



## **Proposed closure of Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior School**

### **Pre-publication Consultation Outcomes Report**

#### **1 Proposal**

The proposal is to close Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior School in August 2021 following completion of Year 11 GCSE examinations.

- 1.1 There are several reasons for the proposed closure of the school, mainly because the school is increasingly hampered in its capacity to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum that it would be reasonable to expect of a modern secondary school now and in the immediate and longer term future.
- 1.2 The majority of the buildings estate needed for a viable 11-16 secondary school is unfit for purpose and in poor repair (these portions of the estate are currently out of use); 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. Consultation outcomes report**

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Interim Executive Director - Children, Families and Education, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Learning, and the Interim Executive Board (IEB) with the outcomes from the pre-publication consultation on the proposed closure of Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior School in August 2021.
- 2.2 This report is based on the responses received during the pre-publication consultation period when we sought views and engaged with those that will be directly affected by the proposed closure Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior School.

#### **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 Interim Executive Board [IEB], in consultation with Croydon Council and the Archdiocese of Southwark have agreed to commence the statutory process for proposed closure of the school in August 2021 following completion of Year 11 GCSE examinations.
- 3.3 The IEB of Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior School has applied to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA) for a variation to the school's admission arrangements for September 2020. The proposed variation of the school's

Published Admission Number (PAN) for Year 7 has been approved by the OSA and as such, been reduced from 120 places to zero for September 2020.

#### **4. Decision making**

- 4.1 The Leader of the Council has 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 consultation on the proposed closure of Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior and decide whether to proceed to the next stage of the process - representation period.
- 4.2 Subject to approval, this consultation will be followed by the publication of the statutory notice, starting a 4 week representation period when any person can send objections or comments to Croydon Council on the proposal.
- 4.3 The council's cabinet committee is the final decision maker for the proposed closure of Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior and must make a decision within a period of two months of the end of the representation period.

#### **5. Consultation**

- 5.1 The process for decision making regarding proposed school closures is set out in the Department for Education's 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 committee on the school closure proposal

#### **6. Pre- publication consultation**

- 6.1 The pre-publication consultation ran from 01 October 2020 to 23 October 2020, during this time anyone with an interest was invited to respond to the proposal to close Virgo Fidelis School.

#### **7. Communication and consultation activities**

- 7.1 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.
- 7.2 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, by email and post.
- 7.3 Different modes and methods of communication were used to inform and facilitate feedback from stakeholders about/on the proposal. Communication activities included the circulation of the consultation document, including a questionnaire via;

- The following websites:
  - ✓ News.croydon.gov.uk
  - ✓ Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior
  - ✓ <https://getinvolved.croydon.gov.uk>
- E-bulletin
  - ✓ Your Croydon weekly
  - ✓ Schools' Bulletin
- Social Media/Applications:
  - ✓ Twitter
  - ✓ Facebook
- Email to MPs, Ward Councillors and neighbouring boroughs.

## 8. Equality and diversity monitoring

- 8.1 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.

### Equalities Impact Assessment

- 8.2 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 school in the borough. Another EQIA will be undertaken as part of the Education Estates Strategy report which will be going to cabinet in January 2021. The Equality analysis will enable the council to better understand the potential impact of the proposed closure of the school on the community.

## 9. Summary of responses

- 9.1 A total of 60 responses were received during the pre-publication consultation period;
- 9.2 57 (95%) of the 60 responses were received via the online survey and 3 (5%) were received via email;
- 9.3 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
- 9.4 Top thematic issues raised and Council's/Diocese response

Key issue	Council / Diocese response
11 respondents stated they are	We recognise that changing schools can be viewed as possibly disruptive. To minimise any potential

<p>concerned about the potential disruption the proposed closure may have on students' education.</p>	<p>disruption, subject to approval, the proposed closure will take place at the end of the academic year – 31 August 2021. This will mean that Year 11 students would have completed their GCSE examinations and other year groups can start the academic year at a new school.</p> <p>We have worked in partnership with the school's leadership team, 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>
<p>9 respondents expressed concern surrounding the loss of Catholic Secondary School places in Croydon.</p>	<p>In deciding on a 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, as well as the number of pupils currently on the roll, the medium and long term need for places in the area, and whether standards at the school have been persistently low.</p> <p>The council will continue to work closely with the Diocese regarding Catholic secondary schools within the borough. However, it should be noted that in line with the free school presumption, where the council identifies the need for a new school to meet basic need for additional school places, the council is under a duty to seek proposals to establish an academy (free school) via the 'free school presumption'. To support this the Department for Education will contact the council when a new free school is proposed through the central route. These measures will ensure a co-ordinated response to the need for additional places as well as quality and diversity of provision.</p>
<p>8 respondents are concerned that the proposed closure with impact the number of single sex secondary school places in Croydon.</p>	<p>It is acknowledged that the proposed closure of the school will impact on the number of single sex school places, particularly those parents/carers who have specifically chosen single-sex education for their child/ren. Should Virgo Fidelis close, there will be 2 single sex girls schools left in Croydon; Coloma Convent Girls' and Norbury Manor Business and Enterprise College</p>

