

Division(s): <b>Isis</b> Also affecting: <b>All Oxford City Divisions</b>
--

COPY – Report to the Governing Body

## **ST GREGORY THE GREAT CATHOLIC SCHOOL, OXFORD**

**Report following public consultation by the Governing Body on their proposal to alter the lower age range to create an all-through school for ages 3-18 plus a private Nursery for 0-2 year-olds**

**OR**

**to create an all-through school for ages 4-18 plus a private Nursery for 0-3 year-olds**

### **Introduction**

1. St Gregory the Great Catholic School is located on Cricket Road, east Oxford. It currently provides education for children aged 11 to 18 and admits 210 pupils into Year 7 every year. The school is part of, and was founded by, the Catholic Church, and its admissions policy places baptised Catholic applicants in a higher criteria than those not of the faith. The school draws many of its pupils from “feeder” Catholic primary schools across Oxford, but there is no restriction on who may apply for a place.
2. The proposal is to alter the lower age range of the school to create a primary phase of education, making the school an all-age facility from Reception (F1) through to Sixth Form with additional early years childcare provision on site.
3. The primary phase would be located in a currently vacant building adjacent to the current school site on Cricket Road.

### **The need for additional school places in Oxford**

4. The Education Act 1996 (Section 14) places a statutory duty on local authorities to secure sufficient school places in their area. To allow for fluctuation in demand, in-year movement and effective operation of parental preference, it is judged that 8% spare places are required across an urban area.
5. To assess the need for future school places, forecasts of pupil numbers are revised each year, based on ward-level population forecasts, which are calculated from census population data, fertility/mortality data, Census migration data and housing net completions data. Oxford City Council’s Core Strategy for Growth to 2026 was approved by the Secretary of State in autumn 2010, and sets out the intention to provide at least 8,000 additional dwellings in Oxford city between 2006 and 2026. Of these, 2472 had already been built by the end of 2010/11.

6. The current forecasts predict average growth in reception numbers in city schools of 2.7% pa over the next 4 years, which follows average growth of 3.6% pa over the previous 4 years. The current forecast for primary age pupils in Oxford is as follows:

<b>Year</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>2011-12</b>	1321	1340	1267	1219	1160	1050	1074	8431
<b>2012-13</b>	1424	1286	1329	1273	1224	1207	1038	8782
<b>2013-14</b>	1459	1412	1269	1324	1271	1273	1204	9213
<b>2014-15</b>	1522	1453	1402	1271	1329	1331	1281	9588
<b>2015-16</b>	1560	1512	1438	1397	1269	1382	1331	9889
<b>2016-17</b>	1581	1548	1495	1433	1394	1324	1380	10154

7. On this basis, the number of Reception places needed by the County Council over the next 4 years is shown below. The current number of places confirmed for 2013 and beyond is 1380. The number of additional places (compared to 2013) the county council seeks to commission for each of the next 5 years is also shown below.

<b>Year of Reception intake</b>	<b>Target number of Reception places</b>	<b>Target additional Reception places (cumulative)</b>
<b>2013</b>	1586	206
<b>2014</b>	1654	270
<b>2015</b>	1696	316
<b>2016</b>	1718	338

8. There are a number of proposals at different stages of development which will contribute towards the additional places required. None is yet confirmed.

<b>School</b>	<b>Additional Reception places</b>	<b>Target date</b>	<b>Status</b>
St Ebbes Primary School	15	2013	Confirmed by OCC Cabinet
Tyndale Free School	60	2013	Subject to DfE funding agreement, decision date unknown
Windmill Primary School	30	2013	Subject to statutory process due to conclude March 2013
St Gregory the Great Catholic School	60	2013	Subject to statutory process, consultation expected autumn 2012
Other schools in	25	2013 /	Initial discussions with 3 schools

Oxford city		2014	ongoing
Wolvercote Primary School	15	2014	Subject to statutory process, consultation expected to commence January 2013
New Barton School	60	2016	Subject to timescale of housing development

9. In addition to the named proposals above, the county council continues to seek up to 2 forms of additional spaces in Oxford to meet the target level of capacity, through “Free Schools” and/or additional expansions of existing schools. If any of the proposals above are not approved, or prove unfeasible, the level of growth sought at other schools will need to be greater.
10. For the reasons set out above, Oxfordshire County Council supports the proposal by the Governing Body as it fits with the Authority’s strategy to meet basic need demand for primary pupil places in Oxford.

