

Consultation on the potential closure of St Dominic's Catholic Primary School



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Introduction

With the support of the Westminster Diocese and Camden Council, the governing body of St Dominic's Catholic Primary School is, with deep regret, seeking the views of parents/carers, staff and other stakeholders on a proposal to close the school.

This document is part of the consultation process and at the end of the consultation period, a decision will be taken by the Governing Body of St Dominic's Primary School whether to proceed and make a formal application to close the school through a Statutory Notice.

This document is part of a six-week public consultation and provides information on the reasons for this proposal as well as asking for your views about it. Please read the document and respond to our short questionnaire at the end before the closing date of 30 November 2022.

Views will be considered by the Governing Body, who will decide whether to issue a statutory notice stating their intent to close the school.

Background

St Dominic's School is a good school offering high quality education for all its pupils. However, a significant fall in the number of primary age pupils in Camden, together with reduced funding from central government, means many schools are facing a major challenge.

The Council and Diocese have been dedicated to maintaining strong school provision across the borough, improving sites, including those at St Dominic's, and building brand new school buildings. However, despite this investment and focus on providing support to families, the borough is facing a reducing birth rate, and the Diocese, a reduction in demand for Catholic Education, which both bodies must respond to.

The current number of primary school children in Camden is below what is needed to fill our schools. In Camden, births fell by 24% from 2012 to 2021.

The areas most affected by unused school places are in the centre of the borough, including the areas around St Dominic's School. There are a significant number of extra places across all years at St Dominic's Primary School, and a high percentage of unfilled reception places.

School Name	Number Unfilled Reception Places					Percentage Unfilled Reception Places %				
	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22
St Dominic's	19	10	25	26	13	42.2%	22.2%	55.6%	57.8%	43.3%

School Name	Number Unfilled YR-6 Places					Percentage Unfilled YR-6 Places %				
	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22
St Dominic's	95	108	129	154	177	30.2%	34.3%	41.0%	48.9%	56.2%

Fig 1. Unfilled School Places

This is not unique to Camden. Other London boroughs, including neighbouring areas, are seeing substantial falls in the number of pupils entering their primary schools. For example, specific action to reduce school numbers, including permanent and temporary reductions of admission numbers, are coming forward in Barnet, Brent, Islington and Westminster.

St Dominic's Primary

St Dominic's Primary School is now a one class entry primary school with a capacity of 210 places, having reduced from a one a half form entry primary school in recent years.

At the moment, the school has a total of 121 pupils on roll and, with 89 vacant places, which is one the highest proportions of surplus provision in Camden. Preferences for the school have fallen acutely in the last three years, and for Reception entry in September 2022, there were 12 first preferences for 30 places.

It is proposed is that the school would formally close from September 2023. **The school would be kept open until that point offering all pupils a high-quality education experience.** All pupils will be guaranteed the continuation of their education within a Camden School. The Council and Diocese would work with all parents to look at the available options for school places including local Catholic provision.

We understand that this consultation and proposal will be difficult for the families of St Dominic's pupils, who have a strong connection to the school.

Camden School Organisation in 2022

School place planning forecasts are reviewed annually by the local authority, transparently, and made publicly available. The Council updates all underlying demographic data including; existing provision and capacity, actual registered births/fertility, latest GLA forecasts for births-population-school rolls, anticipated future increasing or decreasing 'need' including surplus places, additional anticipated housing included in GLA forecasts, and estimated 'child yield' from these developments, as well as the latest demographic information from neighbouring authorities.

Below is some key data, relating to St Dominic's, which has helped inform the proposal.

