



Initial Consultation on the proposed closure of St Francesca Cabrini Catholic Primary School

Consultation period: 13th May 2022 to 1st July 2022

Consultation Document

About the school

The St Francesca Cabrini Catholic Primary School is a Roman Catholic voluntary aided, one-form entry primary school for boys and girls aged 4-11 located in Honor Oak in the London Borough of Southwark and was established by the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus who are the Trustees. The Pupil Admission Number (PAN) for each year group is 30 with a nursery class of 26. The school is part of the educational provision of the Archdiocese of Southwark and the London Borough of Southwark. The school is situated in Forest Hill Road, Honor Oak, London SE23 3LE.

The Proposal

The governing body, in agreement with the Trustees, Southwark Council and the Archdiocese of Southwark have agreed to commence consultation as part of the statutory process for the governing body's proposed closure of the school on the 31st August 2023.

Reasons for the proposed closure

There are three main reasons why it is proposed to close the school.

Firstly, the founders of the school, the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus who are the Trustees, have carried out a review of their operations and missions within their African region that the school is part of and decided that it now has to concentrate its missionary efforts and limited resources in other parts of that region, including Ethiopia and Uganda. It will therefore be withdrawing from the UK as from September 2023. A more detailed explanation from the Missionary Sisters is attached as Appendix A.

Secondly, the number of children on roll has declined over the past years and is now at the point where the school is not viable, both financially and also with delivering the high standard of education provision to the pupils that it has always strived to do. The school was originally a 2 Form Entry school with 420 pupils and a nursery admitting 60 children

each September to the Reception class. Over the past years the roll has dropped and the governors, following statutory consultation, applied and obtained permission to reduce the school to a 1 Form Entry admitting only 30 pupils as from September 2022. This however will not be the case as there are only 16 children whose parents/carers have chosen St Francesca Cabrini as their first preference.

The falling birth rates across Southwark and London will mean that the current reduction in demand for school places will continue in the coming years, exacerbating the current issues in funding, ensuring a high quality broad and balanced provision and classroom organisation. The school has already gone through several years where it has had to have classes of children from mixed ages. The school will lose 35 Year 6 children when they transfer to secondary schools in September 2022 and have only a probable 16 children joining the school in Reception. The nursery class which has capacity for 26 children is likely only to have 8 in September 2022. The projected Year 1 class will have 20 pupils, Year 2, 21 pupils, Year 3, 23 and Year 4 26. The drop in births in the immediate locality make it unlikely that pupil numbers will recover.

Thirdly, is the impact this situation has on school funding as it is directly driven by pupil numbers, the more pupils a school has, the more funding it receives. Unfilled school places have an immediate cost for schools through a reduction in their budgets, as well as affecting the overall viability and quality of education standards at the school. Overheads, such as the cost of maintaining the school, will, as a proportion, take up more and more of the budget, leaving less for actual teaching and learning.

Because of the above, the school will be hampered in its capability to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum that it would be reasonable to expect of a primary school now and in the immediate and longer-term future.

It should be noted that there exists within both Southwark and Lewisham a variety of vacant school places across Reception to Year 5 although not at every school and not always close to St Francesca Cabrini. However, an analysis of the current home addresses shows that around 50% of the children live more than 2km away.

The governing body explored with both the London Borough of Southwark and the Archdiocese of Southwark being able to merge or amalgamate with another school on the school site and retain the unique character of the school. This proved not to be possible as:

- a) The land and buildings are not owned by the Archdiocese or Southwark Council
- b) The nearest other Roman Catholic School in Southwark (St Anthony's RC Primary School is some distance away in Dulwich)

The school has used its reserves to ensure sufficient staffing and resources over the past few years and the funding for the 2022-23 financial year is approximately £200k below what it would cost to make adequate provision for the children. Funding will again fall in 2023-24 due to falling rolls so increasing the deficit, negatively impacting on the provision that can be made for pupils and with no prospect of repaying the deficit.

The Trustees have agreed to underwrite the operational deficit between April 2022 and August 2023 so that the school can meet the educational needs of the children and especially those children in Year 6 in the 2022/23 academic year (the current Year 5) who will transfer to secondary provision in September 2023.

Statutory requirement

In line with the Department for Education's (DFE) guidance: *Opening and closing maintained schools, Statutory guidance for proposers and decision-makers, November 2019*, subject to approval, the Governing Body will be following the statutory process for closing a maintained school which consists of five stages:

Stage one: consultation - it is a statutory requirement to consult any parties the proposer thinks is appropriate before publishing proposals. It is for the proposer to determine the nature and length of the consultation.

Stage two: publication - A statutory proposal should be published within 12 months of the initial consultation period being completed.

Stage three: representation - The proposed representation period will start on the date of publication of the statutory proposal and any comments are to be returned to the Southwark Education Authority.

Stage four: decision - The decision report will be presented to Southwark Council's Cabinet for decision as the statutory decision maker.

