

Public Consultation (1st Stage) on the proposal to close St Matthias CE School

The Proposal

Following advice from Tower Hamlets Local Authority, and with the support of the London Diocesan Board for Schools, the governors of St Matthias School, wish to consult on a proposal to close St Matthias School, in partnership with Christ Church School, from September 2021.

Why are we proposing this change?

St. Matthias Church of England Primary School is a voluntary aided mainstream school for children aged 3 to 11 and is part of the educational provision of the London Diocesan Board for Schools (LDBS) and the London Borough of Tower Hamlets (LBTH). The school is located at Bacon Street, London E2 6DY

St. Matthias' Governing Board, in consultation with Tower Hamlets Council and the London Diocesan Board for Schools have agreed to commence the statutory process for proposed closure of the school in August 2021.

In line with the Department for Education's (DFE) guidance *Opening and Closing Maintained Schools* (2018), the council will support us with a pre-publication consultation. The Council may proceed to a formal consultation. After the formal consultation, a decision will be made by the Council with regards to closure.

Pupil numbers in Tower Hamlets schools are currently falling, particularly in the West of the borough where our school is situated. This means that St Matthias School has not had sufficient numbers to fill our classes and only Year 5 and 6 have year groups above 20. St Matthias School is a one form entry primary school with a capacity of 210 statutory age places.

As our pupil numbers fell, this affected our budget and has placed St Matthias at financial risk, this has necessitated the governing body taking difficult decisions to ensure a balanced budget and sustain educational quality. There is no capacity to request financial support from the Local Authority because they are not allowed to continue to fund schools that are not financially viable. The lower numbers each year place continual strain on the budget, and further cuts would be needed next year, and the year after. We think that it would be very sad to see St Matthias move into a decline in quality of provision or reach the stage where the Local Authority has to withdraw funding because we cannot fill our classes.

Our school already works closely with neighbouring schools, and there are sufficient vacancies within 0.5 mile from St Matthias to accommodate all the children currently attending St Matthias.

To support St Matthias through this difficult period a Partnership has been agreed between Christ Church and St Matthias School.

What would happen to our Headteacher?

As parents from St Matthias will know, Keeley Warren has decided to move to a new role at the end of the 2019/2020 school year after doing a sterling role as Acting Headteacher for St Matthias, since September 2019. Julian Morant, the current Head Teacher at Christ Church is an experienced Headteacher and has agreed on the role of Executive Headteacher across the two schools, from September 2020, for a year, in the first instance.

Both St Matthias and Christ Church Schools will maintain separate governing bodies until, at least, August 31st 2021.

Why close St Matthias?

It is important to stress that the proposed closure is not a judgement on the quality of education at St Matthias. It is the sad fact that there are fewer children in Bethnal Green and several one form entry schools, that are not full, are facing low numbers and financial difficulties.

Unfortunately, St Matthias School is facing financial challenge and is not able to afford to staff the school to ensure single year groups or the curriculum range and pupil support that is expected from schools. St Matthias has had mixed age classes in KS2 for two years now, although our amazing staff have managed this extremely well the National Curriculum is now organized on a year group basis, which is far harder to deliver in mixed age classes.

Neighbouring schools have capacity for all of the St Matthias children to be accommodated within schools that are in a stronger financial position. Sustaining the quality of education offered by our current wonderful staff team, and the continued access for pupils and their families to extended services and facilities will be increasingly difficult as budgets fall at St Matthias.

Between now and Summer 2021 there will be 20 fewer children in our school as the larger classes in Year 5 and 6 leave, and much smaller classes join us. This means the school budget will fall by at least £91,962.40 (at least 20 pupils fewer, each bringing £4598.12 a year to the school budget). This will mean significant further staff and resources reductions in future.

What will it mean for the children?

Families will be supported to move to neighbouring schools. The Local Authority recommends that the group of schools is small, to reduce distances, but also to support children to transition with other children that they know.

A full programme to support children through this difficult period will be put in place, with the aim of helping them to recognise that moving school presents new opportunities as well as celebrating how they have benefitted from their education at St Matthias. This will include open days at the nearby schools so that parents are able to visit once schools have returned after the Coronavirus epidemic.

Christ Church School governors have agreed to work in partnership to support St Matthias School. If a decision is taken, in March 2021, to close St Matthias from the end of the Summer Term 2021, as many children as possible will be accommodated

at Christ Church School, although there will not be space for all children to transfer.

The three closest schools, William Davis, St Anne's and Christ Church all have excellent reputations and the care and importance given to each individual child, is a strength of both all three schools.

Their most recent OFSTED reports can be found at

Christ Church : <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/21/100944>

St Anne's : <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/21/100950>

William Davis : <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/21/100943>

Parents who wish to are able to apply for places in any Tower Hamlets School. The second closest Church of England School to St Matthias, is St John's, Bethnal Green.

What will it mean for the staff?

Staff at St Matthias School will be supported to find redeployment opportunities at other local schools, they may also have the opportunity to consider voluntary redundancy. Wherever possible Tower Hamlets tries to avoid compulsory redundancy. If the proposal does go ahead staff, and their unions, will be involved in a School Re-organisation staffing process consultation, and will receive support to help them through this transition, such as additional training.

What will happen to the school building?

At this stage of the proposal there are no specific plans for the building. These will be considered if the proposal progresses to statutory notice later this year.

Procedure to achieve the closure

It is proposed that there will be no further admissions to St Matthias School from September 2021.

