

INFORMAL CONSULTATION

Proposal to amalgamate St. Vincent De Paul Catholic Primary School and Westminster Cathedral Catholic Primary School

Background

The last three years have seen unprecedented changes to our lives and communities. The combination of a multitude of factors means that there are fewer pupils in primary schools across London. This has led to significant financial pressure on schools, as government funding is predominantly on a per child basis. Regrettably this means that at current pupil numbers, both St. Vincent De Paul Catholic Primary School (SVP) and Westminster Cathedral Catholic Primary School, are financially unsustainable.

The welfare and education of our pupils is our pupils is key to providing them with a secure future. The following proposal has been made to ensure we offer the most sustainable and beneficial educational environment and continue to best support pupils and parents.

The Proposal

The Governors of St. Vincent De Paul and Westminster Cathedral Catholic Primary Schools are proposing to amalgamate (also referred to as merging) the two schools to form a 30-place (one form) entry primary school for 3 to 11-year-olds. The proposal is supported by the Diocese of Westminster and by Westminster Local Authority. An amalgamation will create a single primary school from the start of September 2022 on the current site of St. Vincent De Paul Catholic Primary School.

Having considered the long-term viability and sustainability of the existing school sites, the governing bodies, in conjunction with the Diocese and Westminster City Council, have concluded that the intimate relationship between the SVP site and Westminster Cathedral affords the best opportunity to offer sustainable Catholic Formation.

There are many benefits of becoming a single primary school including greater investment in facilities and more effective use of funding to better support our pupils' needs and provide further enrichment activities (more detail provided later in the document), and we are excited about the potential of this new venture.

Parents play a key part in our school community and your feedback is important to us. The Governors of both schools are now seeking, and welcome, parents' views on this proposal (details on how to share feedback are provided later in the document).

Why are we proposing the change?

Demand for primary school places has been falling over the last few years for the majority of London boroughs. The borough of Westminster has experienced a significant drop across all year groups with an 8% fall in reception applications for September 2021 compared to the previous year, and this trend has significantly impacted reception class enrolment at both St. Vincent De Paul and Westminster Cathedral Catholic Primary Schools in recent years. A borough-wide review of primary school provision was initiated in response, with the result that a number of schools are considering reducing in size or joining together, so that the amount of provision matches the need coming through.

Our two schools do not have sufficient numbers of children to fill two forms of entry from September 2022, and we have vacancies across all year groups. For example, the average class size at Westminster Cathedral Catholic Primary school currently is approximately 22 students per class. As our pupil numbers fall, the school's budget allocation falls, resulting in less money being provided to educate our children, pay salaries and manage the upkeep of our buildings. School budgets are mainly funded by pupil numbers and our schools have already been working together closely, sharing our Interim Executive Headteacher, Mr Nathaniel Scott Cree. This is one example of how the schools have been trying to manage under a reduced budget allocation.

The Governors of both schools are clear that now is the right time to move to becoming a single primary school in order to secure sustainable and high quality Catholic education for our children and into the future, whilst minimizing the impact of the change.

What are the benefits of becoming a single primary school?

By running only one school site, funding can be used more efficiently to provide an appropriate educational environment, rather than in having to stretch budgets to maintain two school buildings which take financial resources away from the children and staff. Projections show that pupil numbers are likely to continue to decline. By amalgamating, we would create stability for pupils, parents and teachers to focus on delivering the best educational outcomes.

By amalgamating into one school, we will be able to allocate more funding towards resuming and providing continued access to enrichment activities above and beyond the usual curriculum for pupils and their families, both before, during and after school.

There will also be more continuous professional development opportunities for staff – which will benefit the children - such as shared training and the chance to work more closely across the curriculum in order to gain experience and understanding of all key stages.

By becoming a single primary school there will be the opportunity for the communities from both schools to keep improving and moving forward, and to be part of an exciting new

future together.

What will it mean for our children?

The objective is for all children currently attending both schools to be together on the St. Vincent De Paul school site. Currently the combined pupil numbers on roll exceed a one form entry school. Whilst these numbers will gradually reduce by September 2022, it will not be known until nearer the time if there will need to be arrangements for some classes to remain at the Westminster Cathedral school site until the numbers reduce. It is very much a priority for us to ensure that children and staff can be safely accommodated. The Westminster Cathedral school site will be retained for educational use and will therefore be available to accommodate any additional classes that may be needed on site in September.

