

## Parent Forum – Questions & Answers

June 2022

The purpose of this document is to provide answers to the questions raised at the Parent Forum on Monday 27 June. Whilst discussions were extensive, we have tried to summarise as concisely as possible – should you need further detail, please get in touch.

Any questions which could not be answered at the meeting will be followed up and responded to as soon as possible after the meeting.

**Date:** Monday 27 June 2022

**Time:** 18:00-19:30

**Attendees:**

Staff

Jackie Walker, *Headteacher*

Lisa Crook, *Early Years/KS1*

Claire Henderson, *Early Years/KS1*

Cheshire East

Mark Bayley  
*Head of Service – School infrastructure and Outcomes*

Mike Harris  
*Governance and Liaison Manager*

Fiona Burke-Jackson  
*School Improvement Officer*

Governors

Paul Leff, *Chair (Foundation)*

Katherine Cooke (*Foundation*)

Father Martin Coyle (*Foundation*)

Sue Davidson (*Local Authority*)

Anne O’Kearney-McMullen (*Foundation*)

Steph Traynor (*Parent*)

### Viability of the School / School Closure

**Who does the actual land belong to and is it likely to be sold for development?**

- Joint ownership is between the Diocese and the Local Authority (LA). The Diocese own the majority of the school buildings; the LA own the majority of the playing fields
- There are no plans to close the school and sell the land. On the contrary, the LA and Diocese are working closely with the staff and governors to secure the future of the school

**What is the minimum number of pupils required to keep the school viable?**

- An exact number was not discussed during the meeting, however as a comparison, the smallest school in the LA has a capacity of 42 with current pupil numbers of 28 and a Planned Admissions Number (PAN) of 6
- St Gregory’s has a maximum capacity of 105 with current pupil numbers of 64 and an estimate of 50 for September
- If numbers were to reduce further, the LA would take appropriate action to ensure the continued viability of the school – i.e. reducing the PAN
- The key factor in the viability of the school is the balance between pupil numbers and staff structure and the resulting financial state of the school. The head teacher and governors will continually monitor this balance to ensure the viability of the school

**Is anyone joining us in reception?**

- The current number of reception children joining in September is 3
- We also have a new reception pupil joining from the Ukraine and hope to be first choice to similar families coming to the village

### If numbers shrink any further is there a possibility the school will run with only two classes KS1 and KS2?

- Yes, this is a possibility should numbers significantly reduce over time. As stated above, this would be based on the need to balance staff and pupil numbers in order to ensure the financial health of the school

### What is the plan to increase numbers?

- The school has an improvement plan in place of which increasing pupil numbers is a key objective. **This is a key focus of the school leadership and governing body**
- The importance of word of mouth, offering activities such as Bolly tots/forest school and benefits of pre-school provision were discussed during the forum. Parent engagement will also be critical.
- *Encouraging new pupils to the school will be prioritised for further discussion at the next parent forum*
  - **ACTION: 'Increasing numbers' to be added as key topic for the next forum – including discussions around nursery/pre-school provision**

### Is there a realistic future for the school and our children given the numbers and damming report?

- Yes. The LA, Diocese, Staff and Governors are all committed to the future of the school – closure of the school has not been discussed at any point and is not being considered. Important points to note:
  - LA representatives, Mrs Walker & Governors discussed the significant progress which has already been made since the Ofsted report and outlined the ongoing improvement plans
  - Mrs Henderson and Mrs Crook spoke positively about their recent experience and commitment to the school
  - It was announced on Monday 27 June that OFSTED has approved the LA Plan of Action
  - Discussions for Academisation of the school are underway, between the Regional Schools Commissioner, the LA and the Diocese. However, it's not possible to provide an exact timeline for completion. Two points of note:
    - All schools will become Academy's by 2030 (<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9511/>)
    - At the point of Academisation, the school will become a new entity and the Ofsted report will no longer apply
  - Final discussions are underway for appointment of a new Head Teacher and should be announced soon (see below)

