

A summary analysis of the representations received in response to the Statutory Proposal to amalgamate Guardian Angels and St Anne's Catholic Primary Schools from the 1 September 2020

Consultation Response Analysis

London Borough of Tower Hamlets (LBTH) consulted the following stakeholders and interested parties directly to inform them of the publication of this statutory proposal:

- ✓ Secretary of State
- ✓ Parents, Carers and Pupils of Guardian Angels and St Anne's
- ✓ Staff at Guardian Angels and St Anne's
- ✓ Governors of all LBTH schools
- ✓ Diocese of Westminster (Roman Catholic)
- ✓ London Diocesan Board for Schools
- ✓ LBTH Admissions Forum
- ✓ Children and Young Peoples Voluntary Sector Forum
- ✓ Headteachers of all LBTH schools
- ✓ Local MPs
- ✓ All LBTH councillors
- ✓ All neighbouring boroughs local authorities
- ✓ Parents Carers Forum
- ✓ Parent Champions
- ✓ Young People Forum
- ✓ Somali Community Association
- ✓ Collective of Bangladeshi Governors
- ✓ East London NEU
- ✓ Council of Mosques
- ✓ Published on LBTH website / social media accounts
- ✓ East London Advertiser

By the formal close of the statutory notice, the following written responses were received:

Total Responses	Agreed with the Proposal	Did Not Agree with the Proposal
4	1	3

Respondents identified themselves as:

- Parent and Guardian Angels Parishioner
- Guardian Angels Parishioner x 2
- Local Headteacher

Within the four written responses received, there were 20 issues raised, within six broad themes:

1. Guardian Angel School's financial mismanagement and the impact of its closure on parents and children of the catholic community

- We understand the fall in pupil numbers and the mismanagement of the school finances are the major factors behind this. Which the latter is of no fault of the parents and children of Guardian Angels School. The governors and council should have picked up on the financial situation of the school much sooner, so that issue could have been made aware of to all and dealt with better and not left until it became a bigger problem putting the school at risk of closure.
- The result of this so-called merger is that some parents who want to send their children to a Catholic school will feel they have been given no option but to send their children to a non-Catholic school to save time and to keep their jobs. So the closure decision will effectively discriminate against their religious preferences.

Council Response

The Council recognises the impact of a school closure on its pupils, parents, staff and the wider community and, especially, when this is precipitated by the need to address the challenges of ensuring school sustainability. Guardian Angels School is at risk of closure due to its earlier decline in standards, subsequent fall in pupil numbers and the financial difficulties that resulted. Unfortunately the subsequent interventions could not prevent the school from reaching the point where it is no longer sustainable as a 1FE school.

The current plan for amalgamation enables Guardian Angels children to have the option to continue in catholic provision together. The LA will ensure that assistance is provided to families who wish for their children to transfer to catholic schools.

Before moving to consultation the LA considered carefully with the RC Diocese the balance of denominational provision. This was addressed in the statutory notices, which were published with the support of the RC Diocese and both schools' governing bodies.

In the last 6 years the Catholic proportion of the school population has varied between 8 and 10 %. The proposed changes still provided for a 10% proportion of the population to access Catholic education.

The proposal leads to a reduction of only 10 places across the Borough's Catholic Primary Schools. Current proposals to reduce pupil places in non-faith schools could reduce 165 places.

The admission criteria changes ensure children from the Guardian Angels Parish will continue to have priority access to a good Catholic education

2. Delay the closure of Guardian Angels and provide opportunity for the recruitment of a permanent full-time Headteacher, enabling the school to improve and reach a position of self-sustainability.

- Guardian Angels School has been without a full-time permanent Head Teacher since the resignation of the former head; however 'good' the Head Teacher of St. Anne's may be I feel that she has the interest of her own school; St Anne's, uppermost in her mind and will fight for the survival of that school at all costs. Guardian Angels, however, has not been given a chance to recover and improve. The appointment of a new, young vibrant headteacher may well have seen the revival of that school in what has been many, many years of educational excellence in this Borough.

