

Pre-publication Consultation on the proposed closure of Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior School

Consultation period: 01 October 2020 to 23 October 2020

Consultation document

About the school

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.

The Proposal

The Interim Executive Board [IEB], in consultation with Croydon Council and the Archdiocese of Southwark have agreed to commence the statutory process for the proposed closure of the school in August 2021 following completion of Year 11 GCSE examinations.

Reason for the proposed closure

The IEB, Croydon Council and Archdiocese of Southwark share the collective view that the school is no longer viable. There are several reasons contributing to this shared view, chiefly:

- 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.

As a consequence of the above, as well as other factors, 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.

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 council will be following the statutory process for closing a maintained school which consists of 5 stages:

Stage 1: 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. The purpose of this consultation is to seek the views and engage with those that will be directly affected by the proposed closure of Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior School.

It is also an opportunity for interested parties to suggest options for consideration on the proposed closure of Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior School in August 2021.

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

Stage three: representation - The representation period starts on the date of publication of the statutory proposal and MUST last for four weeks. Any person can send objections or comments on the proposal to Croydon Council.

Stage four: decision - The LA will be the decision-maker on a school closure proposal.

Stage five: implementation - There is no maximum limit on the time between the publication of a proposal and its proposed date of implementation.

Impact of the closure

Years 7 and 10 pupils

The Office of the Schools Adjudicator approved the suspension of entry to Year 7 for September 2020. Year 7 pupils who accepted a place at Virgo Fidelis have been offered an alternative school place at Notre Dame High School, an all-girls' Roman Catholic comprehensive school situated in Elephant and Castle; or another school of choice. Year 10 students will be taught on the site of St Mary's Catholic Secondary School. Subject to approval of the proposed closure of Virgo Fidelis, the governors of St Mary's Catholic Secondary School have agreed to retain the Year 10 pupils as they move into the final year of their education in a COVID-secure and single-sex location away from the rest of the school. The pupils who remain will be enrolled at St Mary's for Year 11.

Current Pupils

Years 8 and 9 will be offered alternative places at other schools, subject to approval for the proposed closure of the school. Year 11 pupils will have completed their GCSE examinations in July 2021, and the proposed closing date of the school is August 2021.

Staff

The Local Authority and Diocese will work collaboratively to seek to redeploy all staff, or as many as possible, into alternative positions in other schools locally.

Community

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

School Places

School roll projections indicate sufficiency of secondary school places across the Borough for the next 3 years, however this will be reviewed / monitored if the proposed closure of Virgo Fidelis is approved.

Balance of denominational provision

With regards to diversity of education provision and parental preference, the proposed closure will reduce the number of Roman Catholic school places available in the Borough if an alternative plan has not been agreed by the Diocese.

Who we are consulting

We are consulting with the school, parents/carers, governors and the local community on the proposed closure of the school. In addition, we would welcome the views of:

- all schools / admission authorities in Croydon – governing body / academy trust
- neighbouring Admission Authorities;
- Ward members;
- The Diocese
- Students
- anyone else who has an interest or may be affected by the proposed closure of the school.

Consultation period

This consultation will run from **01 October 2020 to 23 October 2020**, during this time you are invited to respond to Croydon Council on the Interim Executive Board's proposal to close the school.

Consultation Timetable

21 Sep 2020	Seek approval from Council to start consultation <i>via delegated authority</i>
01 Oct 2020	Stage 1: Start of consultation
23 Oct 2020	End of consultation period and deadline for response
26 Oct 2020	Analysis of response and preparation of consultation outcomes report
6 Nov 2020	LA considers consultation outcome and decides whether to approve publication of notice
	<i>Subject to approval</i>
12 Nov 2020	Stage 2: Publication of statutory notice
12 Nov 2020	Stage 3: Start of representation period
10 Dec 2020	End of representation period
18 Dec 2020	Analysis of responses and preparation of representation outcome report
Jan 2021	Report to Cabinet Committee

18 Jan 2021	Stage 4: Council's cabinet committee decision on whether to close the school
26 Jan 2021	Key decision implementation (subject to call-in) at 1pm
31 Jan 2021	Stage 5: Implementation of proposed school closure, if approved
31 August 2021	Proposed closure of Virgo Fidelis, subject to approval

How to give your views

This consultation period allows anyone with an interest to comment or raise any concerns about the proposal to close Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior School in August 2021, by:

- Completing the online questionnaire at www.croydon.gov.uk/getinvolved or paper copy of the questionnaire (Annex A below) and returning it by post to the address below or by email to the address below.

- Writing to:

School Place Planning
Croydon Council
School Place Planning Team
4th Floor Zone A
Bernard Weatherill House
8 Mint Walk
Croydon CR0 1EA

- Email: school.org@croydon.gov.uk

Due to COVID-19, the majority of staff are currently working from home and therefore we encourage responses to be submitted electronically either via the online questionnaire or by email where possible.

What happens next?

After the closing date of **23 October 2020**, responses will be analysed and a consultation outcomes report produced. This will be presented to the Executive Director, Children, Families & Education and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Learning to consider the outcome of the consultation and decide whether to publish a statutory notice and start the representation period on the proposed school closure. The outcomes report will be shared with the Diocese and IEB of Virgo Fidelis.

The results of the consultation will be published on the Council's website / school webpage.

Annex A below – Questionnaire

Questionnaire

Proposed closure of Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior School

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

I support the proposed school closure

I do not support the proposed school closure

Not sure

I am not affected by/do not want to answer questions about the proposed closure

2) If you do not support the proposed change, please tell us why.

3) We are keen to understand how the proposed school closure may affect you. Please use this space to tell us if you are impacted by the proposed school closure and how. What can we do to address any impacts you have mentioned?

4) Do you have any alternative suggestions to any part of the proposal?

About You

We are endeavouring to receive comments from a broad range of people reflective of our community. In order to enable us to assess the degree to which this has been successful, it would be helpful if you could take a moment to complete the section below.

The Council will take all reasonable measures to ensure that any data provided will be protected against loss or misuse. Your information will not be retained or shared with any other parties and will be destroyed in line with relevant destruction policies and processes.

5) Please tell us who you are.

- Member of staff at Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior School
- Member of staff at another school
- School Governor at Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior School
- School Governor at another school
- Parent/carer of a child/children at Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior School
- Parent/carer of child/children at another school
- Pupil at Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior School
- Local resident
- Prefer not to say
- Other (Please specify) _____

6) Gender:

- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- Prefer to self-describe
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to say

7) Age:

- Under 15
- 16-18
- 19-25
- 26-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+
- Prefer not to say

8) Which of the following best describes your ethnic background?

- White British
- White Irish
- White European
- Other white
- Mixed white and black Caribbean
- Mixed white and black African
- Mixed white and Asian
- Other mixed background
- Asian or Asian British: Indian
- Asian or Asian British: Pakistani
- Asian or Asian British: Bangladeshi
- Asian or Asian British: Chinese
- Other Asian or Asian British Background
- Black or Black British: Caribbean
- Black or Black British: African
- Other Black or Black British background
- Arabic
- Prefer not to say

Other Please specify _____

9) Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

- No
- Yes
- Prefer not to say

10) Please specify

- Mobility
- Visual impairment
- Hearing impairment
- Mental Health
- Learning disability
- Prefer not to say
- Other (Please specify) _____