

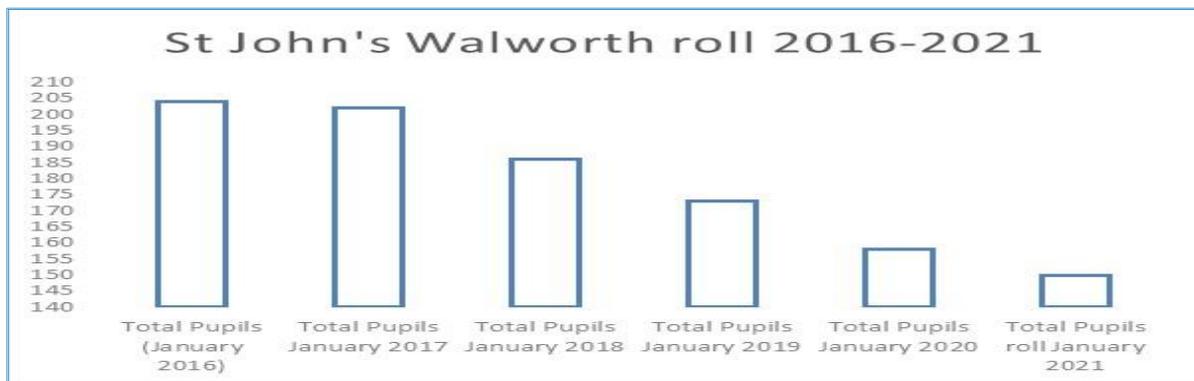
General:

Q 1. Why are you proposing closure of St John's Walworth Church of England Primary School?

A. Over the past few years, St John's Walworth Church of England primary School (SJW) has seen a steady decline in the number of children attending the school. The school has capacity for 210 children but for the start of the next academic year 2021/22, the school was expecting only 120 children on roll. Schools are funded through the number of children on the roll of the school so the 90 spaces that are vacant is creating a funding gap that is growing each year. The funding gap from falling pupil numbers at SJW Primary is anticipated to be approximately £350 000 for the next academic year. The impact of this is now felt in the school's capacity to adequately staff and secure resources to ensure a high quality of education for all children attending the school. If the school were to remain open, a new, reduced staffing model would be required from September 2021 which the Governing body felt would not enable children to continue receiving the high quality education they deserve and need. The decision to propose closure of the school has been taken to protect the education of children at the school, and ensure that, should the school close they can have a managed transition to other local schools.

Table 1 below shows the reducing number of children attending the school since 2016.

Table 1.



Q2. Who made the decision/recommendation?

A. The decision to propose the consultation on school closure was made by the school's governing body. The Local Authority and the Southwark Diocesan Board of Education (SBDE) leaders support this proposal.

Q3. What other options were considered before the decision was made to propose closing the school?

A. A number of options were considered alongside their relative risks and benefits. These included

- *a further restructure to reduce staff numbers*
- *potential merger with other local schools*
- *a delayed closure until September 2022*
- *joining the Southwark Diocesan Board of Education, Multi Academy Trust (MAT)*

A reduced staffing model would need to be implemented from September 2021 at a significantly lower cost to achieve savings, this would not enable children to continue receiving the high quality education they deserve and need. A potential merger with another local school is unlikely because of the size of budget deficit the school is carrying, this deficit would have to be taken on by any school we merge with. Delaying the closure until September 2022 would rely on a reduced staffing structure from September 2021, which would impact on the quality of education that could be delivered. Staff and families could also choose to leave before the closing date, adding further financial pressure on the school, lowering morale resulting in a very negative experience for the remaining staff and children.

Q4. Why is this happening during COVID restrictions when many people are already very anxious and worried? Why is this happening so quickly?

A. We recognise that it is a challenging time for many people, particularly children. However, the low number of applications for reception places for September 2021 and the growing deficit mean that the situation had to be urgently addressed as part of the planning for the next academic year beginning September 2021.

Q5. When are you proposing to close the school?

A. The proposal is to close the school by September 2021.

Q6. How big is the deficit?

