

CONSULTATION OUTLINE: ST ANNE'S PRE-PUBLICATION CONSULTATION

PROPOSAL TO CLOSE (DISCONTINUE) A VOLUNTARY AIDED SCHOOL

January 2025

Introduction

After careful consideration, the governors of St Anne's, Church of England Primary School, have made the difficult decision to consult on a proposal to close the school in the Summer Term of 2025.

Why are we proposing to close the school?

1. This proposal is primarily driven by the governors' commitment to ensuring the pupils at St Anne's receive the highest quality education. With the recent restructuring and falling pupil numbers impacting on Reception intake, the forecast for the long-term sustainability of St Anne's is a major financial concern for the governors at the school. The school has been and is still well led and has been financially secure to date. Moreover, the continued decline in the number of applications means that the financial security of the school is at risk. This will impact on the quality of education the school will be able to deliver.

Governors are committed through this consultation, to be clear and transparent, to listen to and act on the views and concerns of those affected, and to provide reassurance.

Background information

2. St Anne's, Church of England Primary School, is a voluntary aided, one-form entry, co-educational primary school, located in the London Borough of Wandsworth.
3. The Pupil Admission Number (PAN) for each year group is 30. The school is part of the educational provision of the Southwark Diocesan Board of Education and the London Borough of Wandsworth. The school is situated in St Ann's Hill Wandsworth SW18 2RU.
4. In recent years, the school has not filled the 30 places it is able to admit each year. This academic year, starting September 2024, only 8 children took up Reception class places, 19 joined Reception the previous year. St Anne's has a capacity of 210 across all year groups of the school. Only 90 places are currently taken. The school has 120 places empty. This equates to 57% surplus places Years Reception to 6, which is substantially above the Council's average vacancy level of 15%.
5. On 26 November 2024, after significant consideration, the governing body of St Anne's Primary School reluctantly took the decision to propose to close the school at the end of the academic year. This decision was taken with the support of the Southwark Diocesan Board of Education (SDBE) and based on information provided by Wandsworth Local Authority (LA) Education Service. Several reasons contributed to this position including;
 - *The pupil roll has fallen over the past five years but with a recent substantive reduction following an essential restructure resulting in reduced (pupil led) funding: falling birth rates indicate that the roll is highly unlikely to recover at least until 2031 based on GLA projections. The more pupils a school has, the more funding it receives. Unused school places have an immediate cost for schools through reduced budgets.*
 - *This reduced funding has created significant strains on the school's budget forcing the school to spend all its reserves to manage in year, essential expenditure. With all reserves exhausted, the school is now facing a deficit moving forward of Circa £300,000 and even if a further restructure is undertaken the school will have a growing deficit which is unsustainable. The combined circumstances outlined above have made it inevitable that the school will rapidly incur further debt if it remains open, and not be able to balance its budget in year, or reverse the predicted growing debt without significant, additional funding.*

- *The school has already undertaken class re-organisation to ensure the best education for its pupils. This included merging of classes in KS1 and KS2. Any further reorganisation will certainly reduce the broad and balanced curriculum that it would be reasonable to expect of a primary school.*
- *The current number of Pupils in Year 6 is 26, when these children leave the school at the end of the year, our roll number will further decrease significantly.*

Pupil numbers

6. Over the last 12 years, across London, the school age pupil population has grown by over 10%. At its peak in 2018, the primary school population had grown by over 20%, from circa 15,600 in 2010 to 18,800. However, since 2018, early years and primary school numbers have decreased by over 14%.

During the same period school capacity has increased by almost 40%. Capacity peaked in 2021, 3 years later than the population peak. There are many reasons for this.

- The birth rate has been consistently falling since 2011.
- Previous forecasting of demand was affected by Brexit and Covid 19 pandemic, which resulted in families moving out of London.
- An increasing number of families have moved out of inner London due to the cost-of-living crisis.
- Where regeneration has replaced estate housing with private housing, there has been relocation of communities out of London.
- New housing is not attracting families in with school aged children.
- The academy and free school agenda and diversity added school places into a system that was already sufficient.

As a result, Wandsworth now has 15% surplus capacity across its primary schools. St. Anne's however has been particularly affected with a surplus capacity of 57%.