### What are the reasons families are giving for leaving the school, what is/has been done to try and reassure them in the hope they decide to stay at the school

- The majority of families have not contacted the school in advance of leaving. Those who have spoken to Mrs Walker have reasons unrelated to the Ofsted report (i.e. small friendship groups, distance to travel etc)
- **If anyone is considering a move, please do come and speak to Mrs Walker and/or the Governors so that we can address any concerns you may have**

## Staffing

### Why are all the staff leaving in such uncertain times?

- Mrs Arnold and Mrs Sunter are leaving for their own career progression, into roles which are very close to their heart
- Staff changes in schools are very common, however the size of St Gregory's does mean that 2 teachers feels more significant than it would be at a larger school such as Dean Valley

### Who is in charge of recruitment for future staff given the fact we have no long-term leadership in place?

- The Governing body are responsible for all recruitment and have worked closely with Mrs Walker to appoint the two new teachers. In this instance, due to the time constraints, the LA are responsible for appointment of a new Head Teacher

### When will Mrs Walker leave and what is being done to secure a new head?

- Mrs Walker was appointed as interim head for 2 terms and will return as full-time head of St James' in September. The LA and Governors thanked Mrs Walker for the time and dedication she has given to St Gregory's over the past few months to implement the necessary improvements
- The LA are in final discussions with an experienced Head Teacher to join the school from September. The candidate in question has excellent credentials, he is a committed Catholic, has been a headteacher in two schools previously and has undertaken OFSTED school improvement work. He has worked for both the LA as an advisor and for Ofsted as an inspector. He is very enthusiastic about joining St Gregory's!
- It is intended that the Head Teacher's time will be dedicated to St Gregory's (4-5 days a week TBC) and will see the school through to Academisation. At this point the Academy Trust will take over responsibility for staffing and could decide to retain or adjust the leadership structure (it is not usual for the employment status of the teaching staff to be affected by the academy conversion process)
- Contract discussions are still underway and the LA will make a formal, detailed announcement as soon as possible

### What will the staffing structure be in September? Are the TA's staying?

- Mrs Walker confirming the following teaching structure:
  - Class 2: Mrs Crook & Mrs Henderson
  - Class 3: Mrs Dobie
  - Class 4: Miss Hutchinson
- The full staffing structure will be announced ASAP
- *Post-meeting note: please see Friday's newsletter for a TA update*

### Nice to know a bit more about the new teachers for classes 3 and 4 / The teachers for next Y5 & Y6 class, will this be one full time teacher or two on a job share posting?

- Mrs Walker confirmed that Mrs Dobie & Miss Hutchinson are both full time teachers
  - Miss Hutchinson is currently teaching the English curriculum to Y5 students in Kuwait
  - Mrs Dobie is an experienced teacher with previous TA, SENCo experience and has recently been supply teaching at St James (Mrs Henderson and Mrs Crook met her during a recent visit)
- Both teachers are Catholic, very excited to be joining St Gregory's and enthusiastic for the future of the school

### Who will be the new SENDCo / who is current Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and will this change in September?

- Mrs Walker is currently DSL and the new lead for September will be announced ASAP
- In all likelihood, SENDCo support from September will be provided by a contractor (as is sometimes the case in small schools)
  - **ACTION: LA to provide further information on this support as a priority**

### How many of the remaining staff have first aid training?

- None of the departing teaching staff have First Aid training – therefore the first aid position will remain compliant as it is currently
- Post-meeting note:
  - Jessica Davidson (First Aid at Work)
  - Rosalind Davey & Faye Thornton (Paediatric First Aid)

## Education

**What provisions are there, or will there be if any pupil is behind in their learning?**

**What provision is going to put in place to support children who may be behind in their learning? In particular those in ks2 transitioning to high school?**

- Pupil support will always be a priority. Our small class sizes have the benefit of allowing teachers to support pupils 121 within the classroom without the need to take them out of lessons which would be the case in a larger school
- **If any parents are in any way concerned, please get in touch with Mrs Walker**
- See transition to All Hallows overview below

