

OBJECTIONS REPORT



Proposal to discontinue St. Mary's Catholic Primary School Pembroke Dock

**The Governing Body of
St. Mary's Catholic Primary School**

February 2019

Published by:

**The Governing Body of St. Mary's
Catholic Primary School
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Foreword

This Objections Report is published under Section 49 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 which states that proposers must publish a summary of the statutory objections and the proposer's response to those objections.

Barbara Thomas
Chair of Governors

David Burgoyne
Vice Chair of Governors

1. Executive Summary

This report provides information on the statutory objections received to the governing body's proposal to close St Mary's Catholic Primary School. Four objections were received, each of which were from members of staff of the school. This report outlines the basis of those objections and the governing body's responses.

The governing body has considered the individual objections made and acknowledges that these have been received from members of staff. The agreement of the Trustees was sought prior to undertaking this process and they acknowledge how difficult the decision has been for the Governing Body to take and are saddened by the reduction of the provision of Catholic education within the diocese. The governing body reiterates that the decision to consult on this proposal and subsequently to publish a statutory notice was taken with a heavy heart. The school has received significant support from the Council, both in terms of Challenge Advisor and financial support and the governing body is extremely grateful for this and feels that every effort has been made to maintain provision. In addition, the governing body wish to thank all staff of St Mary's for their dedication and loyalty to the school under difficult circumstances.

In concluding, the governing body remains of the view that despite its best efforts, the school cannot be sustained and recommends that Pembrokeshire County Council resolves to determine the proposal at its meeting on 21st February 2019.

2. Introduction

Statutory consultation on the governing body's proposal to discontinue the school was undertaken from 15th October 2018 to 30th November 2018.

Subsequently, the Consultation Report was considered by the governing body of St Mary's Catholic Primary School at an extraordinary meeting on 18th December 2018 with a decision to proceed to publish a Statutory Notice. The decision of the governing body was as follows:

To proceed to the next step in the statutory process, i.e. to publish a statutory notice to discontinue the school at the end of the spring term 2019.
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The Statutory Notice was subsequently published on 8th January 2019 in accordance with the School Organisation Code. The statutory objection period ended on 5th February 2019.

This document represents the governing body's responsibility as part of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 to publish an Objection Report. This document provides:

- A summary of the statutory objections received, and
- the governing body's response to those objections.

3. Distribution of Objection Report

This Objection Report will be distributed to the following:

The Governing Bodies, Parents/Carers/Guardians and Staff of:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St. Mary's Catholic Primary School • St. Francis Catholic School • St Teilo's Catholic School • Pembroke Dock Community School • Pennar Community School 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monkton Priory CP School • Ysgol Gelli Aur/Golden Grove CP • Penrhyn VC School • Ysgol Harri Tudur/Henry Tudor School
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director of Education – Diocese of Menevia • Trustees of the Diocese of Menevia 	Director of Education – The Diocese of St David's
The Welsh Ministers	Estyn
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Angela Burns AM – Constituency • Helen Mary Jones AM – Regional • Joyce Watson AM – Regional • Eluned Morgan AM – Regional • Neil Hamilton AM - Regional • Simon Hart MP • Cllr. AW Wilcox • Cllr. BJ Hall • Cllr. P Dowson • Cllr. J Beynon • Cllr. J Harvey • Cllr. P Llewellyn 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NEU • NASUWT • UCAC • NAHT • ASCLE • UNISON • GMB
ERW – Regional Education Consortium	County Council transport unit
Dyfed Powys Police and Crime Commissioner	Pembroke Dock Town Council Pembroke Town Council Milford Haven Town Council
Independent nursery providers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registered Day Nurseries/Playgroups • Registered Childminders 	Childcare & Young People's Partnership – Early Years, Childcare and Learning Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hywel Dda Health Board 	Pembrokeshire Communities First

4. Objections Received

Four objections to the proposal were received during the statutory objection period. The profile of objectors is such that all are teaching, support or other staff at St Mary's Catholic Primary School.

The objections made are broadly categorised as follows and together with the governing body's responses are detailed in the following tables:

- The proposal removes the option of a Catholic education for pupils in the Pembroke Dock/Pembroke area; this also extends to the loss of choice in relation to faith schools;
- Concerns that both parents and St Mary's School received insufficient support in relation to falling pupil numbers and that pupil transfers to other schools should have been prevented;
- 'Lack of sustained improvement over time' should not be a reason to close the school;
- Observations on the local authority's support in relation to behaviour support;
- Insufficient effort made to recruit a Headteacher;
- Lack of support by the local authority to parents choosing a Catholic education for their children.