7. St Anne's CofE Primary School is situated in the Council's Planning Area 8 (Wandsworth Town Ward). There are 4 other local schools situated within this planning area. In September 2024, these schools admitted a total of 149 pupils into their reception classes with a combined PAN (capacity) of 210. Overall, Reception aged pupil numbers in this area are projected to decrease to 135 by 2028. In total there are 13 other primary schools situated within one mile of St Anne's. Based on most recent vacancy returns, there are currently 61 reception vacancies at these schools and 550 vacancies across Reception to Year 6 with 485 vacancies across Reception to Year 5.
8. School funding is dependent on pupil numbers. Vacant school places have an immediate impact for schools through reduced budgets, which in turn can affect the overall sustainability and quality of education standards at the school. The local authority confirmed at the beginning of this year that the school received another low number of applicants for September 2025. The school received a total of 21 applications of which only 3 were first preferences for places in Reception for September 2025.

Financial Position

9. The governing body has reluctantly reached the view that St Anne's CofE Primary School can no longer continue to provide a high quality of education for all children attending the school in a way that is financially sustainable going forwards. It is recognised by all, that over the years, St Anne's has successfully provided a high quality of education to the whole community. However, once numbers of pupils attending start to fall and consequently budgets shrink, the opportunities and choices offered to pupils and parents are reduced, and a sufficiently wider and enriched curriculum offer becomes unsustainable.

10. As detailed above, pupil numbers are falling dramatically resulting in reduced funding which the school receives based on pupil numbers. Between FY 2021-2022 and current year, FY 2024-5, the school's pupil led funding has reduced by £87,927. This fall in income worsens with a further fall of £465k over the next two years projected. The school has reacted quickly to these reductions up to now and has made necessary cuts however, it is not possible to make further cuts to mitigate the further drop in income going forward.

Year	Brought Forward Revenue Reserves	Income (I01-I05)	In year change in Revenue Reserves	Closing Revenue Reserves
2021-2022	£7,334	£1,313,958	£3,981	£11,315
2022-2023	£11,315	£1,121,764	£26,527	£37,842
2023-2024	£37,842	£1,222,817	£30,496	£68,338
2024-2025	£68,338	£1,226,031	£28,253	£96,591
2025-2026	£96,591	£862,093	-£96,414	£177
2026-2027	£177	£756,726	-£215,245	-£215,068

11. Reduced funding will impact on staffing and resources, which will limit the school's ability to continue to provide the high quality of education that the children in the school community need and deserve.
12. The school budget has been able to remain in surplus until this financial year due to excellent financial management. However, an in-year deficit is now unavoidable in years FY 2025-26 and FY 2026-27 due to the forecast drop in income as a result of the fall in pupil numbers. There is no scope for further cuts in expenditure to match this fall in income. As such, the school forecasts a cumulative deficit of -£215k by the end of FY 2026-27, a position which will get worse as the years progress. The circumstances have made it inevitable that the school will incur further debt if it remains open and would not be able to repay it.

Alternative options considered and rejected

13. A number of alternative options were considered before governors decided to consult on the proposed closure of St Anne's Primary School. These included;

No change: Doing nothing is not a realistic option in the current climate. If no change is made the school is likely to see a continual decline in pupil numbers, placing further pressure on its financial position. Further staff restructures are not a possibility due to the resulting impact on the ability to provide an effective curriculum and maintain the safety of pupils with such limited resources.

Reorganise provision over 3 classes: Governors explored combining classes within school to run with 3 mixed aged classes across the school. This would involve combining Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 as class 1, Year 3 and Year 4 as class 2, and Year 5 and Year 6 as class 3. This model would require further staff reductions and modelling suggests the school would still fall into deficit. It was also acknowledged that parents would be unlikely to choose a school with this model, further reducing pupil numbers.

Amalgamation: Consideration was given to merging St Anne's with another primary school. This option was discounted for a number of reasons; including the practical process which would mean the wider impact on two sets of pupils, families, staff groups and overall school communities. There was no viable amalgamation option with another Church of England primary school.

