of 34 responses were received; 32 via the Get Involved website and 2 via email.

**Please tell us whether you support/do not support the proposed closure of Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior School.**

Response	Number	%
I do not support the proposed closure of Virgo Fidelis	22	65
I support the proposed closure of Virgo Fidelis	8	24
Not sure	4	11
I am not affected by/do not want to answer	0	0

**Please tell us who you are.**

Please tick all that apply\*

\*36 responses were received from 34 respondents

Response	Number	%
Member of staff at Virgo Fidelis school	0	0
Member of staff at another school	1	3
School Governor at Virgo Fidelis school	0	0
School Governor at another school	2	6
Parent/carer of a child/children at Virgo Fidelis school	4	11
Parent/carer of child/children at another school	6	16
Pupil at Virgo Fidelis school	1	3
Ex-pupil of Virgo Fidelis school	1	3
Local resident	13	36
Member of a local church	6	16
Prefer not to say	1	3
Other	1	3

### Equality Data

Gender

Response	Number	Percentage
Male	6	18
Female	14	41
Transgender	0	0
Prefer self-describe	0	0
Non-binary	1	3
Prefer not to say	3	9
No response given	10	29
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100</b>

## Age Range

Response	Number	Percentage
Under 16	1	3
16 - 18	0	0
19 - 25	1	3
26 - 34	5	15
35 - 44	7	20
45 - 54	3	9
55 - 64	2	6
65+	3	9
Do not wish to declare	2	6
No response given	10	29
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100</b>

## Ethnicity

Response	Number	Percentage
White British	6	18
White Irish	0	0
White European	0	0
Any other white background	2	6
Mixed white and black Caribbean	0	0
Mixed white and black African	0	0
Mixed white and Asian	0	0
Any other mixed background	1	3
Asian or Asian British: Indian	0	0
Asian or Asian British: Pakistani	0	0
Asian or Asian British: Bangladeshi	0	0
Asian or Asian British: Chinese	0	0
Other Asian or Asian British Background	0	0
Black or Black British: Caribbean	3	9
Black or Black British: African	3	9
Other Black or Black British background	1	3
Arabic	0	0
Prefer not to say	7	20
Other	0	0
No response given	11	32
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100</b>

## Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

Response	Number	Percentage
No	15	44
Yes	1	3
Prefer not to say	7	21
No response given	11	32
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100</b>



If yes, please tick all that apply

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Mobility	1	100
Visual impairment	0	0
Hearing impairment	0	0
Mental Health	0	0
Learning Disability	0	0
Communication difficulty	0	0
Other	0	0
Prefer not to say	0	0
No response given	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>100</b>

END