

# ST MARY'S RC PRIMARY SCHOOL, PRE-PROPOSAL

Stockport Council Consultation

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## INTRODUCTION

Stockport is immensely proud of its children and young people and recognise that they are our future. We all must acknowledge the great responsibility we have to ensure our children and young people have the best start to life, they are happy and safe, and they have the opportunity, skills and passion to thrive.

We believe the fundamentals to delivering our vision for Children and Young People in Stockport is:

- Sufficient supply of good, inclusive school places
- Strong leadership
- Clear and consistent ethos about learning and life
- Quality teaching and learning opportunities
- Learning environments suited to providing quality learning and to the needs of its pupils

Stockport Council continues to work for and with communities to shape the school estate, providing an environment where schools can thrive through difficult times.

## Who is this for

This is for anyone with a role or interest in schools in the area surrounding ST Mary's RC Primary School in Heaton Norris or their local community. It may include:

- Parent/Carers
- Staff
- Governing Bodies and academy trusts
- Other local authorities
- Schools, including free schools and academies
- Other interested parties

## About this consultation

Stockport Metropolitan Borough and the Diocese of Salford are consulting on the closure of St Mary's RC Primary School (Voluntary aided school). A voluntary aided school is a school funded by Government and maintained by the Local Authority, but also receives financial contributions from the foundation or trust, in this case the foundation is the Diocese. The Diocese also owns the building and the majority of land.

St Mary's RC Primary School is a small primary school based in the town centre for children aged 3-11. The school has an admissions limit of 24 pupils per year group and an overall capacity for 168 pupils plus a nursery class. There has been a consistent decline in pupil numbers over the past five years (2017-2022) with 110 pupils currently on roll, based on the last pupil census which means the schools is approximately 65% full.

Schools are primarily funded as a result of the number of pupils on roll. This funding pays for the Headteacher, class teachers, teaching assistants, other things that support a pupil with their learning, as well as the things that keep the school running. Fewer pupils means less funding. When funding dips below the level needed, the school have to plan to cut their costs. If funding continues to fall or there is no way of cutting costs, then a school may be considered unviable meaning it cannot financially support itself.

The St Mary's RC Primary School received an 'inadequate' Ofsted rating following an inspection which took place in January 2022 and was placed into special measures. The Diocese of Salford were issued an Academy Order under paragraph 10, schedule 1 of the Academies Act 2010. An Academy Order requires a school to either close and reopen as an Academy or close permanently. It is only the Diocese as the foundation responsible for the school which can convert the school into an academy.

In October 2022, the Diocese wrote to Stockport Council stating that they will not convert St Mary's into their academy trust as they believe the school to be unviable (see letter in **What we Know**). Therefore, there is no other option than to propose the closure of the school. Subject to consultation, it is proposed that the school closure be managed during academic year 2023/24.

## Key dates

This consultation was published on **12 December 2022** and will close at 11:59pm on **15 January 2023**.

## How to have your say

### RESPOND ONLINE

To help us analyse the responses please use the online system wherever possible.

Visit [www.stockport.gov.uk/haveyoursay](http://www.stockport.gov.uk/haveyoursay) to submit your response.

### TALK TO US

We will be holding community drop in sessions in St Mary's School hall on

16 December between 10am and 11am

10 January between 10am and 11am

### OTHER WAYS TO RESPOND

If for exceptional reasons, you are unable to use the online system, for example because you use specialist accessibility software that is not compatible with the system, you may download a PDF version of the consultation document and respond either via email or post.

If you are not responding via the online survey, please can you ensure you provide:

- your name
- relevant contact details
- whether you are responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation, along with your role
- whether you would like your responses to be kept confidential within your response.

*By email*

[Admissions.consult@stockport.gov.uk](mailto:Admissions.consult@stockport.gov.uk)

*By post*

School Places, Admissions and Transport Team,  
Upper Ground Floor  
Stopford House  
SK1 3XE

## CONSULTATION

The decision to propose closure of the school is not one taken lightly. The law states that only the Council can propose the closure of a school in this situation.

The Diocese of Salford have the belief 'that the long-term viability of the school does not sit within the Diocese' Catholic academy trust', this decision means the school will not be converted into their multi academy trust and means the school cannot comply with the directive academy order. The Diocese have asked to work in partnership with the Council to determine the future of the school. As such the Council has started the statutory process which considers whether the school should close.

An Academy Order issued by the Secretary of State directs the school to close and open as a new school under a multi academy trust. If the school cannot convert and become a new school, it cannot continue operating as a Local Authority maintained school. The implication of the academy order is that the Council must cease maintaining the school.

OFSTED made a judgement in January 2022 that the quality of education provision provided by the school was not good enough. The academy order was issued to the school following the school being placed into special measures.