A. In order to break even, the school needs a plan to reduce its expenditure by a minimum of £295,000 annually. It also needs to repay the accumulated deficit of £333,000 within a reasonable timeframe. As the number of children at the school falls further, this will become increasingly difficult, because the fewer pupils a school has, the less funding it receives. Even with significant reductions in staff numbers, we would not be able to achieve a balanced budget in 2021/22, and would just add to an already considerable debt in relation to the school's annual income.

Q7. Can the school not find savings on non-staff expenses such as cleaning or catering?

A. The school has achieved significant savings over the last three years through renegotiating contracts and securing equipment and services for free. The only area where we can now deliver the required savings is on staffing costs. The falling number of children at the school means that the school's debt is increasing each year and even with significant reductions in staff numbers, we would not be able to achieve a balanced budget in 2021/22. We would not be able to deliver the high quality education that our children deserve and need if we cut the budget further.

Q8. Have you considered mergers with other Church of England primary schools?

A. We have looked at this option but there are no suitable local Church of England schools we could merge with. SJW could not join the SBDE Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) for financial reasons because the MAT could not sustain a school with a falling roll and budget. There are fewer children at schools across the area, most budgets are being significantly affected by this.

Q9. Where will the children displaced by the school go to?

The local authority, place planning team has confirmed that within 0.6 miles, there are 14 other primary schools, all within Southwark with varying numbers of available places across all year groups. On that basis, we are of the view that there are sufficient places within 0.6 miles to absorb the pupils who have applied for a reception place or who would be displaced were the school to close (present Years R to 5), subject to parental preferences made through an admissions process.

Parents will also have the option to apply to schools which are further away as we know that some families travel from outside of the immediate area so that their children can attend SJW.

Staff:

Q10. Would staff be offered alternative roles at schools in Southwark?

A. The preferred option would be, guided by the SDBE and the local authority, to find alternative employment in other schools for staff. We are working with our Human Resources leads to request that teachers presently employed by the school would be considered for vacancies occurring within Southwark schools prior to September 2021.

Q11. Would voluntary redundancies be offered to staff?

A. A redundancy process would need to be enacted for any staff who are unable to find suitable alternative employment within Southwark.

Q12. How would staff who are in the middle of training/qualifying continue their training/qualification?

A. We would work with the Council's Human Resources leads to look at each individual circumstance and ensure that the correct procedure was followed to support staff.

Q13. Would staff be offered health and wellbeing support as they go through this difficult process?

A. Yes, the SDBE and LA have systems for this and this would be offered to staff employed at the school.

Q14. Would staff working on a one-to-one basis with children with special needs be able to transfer with that child to a new school?

A. Every effort would be made to facilitate this happening however, it will depend on the receiving school's ability to take on staff and, the individual member of staff's willingness to transfer to the receiving school.

Parents and carers:

Q15. Were parents consulted before the decision was made to propose a closure?

A. The consultation process now underway is an opportunity for everyone, including parents and carers to share their views on the proposal to close the school. No formal decision has yet been taken to close the school.

Q16. Would parents be able to choose or express a preference for a new school for their children?

A. This is an extremely important part of the process, the Governing body, SDBE and LA would work with families and local schools, alongside this consultation process to support families to secure a provisional offer of an appropriate, alternative school place for their child from September taking account of each family's preferences and circumstances. Whilst it cannot be guaranteed that every family would receive the school they prefer, a fair and transparent, admissions process that is coordinated by the local authority for all children at SJW will be put in place with offers for September made in May 2021 for families who prefer not to wait until the outcome of this process (which would be in July if the Governing Body decides to proceed to the next stage following this round of consultation). Full details and a timetable of this is available separately).

Q17. If a decision to close the school has not already been taken why is the Council putting an admissions process in place enabling families to apply to other schools?

The statutory process this proposal to close must follow a timeline that means any final decision taken by the Council cannot be taken until July, two weeks before the school summer holidays. July would be too late for families to start the process of securing alternative school places for their children to start in September. A coordinated admissions process for all families will be run alongside the statutory process with provisional offers of an alternative place made for September as this is in the best interests of the children currently at SJW.