All responses to this consultation will be put together in a report to governors and the Local Authority. The Local Authority will then decide, at its November 2020 meeting, whether to move to statutory notice - a formal publication of a document explaining the closure and its impact. Stakeholders are then able to make representations to the Local Authority before a final decision is reached early in March 2021.

If the proposal goes ahead and the Local Authority Cabinet does decide to close the school all the children at St Matthias will transition to new schools by September 2021, when St Matthias will formally close.

Admissions

Children will continue to be able to go to St Matthias School until July 2021. During the Summer Term 2021 the Local Authority Admissions Team will work with the school to allocate places using a parental preference system, including offering as many places as possible at Christ Church, which is the nearest Church of England

School with vacancies. Places will be allocated applying the existing Primary Admission criteria.

If parents are interested in moving their children to a different school before July 2021, they can apply using the Tower Hamlets In-Year Admissions process.

https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ignl/education_and_learning/schools/school_admissions/in-year_admissions.aspx

Children should not move school, other than at the end of the school term.

Why are we consulting you?

We want to consult you to gather your views because you are part of the school community. The governing body of the schools, the London Diocesan Board and the London Borough of Tower Hamlets cannot simply decide to make changes to schools without first seeking the views of parents and others. There is a legal process which must be followed before changes can be made, and it is important that the Governing Body, the Diocese and the Council hear your views before deciding whether to proceed.

We have organised the following opportunities for staff, parents and carers to share their views.

1. You can use the response form (or any other written format) at the end of this document to record your views. It can be posted to the schools, or emailed to

consult@st-matthias.towerhamlets.sch.uk

2. There will be a box in the playground and EYFS at St Matthias School where you can leave your comments, response forms and any questions.

3. The Tower Hamlets Parental Engagement Team will set up virtual “Time to Talk” meetings towards the end of June for parents.

4. The Local Authority consultant, who is supporting the schools with the consultation process will be available for 1 to1 socially distanced questions/feedback on Wednesday 8th July from 10.15 - 2.30. You can contact St Matthias School to book a 15-minute slot.

5. Virtual meetings will be set up on July 8th:

Staff 4pm

Parents 9am and 6pm

To join them please contact the school and provide your email address so that you can be invited.

6. If you would like someone to phone you so you can discuss your views please let the school office know and provide your phone number and some times that would suit you.

7. School staff will create age appropriate ways of consulting with our children on

their views as part of their on-line teaching.

At the start of the Autumn Term governors will review the feedback received so far, and any changes in social distancing rules, so that they can decide on any further activities to take place in September. The consultation will close on September 30th.

What happens next?

The stage one consultation period starts on 8th June and ends on 30th September 2020 – the last page of this document can be used for you to feedback your view to governors and the Diocese and Local Authority. It should be returned to the school office. Following the consultation process, the Governors' Steering Group will review your feedback and use it to make a response to the council, on whether to recommend proceeding with the school closure proposal.

The Governing Body and LDBS will consider your feedback in their representations following the publication of the formal statutory notice, if the Council decide to move to this stage, at their Cabinet meeting in November 2020.

If the Council decides to proceed, a public notice (the statutory notice) will specify details of the final proposal and there will be a period of at least four weeks when representations can be made. This will be the final opportunity to make any comments on the proposal. It is then anticipated that a final decision on whether to merge the schools will be made by the council on March 3rd 2020.

How can I get more information on the proposal?

The LA will publish the feedback from this pre-publication consultation on the council's website during October 2020.

If permission is granted to publish a public notice, further details of this proposal will also be available in the Consultation sections of the Council's website

This document is also available on the school website

<https://www.stmatthiaschool.org.uk/Welcome.html>

Some short videos will be added to the website in the next few weeks, which you may find helpful for explaining the consultation, and the admissions process that will take place in the Summer Term 2021 if the Council do reach a decision to close the school.

If you have any questions at all please do either send them to the email address, or put them in the consultation box, or join one of the virtual meetings that are being set up. Please do complete the response form attached and return it to the school. The consultation will run until September 30th 2020, but we would like to receive responses before then so that we can answer as many queries and concerns as possible before the summer holidays.

Thank you for taking the time to consider our proposal, we look forward to hearing your views. We appreciate that this is a difficult time for parents, and want to hear from you, how we might be able to reduce the stress and ensure our families are able to celebrate their time at St Matthias, and be supported to move to new schools, if that is necessary, from September 2021.

St Matthias Chair of Governors

Proposal to close St Matthias School – Response Form

Our proposal is to close St Matthias School, from August 31st, 2021, to build a strong partnership, with Christ Church C of E School, and to support all St Matthias children to relocate to other schools.

We welcome your views on this proposal. Please fill in this response form and return it to the address below no later than September 2020, 3.30pm.

- 1) Do you accept the need for the proposal to close St Matthias School, and relocate children to nearby schools?

Please tick as applicable

Yes		No	
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- 2) If you like the proposal to partner with Christ Church School, please say why you think it is a good idea?

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

- 4) Any other comments, suggestions for how we can support staff, children and families or questions? Please feel free to use the other side of this paper for your comments.

- 5) Please indicate which of these bests describes your link to St Matthias School

Parent		Staff Member		Governor		Other – please specify
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(Children's views will be ascertained through age appropriate methods)

Your Name (Optional) _____

Please return this form to St Matthias School by 30th September 2020. 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.

If you would like the opportunity to have a telephone conversation about your concerns, please add your phone number and dates and times that would suit you to this form. You will then be contacted by someone from the Local Authority consultation support teams.