**I appreciate there is only 4 weeks left of the term until the school closes for the summer holiday, but there has been no homework sent home with Class 3 for quite a few weeks, is this a consequence of supply teachers being used?**

**Class 2 also haven't had homework for as far back as I can remember is this down to a new way of teaching?**

- **ACTION: Mrs Walker to look into this and update post-meeting**

## Links with All Hallows

**Given the low numbers once year 6 leave, how will the school best support children transitioning to high school where numbers are considerably high?**

**What action is being taken to forge improved links with the feeder school?**

**Will the school seek to do more days at All Hallows? This was a very positive experience for the year 5s yesterday.**

- A number of All Hallows events have taken place recently (Y5 taster day & open evenings) with others planned (Liverpool Hope residential, Y6 taster day & open evening)
- Mrs Walker is also taking 3 pupils with her each time she attends a meeting All Hallows (e.g. recent Farm visit) and is extending invitations to other feeder schools to use St Gregory's premises for joint activities. Father Martin also advised of his close links with the school
  - Mrs Walker is making a note of all interactions to pass onto the new Head Teacher
- **ACTION: Mrs Walker/Governors to pull together list of All Hallows activities to share with Parents**
- **ACTION: 'Supporting Transition/Improving Links' to be added as key topic for the next forum**

## Clubs & Activities

**Football was banned for year 5 and 6 last half term at break times. Is this going to be reinstated?**

- Mrs Walker advised that Football was only banned for 1 week due to Y6's attempting to kick all the footballs onto the school roof. Football is no longer banned, but no footballs are available and cannot be removed from the roof
- Discussion took place as to the impact on younger children and consequences for bad behaviour
  - **ACTION: Mrs Walker/Governors to discuss in more detail offline**
- **ACTION: LA & Governor representatives have offered to provide more footballs**

## On the subject of football, with low numbers does this mean the team will now not be able to play other schools? And netball too?

- Discussion took place as to the number of sports activities available at St Gregory's
- Team activities will still be available – with younger pupils being invited to join teams in inter-school competitions
- Provision of parent-led training was also discussed
- **ACTION: Mrs Walker/Governors to discuss in more detail offline to ensure pupils are not missing out on any opportunities**

## Any Other Business

### Wellbeing

- Mrs Henderson spoke about how the school is supporting the emotional wellbeing of the children. The My Happy Mind programme in school was recently praised by the Cheshire East Safeguarding Children in Education Settings (SCiES) team
- Staff wellbeing was also discussed. Parents commented on the more positive feeling within school and Mrs Crook & Mrs Henderson gave a personal testimony
- Mrs Walker advised that teachers and staff are providing reassurance to any children who may be affected by staff changes or friends leaving – however this may not always be apparent in class. **Please do speak to Mrs Walker if your child(ren) is in any way concerned or upset**

### Communication Channels

- School communications were discussed briefly and overall, there was a general consensus that key, important information should be communicated quickly and separately. Whilst the newsletter is the primary form of communication, information can easily be lost within general updates
- It was confirmed that the Chair of Governors can communicate key information on behalf of the school (with approval from the LA and Head Teacher)
- **ACTION: Mrs Walker/Governors to discuss in more detail offline**
- **ACTION: 'Communication' to be added as key topic for the next forum**

### Key points for discussion at next parent forum

- Increasing numbers
- Nursery / Pre-school provision
- School communications
- Homework
- Sports & activities
- Childcare support for parental meetings

**Please keep in touch!** The School and Governing Body need to hear your thoughts and suggestions and want to answer any queries or concerns you may have. It's important for us to keep communication channels open and work together as we address and improve the areas of concern.

You can reach us on any of the following emails:

[chair@stgregorys.cheshire.sch.uk](mailto:chair@stgregorys.cheshire.sch.uk); [head@stgregorys.cheshire.sch.uk](mailto:head@stgregorys.cheshire.sch.uk); [gov3@stgregorys.cheshire.sch.uk](mailto:gov3@stgregorys.cheshire.sch.uk);