Q18. Would practising Christians be given priority for available places at Church of England schools?

A. The SDBE would like all families who want to continue their child's education in a Church of England school to be accommodated and we will be working with local Cof E schools and families at SJW to try and achieve this. If there are more applications than places available then we will need to take into account each school's published oversubscription criteria, including the faith-based oversubscription criteria. Practising Christians who meet the definition set out in school's oversubscription criteria will qualify for priority under the arrangements in the same manner as they would have done if they applied under the normal LA coordinated admissions round for September entry.

Q19. Would parents be supported to look at options for schools outside of Southwark, such as Lambeth?

A. If a parent/carer would like their child to transfer to a school within Lambeth or indeed another local authority area, Southwark's admissions team would support them through the process and confirm whether or not spaces are available. However, the local authority arrangement to defer admission of children to September will only apply to schools in Southwark, and the coordinated admissions

process will only apply to Southwark schools so children may be required to take up the offer of a place before September.

Q20. Would families with siblings in the school be prioritised for places at schools that can accommodate all siblings?

A. Where possible, we would endeavour to accommodate siblings in the same school, but this would, of course, depend on the school preferences made by parents/carers and the available spaces at the school concerned. Because one sibling gets a place the other in a different (full) year group would not automatically be admitted until there is a vacancy. Siblings would be added to the waiting list for places in that year group, but it would be impossible to predict when/if a place would come up for them. Support to apply for places at alternative schools with vacancies in the required year groups would be available.

Q21. Can you guarantee that teachers will not leave before the end of this school year?

A. We have a committed staff who will want to remain until the end of the year and make sure that children are secure in where they are going on to next. Whilst we cannot guarantee that teachers will not leave, we aim to ensure they will have alternative employment opportunities in place to ensure they will remain with SJW until the end of the summer term. We understand staff will be looking for other employment but we would hope that for most, new employment would begin in September 2021.

Q22. What would happen if the Council's Cabinet refuses the request to close the school in July?

A. The school cannot close unless Cabinet agrees to the decision. In these circumstances, an urgent review of children on the roll of the school and staff available for September would be undertaken and a continuity plan put in place by the Governing body with medium and longer term plans also reviewed.

Q23. What would happen to the buildings if the school closes?

A. The buildings and land they occupy belong to the Southwark Diocesan Board of Education (SDBE), who would, in time determine whether to retain the buildings for an alternative use or dispose of them.

Q24. Would I qualify for additional transport costs if I have to travel a long distance because SJW has closed?

A. We would hope to offer pupils a place within walking distance of the existing schools. But we would look at each case on its merits – whether there was a place available locally, and how far the pupil presently travels to get to school.

Q25. I want my child to go to a smaller school; SJW provides this environment and I would like the same.

A. There are 14 schools within 0.6 miles of SJW are a mixture of 30 (1 Form entry), 45 (1.5 Form entry) and 60 (2 Form entry) place schools, so a smaller school may be available if this is your preference.

Q26. The closure of the school would mean a reduction in Church of England places – is this not discriminatory?

The *demand* for places in denominational schools has decreased substantially across Southwark, the number of vacancies in Voluntary Aided, Church of England schools has increased commensurately – from a 9% vacancy rate in 2016 to 19% in 2020.

Also, the number of preferences expressed per place through the coordinated admissions process each year in Voluntary Aided, Church of England schools have fallen by 11%.

The proportion of Voluntary Aided, Church of England primary places would reduce by 0.2% (because of this proposed closure). In terms of a balance between RC and C of E places, these both remain largely as they are presently - 54:46.

VA Places in Southwark	Before	% VA places	After	% VA places
RC	555	53.6%	525	53.8%
C of E	480	46.4%	450	46.2%
Total VA	1,035	100.0%	975	100.0%

Reducing provision in this area will mean that the remaining Voluntary Aided, Church of England schools will potentially stay viable and ensure a future for this group of schools within the educational landscape in Southwark.