

Appendix 10 – Response received during representation period

Dear Mr Henaughan

I write in regards to the notice to close St Mary Magdalen’s Catholic Primary School.

I was alerted to the proposed closure of the school when a petition was posted on social media, earlier this year. I am an ex pupil [REDACTED]

After stumbling upon the information, I viewed the Mayor & Cabinet meeting online (held on 10th March) and I followed closely the consultation process. In fact, I’ve read all of the documentation and have contributed to the meetings [REDACTED]

Namely:

1. *‘Can you explain the discrepancy? From the outside looking in, the deterioration appears to have happened very quickly. But, if issues were occurring back in 2017-2018 – then why weren’t they flagged?’*
2. *‘Plus, what measures were put in place by the relevant authorities, back in 2018/2019, to address the parents’ obvious issues with the running of the school?’*

I fully understand that falling roll and the ensuing lack of fiscal support has hurt the school, and I’m sure that is related in some part, to falling numbers in church attendance, but it must be acknowledged that the school was highly regarded for many years, and for Catholic parents in the area, it was the first choice of Primary learning for their children. (I would also make clear that many non-practising parents did, and still do look to Catholic schools when enrolling their children, because they’ve historically performed better than other non-religious schools.)

However, I still don’t believe that falling roll adequately justifies the decision to close St Mary Magdalens. I feel very strongly that falling roll is a symptom, not the cause, and I don’t believe the real problems, related to poor governance and school management, were properly addressed at the time. If they had been, then I doubt that the local authority would even have reached this point. Or maybe SMM would’ve been spared, and another school closed.

When discussing the initial consultation process, there was a general consensus among concerned and frustrated parents, that the problems below had been left untreated for a while:

“Resignations amongst a number of highly paid staff who did not have the best interests of the school at heart”.

“Several inefficient managers affecting the morale of teaching staff”.

“Reduced funding when it really mattered”.

“Certain pupils not being allowed to sit the SATS”.

“Lack of managerial expertise, particularly in regard to kids with learning difficulties”.

“Lack of any real support, consistent by the local authority”.

“The eye always being on SATS results, rather than distance travelled”.

Many said that robust teaching policies should’ve been put in place much sooner, and there was a general feeling that the school was being left to rot.

The comments made in Meeting 2 reveal that it was very much the actions of certain members of governance, management or/and staff at the school, left undetected for so long, which were the root

cause of the school failing at the time. I appreciate that efforts were made in implementing new management in 2019, and I understand that the staff there now are doing an excellent job, which makes this decision so much harder to accept...But the question remains, who was culpable for not being aware of the harm which was being done to the school, then? It appears that those members of staff/management at fault, were not held accountable either, and apparently aren't likely to be, just because they *'no longer work in Lewisham.'*

Is that seriously a good enough reason to draw a line under the matter?

It also feels like the actions made to replace those at fault, occurred too late to counter the criticism which was already out there in the community. Issues which should have been dealt with by the local authority at the relevant time, which could have prevented the inevitable fall in enrolment. It's simple cause and effect. Regardless of denomination, parents aren't going to want to send their children to a school which appears to be struggling. A school in which parents were already deserting, under Section 9.

If issues had been addressed sooner, St Mary Magdalens could have recovered in time to weather the storm of Brexit and Covid. I mean, other schools in the borough did, didn't they?

This is obviously a letter to protest the decision...! All of the information/meetings and documents I've been privy to in relation to this matter, have never been forthcoming or easy to find, which is a shame, as I do know of so many people who were shocked and wanted to query the proposal, but felt it was all too late in the day, to have their say.

I still believe that the site can continue as a centre for learning, and that fiscal avenues related to that, have not been fully explored. Is there any hope of extending the closure date? Reading through the notes, it's sad to see that so many parents want the school to be given another chance, in some way shape or form.

Yours sincerely,