Date received	Reference	Comments
1 st February 2019	A	<p>We are writing to you to make an objection to the statutory notice to close St. Mary's Catholic School in Pembroke Dock. The reason that we object to this is that by closing St. Mary's Catholic School we would be withdrawing the option of Catholic education for pupils not only in Pembroke Dock but in the Pembroke Cluster. St. Mary's Catholic School is currently the only church school in the Pembroke Cluster and parents will not have the opportunity to choose a church school for their children's education. Church schools are distinct from non-church schools as they have Christian beliefs and values at their heart. We feel that by closing St. Mary's Catholic School, you will be preventing any Christian denomination from being able to choose a faith school in the Pembroke Cluster. We feel that more should have been done to support parents from the Pembroke Cluster in choosing a catholic education for their children. This could have been done from as early as Flying Start and offering St. Mary's Catholic School as a choice for all Flying Start parents not just those parents in the catchment area.</p> <p>Thank you for taking the time to read our objection and we hope that you take this objection into consideration when making your final decision.</p>
1 st February 2019	B	<p>We are writing to object to the proposal to close St. Mary's School, Pembroke Dock, as proposed in the publication of statutory notice which was issued on 8th January 2019.</p> <p>In the consultation document it has been stated that there has been a lack of sustained improvement over time and we object to this being a reason to close the school. As a staff we feel that the school has been making improvements and that we had been led to believe that the Local Authority also believed that the school was making improvements. The behaviour support group and behaviour support LSA had allowed the school to make improvements with pupil behaviour up until Easter 2018 and this was evident in the reduction of fixed term exclusions from Autumn Term 2017 to the Spring Term 2018. The school had also been working closely with Pivotal and had had behaviour support training which was being implemented. A visit by Pivotal in November 2017 highlighted a number of strengths of the school including caring and enthusiastic adults dealing with the pupils in a caring way and staff making good use of behaviour management strategies.</p> <p>We feel that the support that the Local Authority gave the school in terms of behaviour support LSA was withdrawn too soon and withdrawn immediately rather than it being done over a period of time. Parents were also not informed that this was happening and thought that the Behaviour Support group was continuing after Easter 2018. Pupils were not given time to adjust to these changes.</p>

Date received	Reference	Comments
		<p>This was a crucial time for the school as the classes were being amalgamated which meant a lot of change for all of the pupils. It was at this time that behaviour started to deteriorate and we feel that this could have been avoided by carefully planning the withdrawal of support.</p> <p>The staff were 100% committed to making improvements and we feel that it is unfair to close the school because of this as we don't feel that we were given enough time to embed the behaviour strategies we had been given.</p> <p>We look forward to hearing the outcome of your decision.</p>
5 th February 2019	C	<p>We are writing to you to make an objection to the statutory notice to close St. Mary's School in Pembroke Dock.</p> <p>The first objection that we have to the school closing is that is stated St Mary's Catholic Primary School has encountered difficulties in funding and recruiting a Headteacher. However we don't believe that enough has been done to recruit a Headteacher as the post has not been advertised nationally and an assumption had just been made that one will not be found.</p> <p>That second objection that we have is that we don't feel that enough was done to support the school with the falling pupil numbers. In the consultation report it says that there has been significant parental preference for transfers out of St Mary's Catholic Primary School during the last 2-3 years. This has meant that the school now operates only 2 classes. We feel that a number of these transfers could have been avoided if meetings had been arranged between the parents and the Pupil Support Officer. Lots of the pupils left with no valid reason and we feel and know that lots of these transfers happened because parents followed one another and it was too easy to move to another school. The transfers happened over a period of 2-3 years and we feel that something should have been done by the Local Authority before we got to the position we are in today.</p> <p>We are disappointed that it has been proposed to close St. Mary's Catholic Primary School and we would like our objections to be looked into. Thank you for taking the time to read our letter as we look forward to your reply.</p>
5 th February 2019	D	<p>We are writing to you to make an objection to the closure of St. Mary's School, Pembroke Dock, which was issued with Statutory Notice to Close on the 8th January 2019.</p>

Date received	Reference	Comments
		<p>It has been stated in the documents published that St. Mary's School has encountered difficulties in funding and recruiting a Headteacher. This has also been stated as one of the reasons why the proposal has been taken to discontinue education at St. Mary's School. We object to the school closing on the grounds of this assumption as we don't believe that enough has been done to recruit a Headteacher. When the last permanent Headteacher left the school in 2017 an advert was not put out advertising the position. The same happened when the Executive Headteacher left at the end of the Summer Term 2018. We feel again that the post should have been advertised nationally and more should have been done to recruit a Headteacher. We feel that an assumption was just made that one would not be found. Having a permanent Headteacher would have improved parental confidence in the school and would have increased pupil numbers.</p> <p>We are saddened that it was been proposed to discontinue St. Mary's Catholic Primary School. However we feel that if parents choose Catholic Education for their children, then they should be supported by the Local Authority to choose whichever Catholic School they want be that St. Francis Catholic Primary School or St. Teilo's Catholic Primary School. Thank you for taking the time to read our letter.</p> <p>We Trust that our objections will be considered carefully when making the final decision.</p>