As a result of the academy order, OFSTED will not reinspect the school unless it opens as a new school under a multi academy trust.

The financial forecasts for the school show that the school will continue to be in deficit (costs exceeding income) with the deficit increasing each year.

The Diocese of Salford consider the school to be unviable; it is unlikely to be able to sustain itself financially and has lacked the stability and resources needed to improve the quality of educational provision.

Further to the above, the locality surrounding the school, specifically Reddish, currently has an oversupply of school places. Should St Mary's close, the loss of school places would not have an impact on the overall sufficiency of school places in the area.

This consultation considers:

- Information and data available
- The general principle of closing the school
- How long closure should take
- Admissions Process

# 1. General Principle of Closure

On the basis of the information available (see section, [What we know](#));

- Between 2018 and 2022, OFSTED have judged that the quality of education as requiring improvement
- The school have been issued a directive academy order by the Secretary of State
- The Diocese of Salford have decided not to convert the school into it's academy trust
- The school currently has a deficit budget and deficit is forecast to increase each year
- The Reddish school place planning area currently hold a surplus of places above the level needed to assure sufficiency

Given the circumstance, Stockport Council is proposing to close of the school. Subject to consultation, a decision should be taken by the Council as to whether or not the school will be closed.

# 2. How quickly should the school close

Should a decision be made to close the school, implementation of the closure should start as soon as possible.

School closures are usually carried out over 1,2, or 3 academic years. Consideration is given to a number of factors including:

- Assuring a good transition to secondary school for pupils in Year 6
- Assuring good transitions for pupils who move to nearby schools
- The welfare of pupils of which, some have additional needs
- The welfare of staff at the school
- The continued ability to provide good education to all pupils
- The ability to maintain adequate numbers of staff at a school during closure
- The use of public funds to maintain the school

The council has considered options available and is proposing that closure of the school take place during the 2023/24 academic year. This would allow pupils in Year 6 to transition to secondary school from St Mary's Primary School, should they wish to stay. It will also allow time for a planned admissions process which will place all remaining children in other schools.

As well as the option to close the school within 1 academic year, the Council will also consider arrangements to consider closure over a longer period of time.

### 3. Managed Admissions Process

#### SUMMARY

The Council propose the following process:

- An application process will give applicants sufficient time to consider their choices
- A paper application form will be available which allows each child to apply for up to 3 schools
- Drop-in sessions held at St Mary's Primary School where members of the admissions team will be available to complete forms on a family's behalf
- Applications processed in accordance with the Admissions Code of Practice
  - Places will be offered in order of a school's published admissions criteria
  - Offers will be made where an available place at a school exists
  - Where a place is refused, a right of appeal will be given
  - A guaranteed appeal hearing and decision before the summer holidays
- Start dates will be planned and coordinated so that good transitions can be assured for all pupils
- Children with Education, Health and Care Plans will have a review of their named school as soon as is practicable.

#### DETAIL

The Admissions Support and Advice Team will support parents and carers of children at St Mary's RC Primary School as part of a managed transfer process to ensure they are offered another school. A member of the admissions team will make themselves available at the school to assist parents with paper application forms, allowing parent/carers the opportunity to express up to 3 preferences and give their reasons for wanting a place at any particular school.

We would comply with parental preference wherever possible, however places will be allocated based on places available and in accordance with the council's published admissions policy. As part of a managed transfer process, children will receive an offer of a school place even if no parental preference could be met, this will usually be at the nearest school to the child's home address that has places available. Based on an initial analysis and current places available, we believe the majority of children on roll at St Mary's RC Primary School would have a similar or reasonable distance to travel to their nearest alternative school

Parent/carers will be able to liaise with the admissions team regarding availability at their preferred school and will receive all relevant information regarding the appeals process where necessary.

Admissions officers will also discuss the impact with other local schools and advise them

Free school travel will be provided to all pupils who are eligible based on the eligibility criteria set out in the Council's policy. The statutory distance for pupils aged 8 and over will be reduced to 2 miles as opposed to 3 miles to assist those families who may be financially affected by the closure. This means that if you are:

- Attending your nearest suitable school with places available
- And the shortest safe walking route exceeds 2 miles

You would be eligible for free school travel assistance.

Any parent/carers who make an application for a Reception 2023 place at St Mary's RC Primary School will be contacted by the admissions team following any decision made in March 2023 to advise on how to proceed with their applications.

## WHAT WE KNOW

### OFSTED Inspection Judgements

- 13 February 2018 – Requires Improvement – [View the report](#)
- 11 January 2022 – Inadequate – [View the report](#)

### Pupil Numbers and Admissions

In October 2022 St Mary's RC Primary School had 110 pupils on roll against a capacity of 168 places. There were 58 (34.5%) vacant places. This is shown in the table below.