- I understand that there is a financial issue at stake here, but no opportunity has been provided for the school to recoup its losses and become a viable proposition again: I am certain that other schools in this Borough are equally in financial difficulties but nothing as drastic as closure has been placed at their door.
- I think that this decision should be postponed until a permanent Head Teacher can be appointed and the opportunity for the school to improve be given. The question of finance can be dealt with if the school reduces its size and number of staff and, until these improvements become evident, saves on expenditure but that it should be given the opportunity to do this and as an active member of the Church of Guardian Angels, to see that Roman Catholic Christian children be given the opportunity to be educated in an atmosphere which fosters Catholic beliefs and practice in a comfortable and sensitive way so that the future of Roman Catholic Christianity can be fostered, maintained and assured in this Borough along with the many other faiths that exist here.
- I also understand that the Mayor of Tower Hamlets is predicting a growth in the number of primary school places required in 2023 and yet here you are planning to close schools.

Council Response

Guardian Angels has significantly falling roll, with only 1 first choice applicant for reception in September 2020. It is the smallest Catholic School in the Borough.

Guardian Angels most recent OFSTED inspection (September 2018) assessed the school as "Requiring Improvement". St Anne's Schools most recent OFSTED inspection (January 2020) assessed the school as "Good".

The Guardian Angels School site is not accessible, St Anne's School is a single storey school and is fully accessible.

Guardian Angels School has a significant financial deficit; St Anne's School has a balanced budget. The current financial challenges at Guardian Angels mean that it would require significant and sustained investment over a number of years requiring it to run a budget deficit. Given the government changes, limiting the period for local authorities to fund schools with budget deficits, it would not be possible to postpone the decision on its amalgamation with St Anne's. The appointment of a permanent headteacher at Guardian Angels has not been possible, given its financial circumstances.

The demographic changes in the Borough are seeing a significant pupil population shift. This means the number of places at schools in the west of the borough will need to be reduced and the number of places in the east of the borough will need to be increased. This is what the Mayor is referring to when he talks about growth in primary schools. The anticipated pupil growth in future years would not therefore benefit Guardian Angels.

In the light of this information the proposal is to amalgamate the school through closing Guardian Angels and expanding St Anne's.

3. Impact on the community

- But we would like to ask you to reconsider the idea to still keep the Guardian Angels School site open for Catholic or other Christian Denomination educational purposes.
- The time will come when we need our school sites again. Guardian Angels School is over 150 years old and we wish to continue this legacy. We would like all avenues looked into to find a way to keep Guardian Angles School site running as a Catholic educational facility for our borough.

- Positive impact on the issue with excess places in primary schools in the West of the borough
- Building long term educational and financial sustainability for the school communities under an excellent HT.

Council Response

The local authority and the diocese will consider a range of options for ensuring that the former Guardian Angels site can be used for the benefit of the catholic community, including funding the improvement of facilities at catholic schools in the borough.

4. Using the Guardian Angels School site to manage the oversubscription at Bishop Challoner RC School

- A further idea put forward by one of our church parishioners and parent, is there is only one Secondary Catholic School in Tower Hamlets which is Bishop Challoner RC School, the Guardian Angels site could be used in addition to this secondary school to intake those on the waiting lists. Perhaps this can be discussed with the head teacher of Bishop Challoner RC School and put forth as a proposal to the governors, council and the mayor.

Council Response

The Bishop Challoner RC Secondary Schools are popular schools in the borough, but they are not oversubscribed. There is therefore no need for these schools to require additional accommodation offsite.

5. Travel and Transport

- I fully support the view that every parent has the right to choose where their child is educated and by closing Guardian Angels many parents will be deprived of this privilege and will have to face growing increases in fares putting an added burden on many who are already struggling financially.
- Some parents have told me that they will not be transferring their children to St Anne's; it is very difficult to travel from the Guardian Angels area to St Anne's with small children in less than 40 minutes, then to return home and then to collect the children at home time and then return home = 160 minutes travel time each day. Some parents have other children at other schools which will involve even more rushing around.
- The site of Guardian Angels school is more accessible transport wise and location wise for parents to get their children to the school; and is definitely a nicer and safer environment than where the St Anne's School site area is. Adaptions can be made to site all the children at the Guardian Angels School Site.

Council Response

The closure of Guardian Angels should not deprive future children of a local catholic provision as there will still be the option for parents to apply for nearby St Agnes RC School. Families also have the option to apply for non-denominational local schools if this is their wish.

The Guardian Angels (GA) site does not have capacity for a 2FE school and it would not be financially viable for the amalgamated school to operate over two sites. The St Anne's site will be modified to enable to a 2FE school that could also accommodate GA pupils.

The Council will provide travel support for existing Guardian Angel families to enable them to continue in catholic school provision at St Annes' RC. This would normally be in accordance with its travel policy. In support of the aim for the majority of Guardian Angels children to transfer to St Anne's RC upon the schools amalgamation, the Council will also provide the School with a subsidy to run its own school bus transport for these children.