Ref	Objection comments	Response
A	Implementing the proposal would result in the withdrawal of the option of Catholic education for pupils in the Pembroke area.	<p>The governing body did consider this prior to taking the initial decision to consult on its proposal. There are other Catholic schools in Pembrokeshire, the closest being St Francis school in Milford Haven and St Teilo's school in Tenby. The two alternative Catholic schools are a distance of 8.5 and 11.4 miles (approximately) from St Mary's school. The nature of journeys to alternative provision is therefore well within nationally acceptable distances and times.</p> <p>Free home to school transport is available to St Francis Catholic Primary school in Milford Haven for any pupil remaining on roll at St Mary's wishing to continue receiving a faith education. Similarly, requests for transport to St Teilo's Catholic school will be considered on an individual basis.</p>
A	The loss of a church school will result in parents not having the opportunity to choose a church school for their children's education. Church schools are distinct from non-church schools as they have Christian beliefs and values at their heart.	<p>Both Cosheston VC School and Penrhyn VC School are Church in Wales schools within the Pembroke cluster. In accordance with Pembrokeshire County Council's admissions arrangements, parents may express a preference for any school they wish, including Voluntary Controlled faith schools.</p> <p>It should be noted that several pupils who have transferred from St Mary's School during recent months have been given places at the above named schools and others.</p>
A	This will prevent any Christian denomination (child/family) from being able to choose a faith school in the Pembroke cluster.	
A, C	<p>More should have been done to support parents from the Pembroke cluster in choosing a Catholic education for their children.</p> <p>Not enough was done to support the school with the falling pupil numbers.</p> <p>Feel that a number of pupil transfers to other schools could have been avoided if meetings had</p>	<p>The preference expressed for individual schools is a matter for parents, not the governing body or the Council.</p> <p>An overview of the significant support given to St Mary's School by the Council during 2016/17 and 2017/18 was given on pages 11-13 of the consultation document to this proposal.</p> <p>It is a matter for parents, taking note of LA policy, to determine whether they wish to transfer a child from one school to another and it is often the case that a stream</p>

Ref	Objection comments	Response
	<p>been arranged between the parents and the Pupil Support Officer. Lots of pupils left with no valid reason and we feel that the lots of these transfers happened because parents followed one another and it was too easy to move to another school. Something should have been done by the LA before we got to the position we are in today.</p>	<p>of transfers can be triggered by one parent. The Council's advice to parents in relation to transferring schools is very clear and this is articulated as part of the published Information to Parents online booklet annually. The following extract from the Information to Parents booklet is pertinent in this regard:</p> <p><i>The Council is prepared to consider requests for transfers between schools other than at normal admission times. However, if you are seeking to transfer your child, you must first discuss this with your child's present headteacher, or head of year in secondary school. You should also contact the headteacher of the school you wish your child to attend. As term time transfers are discouraged, they are normally made only at the beginning of a term, except where they arise due to a change of family address. A transfer application must be completed online in all cases, and this is available on the County Council's website. Applications to transfer will not normally be considered more than 1 term in advance of the transfer.</i></p> <p>Changing schools can be unsettling for pupils and can disturb class organisation. It should be a last resort and considered only when all other options for resolving problems have been explored.</p> <p><i>If your request for a transfer is due to concerns about your child's progress or there are any problems at your child's school, you should, as a first step, discuss the matter with the headteacher of the present school. It is usual practice for a Pupil Support Officer to discuss a transfer application with parents. A booklet 'Changing Schools – A Guide for Parents' provides additional information on the transfer process and any potential implications. It is available on request from the Admissions Officer or your child's school, or can be downloaded from the Council's website.</i></p>
B	<p>Object to 'lack of sustained improvement over time' as being a reason to close the school.</p>	<p>The governing body applauds the efforts of all staff in improving performance but the factors outlined below mean that sustaining those improvements would have been almost impossible. This issue is only one part of a range of matters identified in the case for change, i.e. "why is this change being proposed?". Other reasons for the governing body's decision to consult on the closure of the school were as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Falling rolls and the non-sustainable number of statutory age pupils.