	PAN	N	R	1	2	3	4	5	6
St Mary's RC Primary School	24	6	13	13	15	13	18	20	12

Figure 1. 2022 pupil numbers taken from October 2022 pupil census

Pupil numbers have been relatively low for some time however pupil numbers this year mark their lowest point in 9 years as illustrated in the chart below.

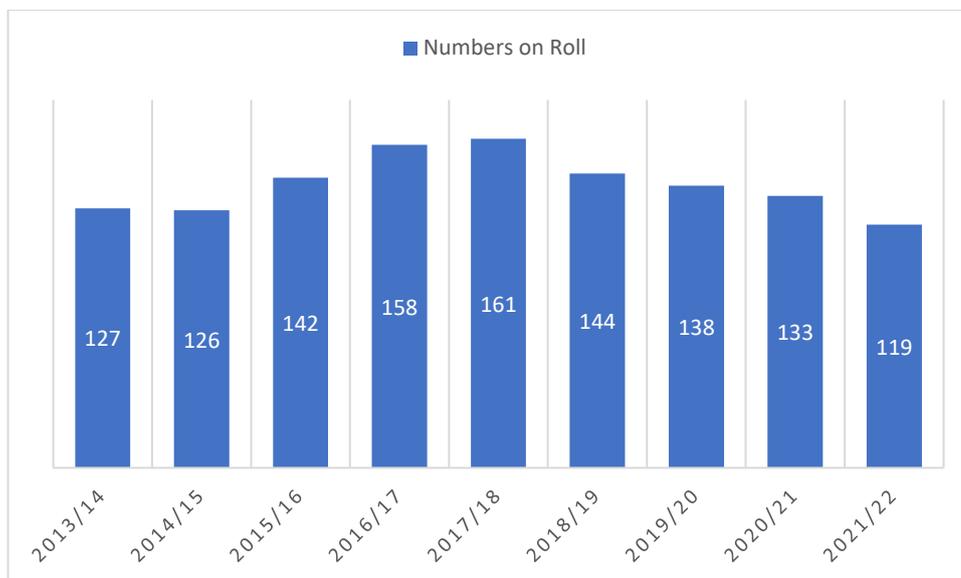


Figure 2. Total numbers on rolls from January census

In July 2022, 22 pupils left the school from year 6 transitioning to secondary school. The incoming Reception cohort only had 13 pupils meaning the school had a net loss of 9 pupils entering the new 2022/23 academic year.

Preferences for the school have declined over the past 5 years. The table below illustrates the number of preferences expressed for reception places at the school between 2017 and 2022.

Admissions Intake Year	Preference Expressed							Total
	1 <sup>st</sup>	2nd	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4th	5th	6th	Other	
Reception Intake 2017	32	10	4	5	1	1	0	53
Reception Intake 2018	18	7	6	3	3	0	0	37
Reception Intake 2019	19	8	0	1	0	1	1	30
Reception Intake 2020	14	6	1	0	1	0	0	22
Reception Intake 2021	13	3	2	0	0	2	2	22
Reception Intake 2022	13	5	3	2	1	0	1	25

Figure 3. Number of preferences expressed ordered by 1-6 by Reception intake admissions round.

'Other' represents non-parental preferences where preferences have been expressed by LA as the nearest school with places available.

## Finances

The budget for 2022/23 academic year c. £690k based on October 2021 school census numbers.

School surplus balances have reduced from £54k in 2018/19 to a final 2021/22 balance of -£40k in March 2022.

The LA provides additional financial support of £50k per year to maintain separate classes across key stage one.

The current short to medium term forecast is for a final year-end deficit of -£20k by end of 2022/23 financial year based on recent school in-year budget monitoring updates, however the overall budget position continues to provide an in-year and unsustainable deficit position every subsequent year rising to a cumulative deficit of -£300k by 2026/27

# Letter from the Diocese



Our Ref: SAS/AW/904

12<sup>th</sup> October 2022

Mr T Bowman  
Director of Education  
Stockport Local Authority

Dear Tim

I am writing to update you on the diocesan position in relation to St Mary's and the possible receipt of a Directly Aided Voluntary School Order. As you know, the school is in a vulnerable position in that the number of Catholic families choosing the school has declined over a long period of time. In September 2024, if the current trend continues, there will be around 70 pupils on roll. Today, the percentage of those who are Catholic is 23% and is reducing further. Consequently, the diocese believes that the long-term viability of the school is not within our Catholic Academy Trust that covers Stockport.