## Need for additional Catholic primary school places in Oxford

### Parental preference

11. For September 2012 the School Admissions team allocated places at the four Oxford Catholic primary schools as follows:

#### **St Joseph’s Catholic Primary School – Admission Number 45**

67 first preference applications received  
 45 places allocated (all allocated to baptised Catholic children)  
 34 applicants refused, of which 10 were baptised Catholic

#### **St John Fisher Catholic Primary School – Admission Number 30**

45 first preference applications received  
 30 places allocated (all allocated to baptised Catholic children)  
 32 applicants refused, of which 2 were baptised Catholic

#### **Our Lady’s Catholic Primary School – Admission Number 45**

79 first preference applications received  
 45 places allocated (all allocated to baptised Catholic children)  
 59 applicants refused, of which 11 were baptised Catholic

#### **St Aloysius’ Catholic Primary School – Admission Number 30**

28 first preference applications received  
 30 places allocated (3 non-Catholic siblings, 3 non-Catholics)  
 13 applicants refused, none of which were baptised Catholic

12. The applicants shown as refused had not been allocated a place at any other school ranked higher on their application. The last successful applicant offered a place lived within 1.4 miles of each school in question, and for Our Lady’s and St Aloysius they lived less than a mile away. 27

baptised Catholic applicants who had expressed a preference for a place at a Catholic primary school in Oxford were unable to be allocated one.

13. 115 non-Catholic applications expressing a preference for a place at a Catholic primary school in Oxford were unable to be allocated one.

**Quality of provision**

14. At its last inspection (2011) St Gregory the Great Catholic School was judged by Ofsted to be “Good”.
15. St Gregory’s has an established relationship in working with St John Fisher Catholic Primary School which has seen that school’s pupils’ outcomes improve over the last two years. St John Fisher Primary School’s Ofsted inspection report on October 26<sup>th</sup> 2012 says that “Teaching across the school is usually good with some outstanding practice , particularly in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. The school community has strong spiritual values that pervade all its work.” St Gregory’s governors believe they can successfully build their own 2 form entry Primary School to the highest of parental expectations.
16. In addition, St Gregory’s is running a related consultation on a proposal to convert to Academy as part of a Roman Catholic Multi Academy Company, together with Our Lady’s Catholic Primary School (Cowley), Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School (Witney), St John Fisher Primary School (Littlemore), St Joseph’s Primary School (Carterton), St Joseph’s Primary School (Thame) and St Thomas More Primary School (Kidlington).
17. There are five statutory stages for a proposal to alter the lower age range of a school:
- i. Consultation;
  - ii. publication of a statutory notice;
  - iii. representation;
  - iv. decision;
  - v. implementation.

This proposal has completed the first consultation stage, and a decision must now be made by the Governing Body of St Gregory’s as to whether to proceed to publish a statutory notice.

**What if the proposal does not go ahead?**

18. If the proposal does not proceed, it will not affect St Gregory the Great Catholic School as it exists currently, but the school would not be able to implement the changes to their curriculum and expand their offer of vocational courses which the additional space would allow.

19. It is extremely likely that the owners of the vacant Cricket Road building would dispose of the site, and it could be that an alternative educational provider would seek to open a new Academy or Free School within it.
20. There is a growing population in Oxford, and so a growing Catholic population. If this proposal does not proceed, there is a possibility that in future years more families wanting a place at a Catholic school will be unable to be allocated one as the schools will be full.
21. As a part of the County Council's overarching strategy for pupil places in Oxford, if this proposal does not succeed, additional places would need to be created elsewhere.