It will also mean that:

- children at the merged school on the St. Vincent De Paul School site will see new investment in buildings and facilities to ensure that there will be excellent accommodation for all the children;
- children from both schools will have the opportunity to make new friends in a school which has a sustainable future;
- on a day-to-day basis, arrangements in the school will feel very similar for the children. The differing needs of each age group will continue to be met;
- the Pastoral care given to each individual child within the Catholic ethos which is a strength of both schools, will always remain paramount. The merged school will be the parish school for both The Holy Apostles and the Cathedral with priests from both parishes celebrating liturgies and sacraments with the children and staff.

What will happen to our Headteacher?

Mr Nathaniel Scott Cree will remain as Headteacher. Mr. Scott Cree is an effective Executive Headteacher who has been working for both our schools and has been essential in establishing the partnership between the two schools. The Governing Bodies from St. Vincent De Paul and Westminster Cathedral agree that the headteacher post for the new school is, in effect, not vacant and therefore not subject to advertising or selection requirements. This will provide stability in leadership through this period of change.

This would mean that a single Headteacher and a single Governing Body would collectively oversee the running of the amalgamated school. A single primary school would bring both schools together to become one community which we believe will be the best for the children and their education.

What will it mean for the staff?

A new staffing structure will need to be developed as part of the planning for September 2022 if a decision to amalgamate the schools is taken. In both schools, staffing changes are already needing to be made because of falling numbers of children.

The exact structure for the future cannot be clear until we know whether the schools are amalgamating and the numbers of children and therefore, the numbers of staff required.

If numbers at either school continue to fall, or children do not move to the amalgamated school, this could lead to further staff losses. Staffing structures for September 2022 will be clarified once numbers of children are known, and will, initially, be based on the staff structure required to support the numbers of children from each school. Existing staff at both schools will have an equal opportunity to apply for posts at the amalgamated school on the St. Vincent De Paul Site.

As part of the consultation process, Governors will work with the Local Authority, staff, and their unions, and an HR consultant to determine the best ways to manage any changes needed. The council, diocese and Governors are committed to avoiding compulsory redundancy.

Consultation meetings for staff will be held during the Autumn Term and throughout any agreed change processes.

Amalgamation provides greater protection for staff because more posts will be retained than would be the case if one school closed without being part of an amalgamation.

Consultation process

There are two stages to the consultation process. Firstly, the '**informal consultation**' which will run for five weeks from October to November 2021 (inclusive of the half-term break).

If it is agreed that the proposal will move to the next stage following this informal consultation, there will be a statutory notice published by the Local Authority with the '**formal consultation**' open for four weeks from early January 2022 before a final decision is taken on the amalgamation.

If we open as a newly formed school in September 2022, the Governors would like to mark the commencement and welcome your ideas and suggestions on launching the new amalgamated school and the start of this exciting new venture. The Governors of both schools welcome your views on ideas such as:

- How best to recognise the coming together of the two schools
- A plaque celebrating the coming together of the schools
- Other ways in which the history of the two schools could be preserved
- The new name of the amalgamated school

Admissions

If the proposal is agreed, a primary school would be created on 1 September 2022 and the following would apply:

- Children at St. Vincent De Paul Catholic Primary School will be automatically enrolled at the newly amalgamated school and receive a guaranteed place.
- Children at Westminster Cathedral Catholic Primary School will be automatically enrolled at the newly amalgamated school and receive a guaranteed place.
- First admissions: Children who have applied for reception or nursery places at St. Vincent De Paul Catholic Primary School or Westminster Cathedral Catholic Primary School for September 2022 would be offered places through the standard admissions process.
- Children with siblings at St. Vincent De Paul Catholic Primary School or Westminster Cathedral Catholic Primary School would be given sibling priority for September 2022 and later years.
- Belonging to either parish of Westminster Cathedral or Holy Apostles would carry equal weight in the admissions criteria.
- After all other priorities have been considered if there are further, non-Catholic, applicants requesting places, a distance criterion would need to be used in a tie-break. St. Vincent De Paul's School entrance would be used to measure home-school distances.
- A grace period will be facilitated to align pupil uniforms/implement a new uniform.

Governors, the Diocese, and the Local Authority strongly recommend that children remain at St. Vincent De Paul Catholic Primary School and Westminster Cathedral Catholic Primary School, transferring together to the newly merged school at the St. Vincent De Paul site, as we believe this is the least disruptive move for our children.

In the event of any parent preferring to apply for a place at another school, there may be vacancies at other local schools which could be applied for through the termly In-Year Admissions process.

Why are we consulting you?

We value your thoughts highly and want to gather your views because you are part of our school community.

The Governing Bodies, the Diocese and the Local Authority cannot simply decide to make changes to schools without first seeking the views of parents, staff, and other stakeholders.

There is also a legal process which must be followed before changes can be made, and

it is important that the Governing Bodies, the Diocese, and the Local Authority hear your views before deciding whether and how to proceed.