Stage five: implementation - The proposed implementation of the school closure will take place on 31st August 2023.

School Places School roll projections indicate sufficiency of primary school places across the Borough for the next 7 years, however this will be reviewed and monitored if the proposed closure of St Francesca Cabrini Catholic Primary School is approved.

About pre-publication consultation

The purpose of this consultation is to seek the views and engage with those that will be directly affected by the proposed closure of St Francesca Cabrini Catholic Primary School on 31st August 2023.

It is also an opportunity for interested parties to suggest options for consideration on the proposed closure.

This pre-consultation will be followed by the publication of the statutory notice and proposal, starting a 4-week representation period when any person can send objections or comments to Southwark Education Authority.

Impact of the closure

Parents/Carers and Pupils

It should be noted that as the proposed closure will not take place until 31st August 2023 and so the current Year 5 will be able to receive their Year 6 education at the school uninterrupted prior to secondary transfer in September 2023.

There is a significant oversupply of Primary School places across Southwark and the surrounding boroughs. It should be noted that there exists within both Southwark and Lewisham a variety of vacant school places across Reception to Year 5 although not at every school and not always close to St Francesca Cabrini. However, a recent analysis of the current home addresses shows that around 50% of the children live more than 2km away from St Francesca Cabrini.

If the closure is approved, then Parents and Carers who have applied for a place in Reception for St Francesca Cabrini Catholic Primary School will be individually contacted to discuss a Year R place at a school of choice with available places. And in

2023 pupils in the then Years R to 5 will be individually contacted and offered alternative places at other schools within the locality that have places – Southwark Admissions will take into account parent/carer preferences when allocating a place for children affected by the proposed closure. Year 6 pupils will have been offered a secondary place, and will not require a primary school place.

As the school is on the boundary with Lewisham, 13 of the 16 nearest schools to St Francesca Cabrini are in that borough and this will require both boroughs working together to support parents in the transfer.

There are places in Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Southwark to allow those parents who choose it, to access a Catholic education. However, this does not guarantee that parents would get their choice and nearest to where they reside.

Staff

Efforts will be made to ensure that staff currently at the school will be offered support and assistance in finding alternative employment. The school will liaise with the Archdiocese to inform staff of vacancies that arise within the Catholic sector. And, the London Borough of Southwark for those within community schools as well as local primary academies.

Community

Local residents will have the opportunity to express their views during this consultation and the representation period.

Who we are consulting:

Those to be consulted upon the proposed closure of the school are; the school, parents/carers, prospective parents/carers, staff and the local community. In addition, we would welcome the views of:

- all schools / admission authorities in Southwark – governing bodies / academy trusts
- neighbouring Admission Authorities;
- Ward members;
- The Parish community via the newsletter
- anyone else who has an interest or may be affected by the proposed closure of the school.

This consultation will run from 13th May 2022 to 1st July 2022, during this time you are invited to respond to the governing body of St Francesca Cabrini Catholic Primary School on their proposal to close the school.

What happens next?

After the closing date of **1st July 2022**, responses will be analysed by the governing body and a consultation report produced for them to decide whether or not to publish a statutory notice and start the representation period on the proposed school closure.

Timeline of statutory process	
13 th May -1 st July 2022	Stage 1 – Consultation period. Any comments to be sent to the Governing Body
8 th July 2022	The Governing Body to review the consultation responses and decide whether to move to Stage 2 which is to publish the statutory notice which the LA is advising should be from 1 September 2022
22 nd September 2022 - 20 th October 2022	Stage 3 – If it is decided to proceed with the closure consultation, the governing body “representation” period will begin on the date of publication of statutory closure proposals and will last for four weeks. Any comments to be returned to the Southwark Education Authority
31 st October 2022	Stage 4 - The school will send the papers to Southwark, and the Council’s Cabinet will meet to discuss the proposal within 2 months of the end of the representation period as they are the decision makers in this process
Summer term 2023	Bespoke admissions arrangements for those pupils at the school
31 st August 2023	Stage 5 – If Southwark Council agree then it is proposed to close the school on this date

How to give your views

This consultation period allows anyone with an interest to comment or raise any concerns about the proposal to close St Francesca Cabrini Catholic Primary School by 31st August 2023. We welcome you to join a consultation meeting and/or complete the questionnaire as detailed below.

Consultation Meeting	Date	Location
1	Monday 16 th May 2022 at 5:30pm	School
2	Tuesday 17 th May 2022 at 7:00pm	School

Responses must be submitted or completed and returned by 5 pm on Friday 1st July 2022 either dropped off at the school office or in writing to:

Consultation Response
St Francesca Cabrini Catholic Primary School
Forest Hill Road
Honor Oak
London
SE23 3LE

Or by Email: consult@stfcabrini.southwark.sch.uk

Alternatively, responses can be completed online on the school’s website from Tuesday 17th May 2022 following the link at - www.stfrancescacabrini.co.uk – ‘Consultation’ tab.