We note the DFE guidance; the 'proposer' to close a maintained voluntary aided school may be the local authority or the governing board (diocese). It is the diocesan position that there is a joint responsibility to resolve the future of the school together in partnership. For the various stages and processes to be undertaken, this would be led by the local authority as the 'proposer'.

With the local authority, the diocese will continue to support the school governors to very quickly improve standards in the school so that pupils currently enrolled have the very best learning experiences.

I have copied this letter to Deborah Dempsey at the DFE North West Regions Group.

Yours sincerely

S A Smith  
Director of Education  
[@RCSalfordEd](https://twitter.com/RCSalfordEd)

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## Admissions and availability of places

The admissions process outlined by the Council provides an element of choice to parents who need to transfer from St Mary's to another primary school.

Place availability will change over time however an indication of the availability of places are as follows:

School	Number of places available, school wide
St Thomas' CE Primary School	71
Vernon Park Primary School	5
St Joseph's RC Primary School (Stockport)	46
Our Lady's Catholic Primary School	15
St Matthew's CE Primary School	24
All Saints CE Primary School	17
Whitehill Primary School	27

*Availability of places at schools 2 miles walking distance from St Mary's Primary School*



## ASSESSMENT AND ANALYSIS UNDERWAY THAT WILL BE AVAILABLE TO CABINET BEFORE THEY MAKE THEIR DECISION

- Travel impact assessment including costs of indicative works
- Equality Impact Assessment
- Environmental impact assessments
- Consultation findings from the per-proposal consultation
- Consultation findings from the statutory proposal consultation, if taken forward

# CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

- 1. Do you agree that the Council has no other option available to it other than to propose closure of the school?**

*Yes*

*No*

*Don't know*

*If you disagree or don't know, can you provide further feedback as to why?*

- 2. Do you support the proposal put forward by the Council to close the school?**

*Yes*

*No*

*Don't know*

*If you disagree or don't know, can you provide further feedback as to why?*

- 3. If a decision is made to close the school, how long should the closure period last?**

*Immediate, close by September 2023*

*1 Academic Year, close by September 2024*

*2 Academic Years, close by September 2025*

*3 Academic Years, close by September 2026*

*Other, please leave comments below*

- 4. If a decision is made to close the school, do you support the admissions process outlined by the Council?**

*Yes*

*No*

*Don't know*

*If you disagree or don't know, can you provide further feedback as to why?*

- 5. Are there any options available to the Council that you believe have not been considered?**

Yes

No

Don't know

*If you disagree or don't know, can you provide further feedback as to why?*

## NEXT STEPS

There is a defined statutory process in the School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013 which must be followed before making a decision on the closure of a maintained school. This is supplemented by further guidance on the process published by the Department for Education.

There are five stages to the statutory process which must be followed:

- **Consultation** The publication of this consultation document marks a period of consultation during which the views of interested parties are sought and which will be considered by the local authority.
- **Publication** Dependent upon the outcome of the consultation, the local authority will decide whether or not to publish statutory notices regarding the proposed closure.
- **Representation** The representation period starts on the date of publication of the statutory notice and must last for a period of four weeks. During this period, any person or organisation can submit comments on the proposal to the local authority, to be taken into account before a final decision is taken.
- **Decision** Within two months of the end of the representation period the local authority must make a decision on the proposal.
- **Implementation** If the proposal is approved, St Mary's Primary School would close on 31 August 2024.

1.1 The proposed timetable is as follows:

Date	Description	Purpose
6 December 2022	Cabinet decision	Seeking authority to proceed with the statutory process to consider closing the school
12 December 2022	Pre-publication consultation opens	To seek views from all affected and to consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The general principle of closure given the context and data available</li></ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To consider options available as to how the school may be closed including; Timescales, Admissions processes, provisions for staff</li> </ul>
15 January 2023	Pre-publication consultation closes	
17 January 2023	Decision by Chief Executive, Corporate Director for People and Director of Education.	Whether or not to proceed to the next stage of the statutory process and how to proceed
18 January 2023	Statutory Proposal	Detailed proposal published as to when and how the Council will close the school
18 January 2023	'Representation' Consultation opens	<p>A second stage of consultation which examines a more detailed proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A final proposed timeline marking the stages of closure</li> <li>A final proposed managed admissions process</li> <li>Other information relating to statutory processes such as redundancy, closure of accounts etc.</li> </ul>
19 February 2023	Representation Consultation closes	
27 February 2023 – 1 March 2023	Council considers responses to consultation	W/C 27 February Corporate Leadership Team, and 1 <sup>st</sup> March Children and Families Scrutiny Committee
14 March 2023	Cabinet decision	Final decision on the proposed closure of the school.
20 March 2023	Implementation (if decision is taken)	Call in period has ended