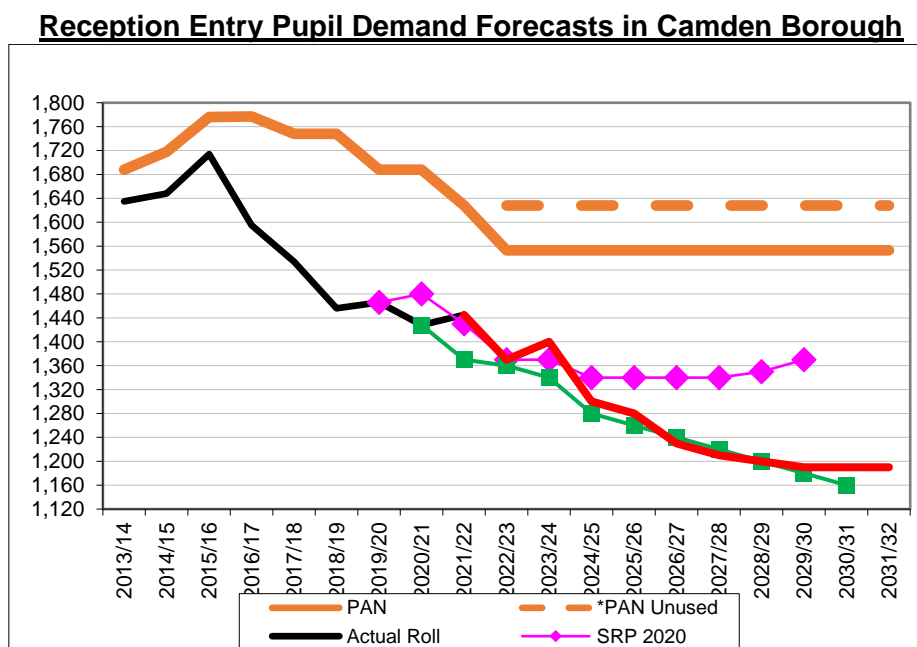


Fig 2: chart showing latest GLA SRP 2022, and previous historic GLA SRP 2021 and 2020 forecasts with planned admission number (PAN): [Borough Reception](#)