	<p>A key part of the council's duty is to secure high quality and diversity of education offer to increase opportunities for parental choice when planning the provision of school places in the borough. However, it is important to note that there has been a declining roll at this school which has contributed to a significant financial deficit.</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 for protected groups.</p>
<p>7 respondents highlighted the history attached to the school and its building and wish for this to be protected.</p>	<p>The 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.</p>
<p>5 respondents stated that Virgo Fidelis used to be a good school.</p>	<p>Although it is recognised that Virgo Fidelis was once able to offer good quality education and the current Executive Head Teacher and staff members are working to ensure that the existing pupils receive as good an education as possible while they remain on roll at the school, over the past several years, the number of pupils on roll has consistently fallen. Over many years, the school budget has been in deficit with the school now in significant debt. The majority of the estate required to run a viable secondary school is unfit for purpose and in poor repair with some portions having to be closed off in the interests of health and safety.</p> <p>Together, these factors have increasingly hampered the school's ability to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum that would be reasonable to expect of a modern secondary school.</p>

9.5 Of 12 respondents who support the proposal; only 2 gave their reasons why they support the proposed closure. The two respondents raised the following points;

- The number of students at the school has been falling for years.

- The school and its budget have been poorly managed.
- The building is in dire need of investment.
- The small number of students and staff at Virgo Fidelis has resulted in a decline in the standard of education offered by the school.

9.6 3 (5%) of the 60 responses were received via email.

- One email was received from a former student who expressed *'it has been with great sadness over recent years to see the school where I had been so happy change so totally'*. The respondent's main concern *'is the beautiful Victorian building which is of Gothic Style and Unique'* and wanted to raise awareness that *'the Church, The Convent and The School are Locally Listed and The School is in a Conservation Area which is surrounding The Convent'*.
- One respondent wrote *'Virgo Fidelis was and is an excellent Catholic school. I truly hope that the borough is not seeking to start up a non Christian school so as to keep Labour in the Borough'*.
- The council also received an email on behalf of a local football club regarding the future use of the school's playing fields and facilities. This query has received a direct response from Sister Bernadette of the Charitable Trust: Our Lady of Fidelity Established at Upper Norwood, London.

## 10. Next Steps

- 10.1 The Interim Executive Director, Children, Families & Education and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Learning will consider the outcome from the pre-publication consultation. Together, they will decide whether to proceed to the next stage of the process - publication of a statutory notice, starting the formal consultation (representation) period on the proposed closure of Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior School.
- 10.2 Subject to approval, the publication of statutory notice will kick start the four week formal consultation (representation) process on 12 November 2020 and end on 10 Dec 2020.
- 10.2 The council's cabinet committee 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.
- 10.3 A summary of the responses can be found below in Annex A.

**END**

## Annex A

### Summary of responses

A total number of 60 responses received during the pre-publication consultation period of which 57 responded via the online questionnaire on Get Involved and 3 responded in writing via email.

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

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
I do not support the proposed closure of Virgo Fidelis.	32	56
I do support the proposed closure of Virgo Fidelis	12	21
Not sure	12	21
I am not affected by/do not want to answer	1	2

**Please tell us who you are.**

Please tick all that apply\*

\*64 responses received from 57 respondents

<b>Response</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Member of staff at Virgo Fidelis school	1	1
Member of staff at another school	2	3
School Governor at Virgo Fidelis school	0	0
School Governor at another school	2	3
Parent/carer of a child/children at Virgo Fidelis School	5	8
Parent/carer of child/children at another school	4	6
Pupil at Virgo Fidelis School	1	1
Local resident	13	20
Prefer not to say	5	8
Other (Please specify)	6	11
Did not respond	25	39