## **Representations**

22. During the Stage 1 public consultation phase (26<sup>h</sup> October 2012 – 30<sup>th</sup> November 2012) a meeting was held at the school on 13<sup>th</sup> November to give parents of pupils and other interested parties the opportunity to raise queries about the proposal with a County Council officer and the Headteacher.
23. A consultation leaflet was sent to parents of pupils at St Gregory the Great Catholic School, as well as to local councillors, partnership and other Catholic schools and early years providers including childminders in the area, libraries, local Early Intervention Hub, community groups, centres and other stakeholders. It was also available on the OCC public website and the school's website, together with full details of the various ways of responding.
24. 13 responses to the consultation were received:
  - 38% (5) of respondents supported the proposal in principle,
  - 54% (7) of respondents were opposed to the proposal in principle.
25. The reasons given for supporting the proposal were:
  - Clear need for additional primary pupil places in Oxford.
  - Benefits of continuity for both pupils and parents in their relationship with the school and in their education.
  - The perception that St Gregory's is a good school and that any primary phase of education at the school would therefore be good quality.
  - Benefit of having a secure secondary place following on from primary school, without the need to go through the process of applying through the admissions process again.
  - One respondent expressed a preference for the school age range to be from 3-18.
  - Two respondents expressed a preference for the school age range to be 4-18. One of these was a childminder whose opinion was that children should not be in a "school environment" before 5 years of age.
  - Belief expressed by Cllr Alaric Rose of Cherwell District Council that an all-through school would benefit the local children in ethos and in creating

strong relationships with parents, and in its ability to meet the needs of pupils requiring additional support throughout their school careers.

26. The concerns raised were:

- Concern about the increase in traffic resulting from a primary school being created. Also a related concern about whether, as it would be a Catholic school, children would be local or travelling from further afield.
- Preference that a vocational secondary educational facility be created instead of a primary phase.
- Concern about the effect on other primary and secondary schools locally. Cllr Bob Price, Leader of Oxford City Council stated the opinion that the proposal would compromise the intakes of other local primaries and hence their funding and future prospects.
- Belief that an “all age” school would be overwhelming for the youngest children, with the opinion that secondary and primary schooling should always be separated.
- Concern over the expansion of faith schools in Oxford generally and east Oxford in particular, including the proposed new Free School which will also have a religious character. Concern over lack of choice for parents seeking a non-religious school place for their child. Also a related concern that Catholic pupils will receive preferential treatment within the admissions system as the school’s catchment area will be wide rather than “local”. A related wish expressed that St Gregory’s would admit a significant percentage of non-Catholic pupils to avoid sectarian isolation. A related wish expressed that the new primary school be of a different faith to promote religious and community understanding.
- Concern that the governors did not publicise the consultation adequately and that therefore response to it has not been representative or sufficient.
- Concern that there was no costed plan for the proposal and that the proposal is not financially viable.
- Concern that the proposal would over-stretch the Governing Body and Headteacher and that they should concentrate on making the existing school as good as possible.

27. The concerns raised during the meeting at the school are included within those detailed above. Most attendees seemed in favour of the proposal as long as their concerns were taken on board. The meeting had approximately 25 people present including local residents, parents of students at St Gregory’s, Our Lady’s Catholic Primary and St John Fisher Catholic Primary. There was one question raised about the proposed admissions arrangements. There are no proposed changes to admissions criteria for September 2013 or 2014.