In addition governors have researched whether they would be able to offer a hardship travel fund, for particular families who live more than a mile from the St Anne's site.

Governors are also considering whether extended day provision at the amalgamated school is sufficient to support parents with their journey to work. Guardian Angels Catholic Primary School does not offer nursery provision, but this will be available for parents in the amalgamated St Anne's Catholic Primary School.

6. Consultation Process and Engagement with Community

- I also feel that many of our parents have not been given sufficient guidance about where and how to make a proper protest about these plans
- The decision to merge the two schools has been rushed through without any notice given to Guardian Angels parishioners; I say this because most people did not know of this proposal. To close the school after 150 years with less than six months' notice is an insult to the people of the parish.
- Most of the parents who have children at the School have not been informed formally that the School is to close. Most information seems to come by hearsay.
- Most of all I feel that people in Tower Hamlets feel that it is a lost cause to make any protest about anything in this Borough because the fact of the matter is that the decision has already been made and this opportunity is only a token gesture to make people think that their opinion really matters whereas in actual fact no-one is really interested at all.

Council Response

The Schools, RC Diocese and Local Authority has engaged in extensive consultation with parents and the local community as follows : A letter was sent to all parents from the Director of Education in July 2019; letter from governors to parents following the governing body decision to consult; Consultation documents explaining position on Monday, 4 November release inviting feedback; parents meetings for school based consultation 13/20 November 2019; Coffee mornings 27/11/19 at Guardian Angels and 28 November 2019 at St Anne's; Local Authority Open Information Sessions at the PDC on the Primary Review 11 December 2019, morning and evening sessions; Cabinet papers published 3 January 2020 on LA to decide whether to publish statutory notices; Statutory notices published February 2020 in and around the school buildings; Letters to parents 6 February 2020 to invite feedback on the statutory notices

When the Local Authority undertakes consultations of this kind it is required to explain what is being planned. However, it does not mean that the final decision on its plans have been pre-determined. The consultation invites respondents to put forward ideas or proposals that could enable the Local Authority to consider a different course of action.

Feedback from Staff consultation meetings (30/1/20 and 27/2/20) at Guardian Angels

- Some staff members were upset that "no one" had asked how they were feeling about the changes; that whilst extensive consultation and consideration had been given to parents and children affected-the staff felt they had been forgotten. They had worked very hard to maintain stability for the children through this turbulent period, and some acknowledgement of the anxiety they were feeling would have been appreciated.

- Some members of non-teaching staff felt that rather than a full restructure of both schools, that Guardian Angels should have had “first chance” for redundancy
- One member of staff said that the new governors are St Anne’s governors, don’t know the school, and have made decisions about potential reorganisation for the full restructure of both schools without involving Guardian Angels staff
- Staff felt that there would be very few Guardian Angels pupils that will transfer to St Anne’s as they are not practising Catholics and attend Guardian Angels as a local school
- One member of staff said that if they were forced to move to St Anne’s, and the pupil numbers were not sustainable, will St Anne’s need to restructure again, and any redundancy offer at that time would have reduced under Tower Rewards.

Council Response

Along with the RC Diocese, Local Authority (LA) officers apologised for the apparent lack of concern to the staff at Guardian Angels and committed to ensuring a greater presence within the process would be presented going forward. It acknowledges that it is a very anxious time for staff and thanked them for their continuing efforts to ensure the children at Guardian Angels continue to progress, despite uncertainties.

The LA and Diocese support the potential restructuring approach and explained to staff that it is the LA’s duty to try and retain as many staff as possible in any restructure for continuity in education for the children. Whilst it understood concerns of staff who may wish to receive redundancy – retention of skills was the key consideration.

It is anticipated that numbers will increase at St Anne’s, under the Primary Review reorganisation plans, and that the school will be sustainable.

Conclusion

Through analysis of the feedback received during the informal consultation and the statutory consultation period, the Council is able to draw some clear recognition from the consultees that Guardian Angels School has a loyal support within the community and is well regarded. No feasible alternatives to the proposals were uncovered during the consultation. The fall in pupil rolls (only one child expressed a first preference for the Guardian Angels School for September 2020), an unrecoverable financial deficit, and a fall in educational standards indicates that the amalgamation with St Anne’s is in the best educational interests for pupils at Guardian Angels.

Report Prepared on 6th March 2020