We are organising opportunities for parents, carers, and other stakeholders to share views at meetings of both schools.

At St. Vincent De Paul Catholic Primary School (for SVP parents)	At Westminster Cathedral Catholic Primary School (for WCPS parents)
Date Weds 20th October at 6 p.m.	Date Weds 13th October at 5:30 p.m.
Date Thurs 4th November at 6 p.m.	Date Mon 18th October at 5:30 p.m.

Information will also be

- published on the school websites;
- publicised at the schools;
- shared via newsletters sent home with children over the next few weeks;
- available at the school offices (available either by phone or in person).
- available at Holy Apostles church and at Westminster Cathedral.

What happens next?

The informal consultation period ends on Friday 12th November 2021 at 3:30 p.m. An Informal Consultation Response Form can be found at the end of this document for you to share your feedback on the proposal. Completed forms should be returned to the consultation boxes in your school's reception area. The same form is also available on the school websites and when submitted will be forwarded to the Governors.

Following the consultation process, a steering group, including Governors, will review your feedback and use it to make a response to the Local Authority on whether or not it recommends proceeding with the school amalgamation proposal.

The full Governing Body of each school will also consider your feedback in its representations if the Local Authority decides to move to a formal statutory notice consultation in January 2022.

If the Local Authority decide to proceed, a public notice will specify details of the final proposal and there will be a period of at least four weeks when representations can be made (January to February 2022). This will be the final opportunity to make any comments on the proposal. It is then anticipated that a final decision on whether to amalgamate the schools will be made by the end of March 2022.

How can I get more information on the proposal?

Parents are warmly invited to visit St. Vincent De Paul Catholic Primary School. Further details will be provided of open mornings at the school when you will have the opportunity to visit.

If you have any additional queries or questions, these can be posted in the consultation boxes in each school's reception area.

We understand that you may have concerns and queries and will be happy to answer your queries. We respectfully ask that you direct any questions or feedback as outlined in this document, and not by questioning school staff, who themselves are being consulted in a similar way.

Governors are committed to giving parents, children, and staff as much information as possible and will update you regularly. Please note that we may not be able to answer some questions until after a decision is made.

This document, and other information, is also available on both school websites:

[St. Vincent De Paul Catholic Primary School](#)

[Westminster Cathedral Catholic Primary School](#)

If the Local Authority decide to publish a public statutory notice, further details of this proposal will also be available in the Consultation sections of the council's website. Feedback from the statutory consultation will also be published on the council's website during the Spring Term.

How do I respond?

You can either complete the Informal Consultation Response Form on the following page and return it to the consultation box in your school's reception area, or you can complete it electronically and email it to:

admin@svpschool.co.uk (St. Vincent de Paul parents)

consultation@westcathsch.co.uk (Westminster Cathedral parents)

Your views and feedback is important to us and we would encourage you to come along to one of the meetings (details provided earlier in this document). Responses not received on the below form will also be considered.

Thank you for taking the time to consider our proposal, we look forward to hearing your perspective.

John Moruzzi
Chair of Governors
St. Vincent De Paul

Seb Wallace
Co-Chair of Governors
Westminster Cathedral

Will Kenney
Co-Chair of Governors
Westminster Cathedral

INFORMAL CONSULTATION RESPONSE FORM

Proposal to Amalgamate St. Vincent De Paul Catholic Primary School and Westminster Cathedral Catholic Primary School

Our proposal is to bring St. Vincent De Paul and Westminster Cathedral Catholic Primary Schools together as one all-through primary school from 1st September 2022 at the St. Vincent De Paul school site. We welcome your views on this proposal. Please fill in this form and return it to the school office no later than 12th November 2022, 3.30pm. You can also download the form online and email it to the relevant address given above.

- 1) Do you agree with the proposal to amalgamate our two schools to become one school?

Please circle/ delete as appropriate:

YES

NO

- 2) If you like the proposal, please say why you think it is a good idea?

- 3) If you dislike the proposal, please tell us why you are concerned?

- 4) Any other comments, issues, or questions? (please feel free to use the back of this form if you need more space)

	St. Vincent De Paul	Westminster Cathedral
I am a child attending	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have child/ren attending	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am a staff member at	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am a Governor at	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please describe)		

Please note: If you are completing this form jointly, or for more than one role, please tick each box that applies so that your views are included within each group you are part of.

Your Name (Optional) _____

Please return this form to the relevant school by 12th November 2021. Feedback from question one will be summarised numerically. Comments will be typed-up and anonymised. This information will be made available to the public (via the school website), but all respondents' comments and information will be anonymised.