## **Making a Decision**

28. Sections 18 to 24 of the Education & Inspections Act 2006 and The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools)(England) Regulations 2007 (as amended) ["the Prescribed Alterations Regulations"] establish the procedures that must be followed when altering the lower age range of a school. The Governing Body should have regard to statutory guidance, in this particular case 'Making Changes to a Maintained Mainstream School: A Guide for Local Authorities and Governing Bodies'. ("the Guidance").
29. The Prescribed Alterations Regulations require proposers to consult interested parties and the Guidance lists these at paragraph 1.3. The Governing Body must be satisfied that the statutory consultation has been properly carried out prior to the publication of the notice. Annex 1 provides details of the interested parties contacted by the County Council that are required to be consulted with under the Prescribed Alterations Regulations. The period of consultation is not prescribed by legislation, although the Guidance recommends a minimum of 4 weeks. The consultation period was in line with the Guidance having run from 26<sup>th</sup> October 2012 to 30<sup>th</sup> November 2012, thereby exceeding the four week minimum requirement. The consultation was therefore carried out in accordance with the Prescribed Alterations Regulations.
30. A decision is now required as to whether to publish formal proposals for this proposed expansion. If this is the decision, a statutory notice would be published, followed by a formal representation period of six weeks. The decision-making power in terms of determining the notice will lie with the Oxfordshire County Council Cabinet or the Cabinet Member for Education, and a report will be put to Cabinet if objections in principle are received, for a final decision in due course.

## **Equality and Inclusion Implications**

31. Equality Impact Assessment of Oxfordshire's Pupil Place Plan (June 2011) identified that increasing school places at the heart of their communities has a positive impact on equalities through promoting social inclusion and minimising barriers to accessing education.

## **Financial and Staff Implications**

32. The direct financial implication of this report is the cost of the statutory process recommended, which is planned for and met within the County Council's budget provision.  
  
The financial implications are linked to the capital works that will be carried out and the annual revenue costs of the leasehold acquisition of the school premises should the proposal be approved. Publication of a statutory proposal to expand the school requires confirmation from the County

Council that funds will be made available for the necessary capital costs. The Capital Investment Board (CIB) has approved funding for the initial feasibility work to establish the preferred option for meeting the additional accommodation needs. The Archdiocese of Birmingham has commissioned consultants to work with the Headteacher and Governors to identify the accommodation requirements. Detailed proposals are being developed and costed but at this stage it is estimated that investment of approximately £3.0m may be required to meet the cost of converting the Cricket Road centre to provide suitable primary school facilities. The cost of this work will be shared between the Archdiocese of Birmingham and Oxfordshire County Council using capital funding made available by the Department for Education to meet the cost of providing school places.

33. In addition to capital costs there will also be revenue on-costs for the school for additional staff, resources and on-going operational and maintenance requirements. This will be funded from the schools delegated School Budget Share, which will increase in proportion to increases in pupil numbers.
34. Confirmation will be required from the Governors of St Gregory the Great School that both the capital works associated with secondary school vocational accommodation and the on-going revenue costs of the building will be met from their resources. A further statement that should the proposal to convert to academy status as part of a Multi Academy Company (MAC) be pursued that this statement will be binding upon that MAC.
35. There will also be on-costs to the school for additional staff and for increased maintenance requirements. The day to day revenue costs for repair and maintenance and staffing costs must be met through the school's delegated budget as part of the Council's Fair Funding arrangements, which will be updated to meet revised government requirements from April 2013. Should the school subsequently decide to convert to academy status those same costs will fall to revenue finance provided through the Education Funding Agency (EFA).
36. Resources for School Budget Shares are provided by government through the Dedicated Schools Grant, which will increase proportionately to increases in overall pupil numbers in Oxfordshire. Additional pupils will be reflected in an adjustment in the school's funding formula which applies numbers of pupils on roll and their characteristics. Additionally there will be access to additional funding for teaching costs associated with setting up additional Reception classes to meet basic need as agreed by Schools forum. This also applies if the school subsequently decides to convert to academy status.



**A decision is now required as to whether to proceed to publish a formal proposal (Statutory Notice) and if so, for which age range.**

**Report date: December 2012**

Annex 1      List of interested parties contacted by the County Council to promote the Governing Body's public consultation