Admissions

14. Governors are fully aware that the greatest anxiety for parents associated with this proposal is likely to be the need to secure an alternative suitable school place for their child should St Anne's close, as well as the impact of any changes. In the event that proposals are agreed governors will work closely with the Local Authority and SDBE to support the school community. There will be a separate co-

ordinated admissions process, and governors seek to reassure parents that there is no need to, act alone, or to take any immediate action in response to the notification of this consultation.

15. If a decision is made to close St Anne's Primary School, a separate admissions process will be administered by the Council's Pupil Services Team allowing families of affected pupils to apply for other local schools. Pupil Services will consider new school applications for all existing pupils and ensure, wherever possible, they meet one of the parental preferences.
16. Wandsworth Admissions Team will make every endeavour to offer family sibling groups a place at the same school. Places will be allocated in accordance with schools' individual admissions policies. Parents will have a right of appeal to an Independent Appeal Panel if it is not possible to offer a place at one of their preferred schools.

SEND

17. The school currently has 6% of pupils on roll with an EHCP's and 26% of pupils across the school with additional SEND needs. The SEND service in the local authority where the child resides will work closely with the St Anne's SENDCo to support all children with an EHCP and their families to consider school preferences, taking into account home to school distance. They will also work together to ensure that where there are siblings, they can be placed together to avoid additional pressures on parents. They will give consideration to the wider SEND pupil cohort to manage transitions well and address any concerns parents may have.

Transition planning

18. The School and Community Psychology Service will work alongside the school's leadership team and help them to manage the impact of this proposal on staff, pupils and their families. Should this proposal progress, they will support the school leadership to develop a transition plan for children as they move to a new school. These conversations and this work will be carefully planned and managed sensitively in discussion with the head and senior leadership to ensure they best meet the needs of the school community as they emerge and if needed. The school is focussed on thinking about how we can take forward positive learning from this experience for children.

Given the cost of living crisis, there is a commitment to work with families with children in Reception to Year 5 who require the support to provide funding for school uniform as a result of any changes.

Transport arrangements

19. Vacancy data for local schools currently suggests that 100% of the St. Anne's pupils can be placed in a local school within 1 mile. At present, 75% of St. Anne's pupils live within 1 mile of the school. Therefore, it is not anticipated that there will be a significant impact on school journeys. Of the 25% of pupils currently living more than a mile away, we anticipate these families may seek schools closer to home and we aim to support these families with being placed in Church of England schools in their local area.

Local schools

20. If the decision is taken to close St Anne's primary school, it is expected, given the surplus of places outlined in the document that local schools will be able to accommodate all affected pupils. The school will work closely with these schools and the local authority to ensure that appropriate support is provided to all pupils during this transition period.

Impact on Staff

21. We know that staff will be anxious about the implications of any decision, and their wellbeing is important to us. We offer our reassurance that governors, the SDBE, council officers and school leaders are here to support staff as we navigate this process together.

If this proposal is moved forward, governors can assure staff that the school will remain open for the whole academic year 2024/25.

22. Governors anticipate that staff redundancies will be minimal as affected staff will be supported to consider their options reflective of their individual circumstances. There are known local shortages for teachers, teaching assistants (TAs) and for learning support assistants (LSAs), which will provide new employment opportunities for any displaced staff. We will work with all Wandsworth school leaders and wider SDBE school leaders to identify and signpost these vacancies and support staff to apply and secure interviews. We are very clear that regardless of the decision reached, we do not want to lose the experience, skills, and talent of education staff from Wandsworth.
23. Governors will continue to offer support to all staff in collaboration with the Wandsworth School and Community Psychology Service to work through and manage the anxieties and emotions which will inevitably be felt given this proposal.
24. To supplement the support outlined above, all staff have access to the council's employee assistance programme and further support through the SDBE.

Consultation and decision-making process

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:

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 governors.
Publication	Dependent upon the outcome of the consultation, governors 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 Anne's C of E Primary School would close on 31 August 2025.

Equality Impact Assessment

Governors recognise the need to have 'due regard' to the duties set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 (the Public Sector Equality Duty, 'PSED') in determining these proposals. An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken as part of the consultation process to identify the equality implications of this proposal and any appropriate mitigation, which we are seeking views on as part of this consultation.