Forecast for the immediate St Dominic's Area

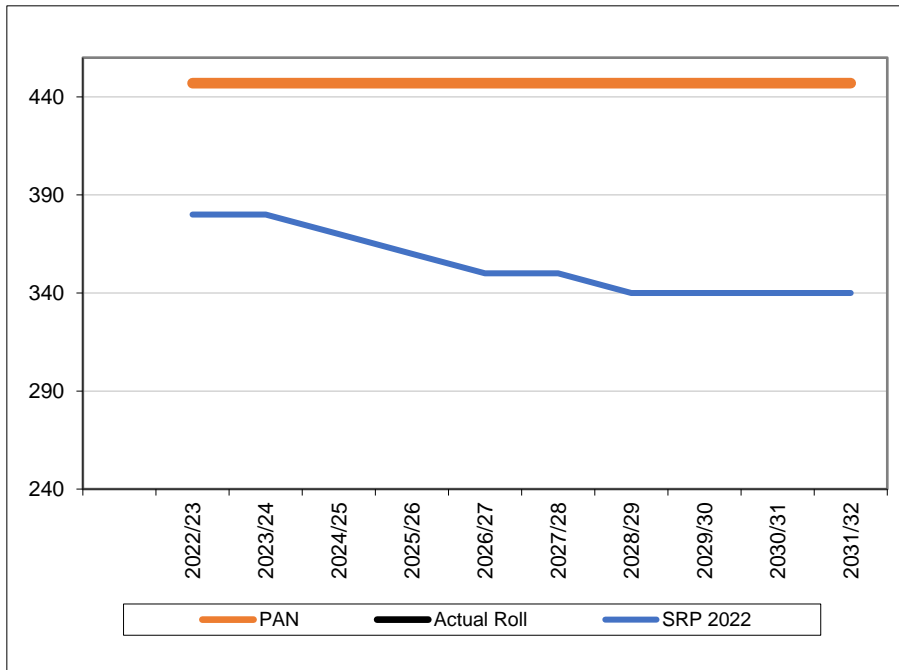


Fig 3. Forecast reception age entry and against local planning area

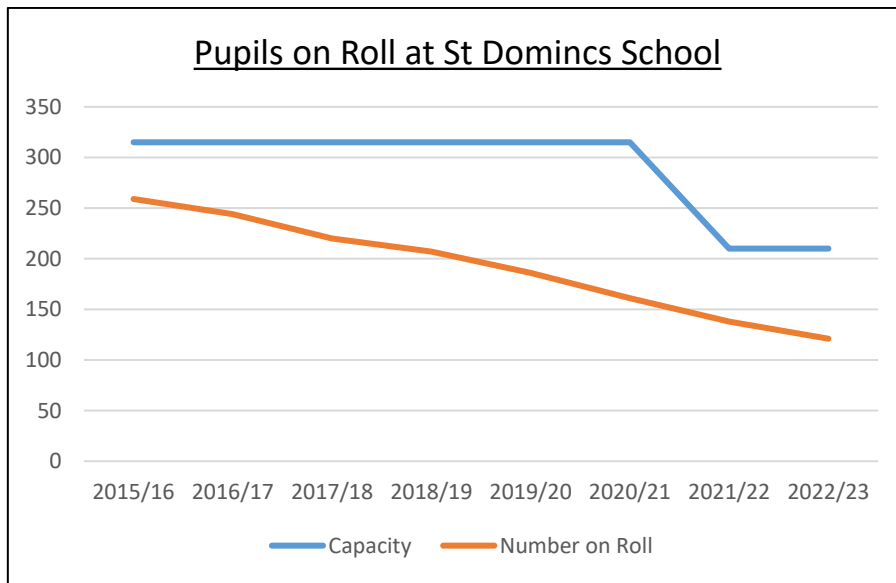


Fig 4: Numbers on roll at the St Dominic's School from 2015

Forecasts and Housing

Camden's forecast of future pupil numbers is based on the best available information. Recent revisions have improved the accuracy of forecasts in Camden to within 2% of the actual numbers on roll. The Council makes use of data provided by the Office for National Statistics and the Greater London Authority (GLA). The Council has also undertaken a review of all potential housing development data. Our forecasts incorporate the additional pupil demand anticipated from agreed and potential developments in the local area.

Cost

The cost of running St Dominic's Catholic Primary School with its current level of pupil intake, is unlikely to be sustainable. In addition, smaller schools are also more vulnerable to potential changes in pupil numbers and the impact that this has on budgets. St Dominic's, has found it difficult to attract pupils, as reflected in the numbers highlighted in the tables above.

Schools are funded on a formula basis and the number of pupils attending the school drives the level of funding received by a school. This means that schools with unfilled places are under increased financial pressure and not able to guarantee the level of education offered to pupils in the long term. Reducing the number of school places in a planned way supports all schools to manage their budgets better, in line with the amounts given by central government.

Examples of the funding challenges:

- in Camden each pupil brings an average revenue funding of £4,500 to a primary school's budget
- for a 1 form of entry (FE) school, with 30 unused places (14%) throughout the school, that amounts to a loss of £135,000 revenue funding per year, approximately 8% of the school's total budget. This is equivalent to the total cost of more than two teachers.

The Future

The Council and Diocese need to create a school system which can cope well with continued financial challenges, changing educational policy, and, above all, the needs of our children and young people in a difficult and uncertain world, ensuring we can continue to serve our community well with high quality education, care, and support into the future.

If we are unable to actively manage the reduction in demand for primary age pupils, it will put at risk the pattern of education provision within Camden. Not taking action could therefore lead to unplanned school closures or changes. This, in turn could result in uncertainty and greater disruption for parents, poorer outcomes for pupils, concern in communities, and a strain on the relationships between Camden Council, the local Dioceses Camden Learning and Camden schools.

How will the proposed changes be managed?

The Governing Body of St Dominic's School, and the Westminster Diocese, alongside Camden Council, will manage the consultation and the processes should the decision be made to close the school.

If the proposal is agreed by the governing body of St Dominic's Primary School, the Council and Diocese would work with all involved to help ensure a smooth transition for all pupils. Camden Council, would work to identify the additional needs of all the children that may result if closure is approved. We would be focusing on those pupils with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and ensuring that the right levels of support continue to be in place for those pupils who require it. More detailed information around the transition will be communicated if the closure proposal is agreed.

Parents and carers would also have the option to apply for alternative Camden schools and would be given time to consider their options. Face-to-face support would be on offer for those families who need any help with admissions or transitional arrangements.

Timeline for these proposals and next steps

Start Date	End Date	Description
12 October	30 November	Six-week informal public consultation
		Governing body of St Dominic's decision
December	January	4 week Statutory notice period, during which formal objections to the proposal can still be made
March		Camden Council's cabinet member decision on the final outcome.
31 August		St Dominic's School closes

Should the governing body confirm the publication of a statutory notice, this would be considered by the Council's Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families at a public meeting.

Summary of the proposals

- The current number of primary school children in Camden is below what is needed to fill our schools and funding from central government has dramatically reduced.
- St Dominic's Catholic Primary School has a high number of unused places.
- The proposal is to close Dominic's School from 1 September 2023
- Existing St Dominic's Primary School pupils would be offered a place within a Camden School.
- The Council, Diocese and staff would support the school and parents throughout the transition.

Have your say

We want to hear your views on this proposal. The views of parents, pupils and the wider community will be considered by the Governing Body when determining whether to issue a Statutory Noticing stating their intent to close the school.

Question 1.

Do you agree with the proposal to close St Dominic's Catholic School?

Yes		No	
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Question 2.

Do you understand why the proposal to close St Dominic's Catholic School has been made?

Yes		No	
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Question 3.

What additional support do you need in this process? (eg. My child has an EHCP)

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Question 4.

Are there any further points or questions you would wish to raise?

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Please drop this questionnaire into the school office when completed – before the closing date of 30 November 2022.

Any comments or questions can also be emailed to stdominics@camden.gov.uk

The following information is being asked for on a voluntary basis:

Name	Link to School	Year group of child at school, if applicable	Postcode