Ref	Objection comments	Response
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A poor organisational culture, particularly in relation to the Catholicity and ethos of the school. • A lack of stable and consistent leadership since September 2016. • A decision by the acting executive headteacher and the deputy headteacher not wishing to undertake the headteacher role from September 2018. • The local authority and diocese have been unable to find a replacement leader. • Significant concerns regarding the budget despite the addition of £75,000 from the local authority over the last year. • Inability to fund or recruit a permanent headteacher at the current time. • A concern that the school would be placed in an official category if inspected with no prospect of coming out of that category due to instability in leadership.
B	<p>The support provided by the LA in terms of behaviour support LSA was withdrawn too soon and withdrawn immediately rather than it being done over a period of time. Parents were not informed that this was happening and thought that the Behaviour support group was continuing after Easter 2018. Insufficient time given to embed behaviour strategies.</p>	<p>The local authority provided a highly trained HLTA to set up a nurturing provision, and to build capacity for school staff to run the provision. It was full time in the first term and reduced by a day during the second term and by 3 days in the third term. The staff in the school were supported to take over the running of the nurturing provision during this time. This was agreed as part of the Behaviour Reviews with the Acting Head Teacher and was reviewed on a termly basis with the school.</p> <p>The following was also provided to help support the school with children with additional learning needs and behaviours that challenge:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The local authority also allocated Behaviour Support Teacher to support school for half a day a week, to provide building capacity support, monitoring and supporting Acting Head to develop the Behaviour Approach within the school. • Additional half termly Team around the Pupil, Parent and Setting meetings (multiagency from Inclusion meeting) to advise and support the school with pupils with additional learning needs took place. • Additional training through INSETS and TWILIGHTS. • Additional funding for pupils with BESD. • Additional Penally Centre (PRU) placements at no extra cost to the school. Specialist LSA's to visit on a fortnightly basis.

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PIVOTAL training for school. The Acting Headteacher to attend additional training to be able to deliver further training to school staff (no cost). • Head of PLC, Challenge Advisor for ALN and School Challenge Advisor carried out three Behaviour Reviews, supported the school to develop and support school with their action plan. <p>The above support was welcomed by the governing body and proved effective at the time. However the governing body understood that this support was for a specific period of time with a view to the school becoming self-supporting thereafter.</p>
C, D	<p>Don't believe that enough has been done to recruit a Headteacher as the post has not been advertised nationally and an assumption had just been made that one will not be found.</p> <p>The vacant post should have been advertised nationally</p>	<p>Following the decision of the previous headteacher to leave her post, The governing body, Diocese and Local Authority have been acutely aware of the shortage of suitably qualified Catholic headteachers applying for leadership posts in Catholic Schools in the diocese. All three have worked in partnership to stabilise the leadership of the school with its challenges as set out above. The governing body has complied with the relevant national Regulations in their efforts to provide a suitably qualified person as acting headteacher. The governing body has also complied by using The Federation of Maintained Schools (Wales) Regulations 2014 in order to source the support of an experienced headteacher in a Green school to consider Federation. All viable alternatives were explored, however, neither of these approaches worked given the scale of the challenges faced by the school.</p> <p>At the point of the departure of the previous full time headteacher, the school had insufficient resources to fund a new headteacher. It was at this point that the governing body had to consider alternatives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historically there had been recruitment challenges. During the period of absence of the substantive Headteacher the Deputy Headteacher undertook the acting Headteacher role, supported by an experienced mentor. • When the substantive Headteacher resigned, the Governing Body agreed for an experienced Catholic Headteacher to act in an Executive Headship role as due to falling roles and existing budget constraints the school budget would have been insufficient to recruit an experienced Headteacher, which, given the

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		<p>red categorisation of the school was deemed essential by the Governing Body and Diocese.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At an extraordinary Governing Body meeting in June 2018, the interim executive Headteacher felt unable to continue the role. Furthermore, the acting Headteacher did not wish to continue her role as the Acting Headteacher and due to the significant fall in pupil numbers the Governing Body decided to begin the process to discontinue the school by consulting with the Diocese. • The Local Authority and Diocese arranged for a highly experienced Catholic Headteacher to undertake the statutory duties of the Headteacher in the interim period.
D	<p>If parents choose Catholic education for their children, then they should be supported by the LA to choose whichever Catholic School they want, be that St Francis or St Teilo's schools.</p>	<p>The Council has made a commitment to all pupils remaining on roll at St Mary's at the date of implementation, that they can continue to receive a Catholic primary education and that transport will be provided to St Francis School in Milford Haven. Requests for transport to other Pembrokeshire Catholic schools will be considered on an individual basis.</p>