



Free Schools Group
Department for Education

London

Your ref:

My ref:

Date:

24 March 2011

Dear [REDACTED],

Free School Proposal: St Michael's Catholic Small School

I am writing in response to the Department's request for the Local Authority's views on the potential impact of the above proposal. As an authority that supports choice and diversity in school organisation we welcome the intentions of the free schools programme to provide new high quality places, where these will meet parental demand and a need for additional places. St Michael's has kept us informed of their Free School proposal from an early stage. We are committed to maintaining positive dialogue and cooperation between the Local Authority and the proposed school, as well as with existing schools, as the proposal develops. We have considered the proposal in detail and consider that there is likely to be relatively small impact on existing schools.

In response to the request for contextual information, we have considered the proposal in detail on the basis that the school's preferred location is the Trevu building in Camborne.

Demand for places

Cornwall does not currently have any maintained faith secondary schools, although there are 43 Church of England and 4 Roman Catholic maintained primary schools across the county.

Information from the Catholic Education Service's census of Catholic schools in 2010 shows that on average 32% of pupils at Cornwall's Catholic primary schools are members of the Catholic faith, with a figure of 34% at St John the Baptist Roman Catholic Primary School in Camborne.

[REDACTED]

The St Michael's Free School proposal suggests that the immigrant community of Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese families in Cornwall often choose Catholic primary schools. There is some evidence to suggest that this is the case. In the January 2010 Census, 9.7% of pupils at St John the Baptist Catholic Primary School in Camborne were identified as speaking English as an Additional Language (EAL), with the vast majority speaking Polish or Portuguese as their first language. This compares to 1.5% of pupils with EAL in the county as a whole and 1.7% in the Camborne, Pool and Redruth network area. Similarly, 9.1% of pupils at St Mary's RC Primary School in Penzance were identified with EAL, compared to 1.7% in the network area.

The town of Camborne is served by seven maintained primary schools and one 11-18 secondary school, which has recently applied for Academy status. The neighbouring towns of Pool and Redruth which make up the wider urban conurbation are served by a further two secondary schools, one 11-16 and one 11-18. There is also a large Further Education College.

The table below shows the Local Authority's latest forecasts for pupil numbers at the three secondary schools.

	Number on Roll						
	Net Capacity (2010)	Sept 2010 (actual)	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Camborne Science and Community College	1419	1307	1331	1353	1348	1318	1297
Pool Business and Enterprise College	1058	885	945	994	996	971	970
Redruth School: A Technology College	1416	1092	1049	972	910	909	924
TOTAL	3893	3284	3325	3319	3254	3198	3191

The figures indicate that overall secondary pupil numbers are expected to rise over the next couple of years, but then dip again slightly. We are, however, currently seeing a rise in reception admissions to primary schools in the area which we would anticipate resulting in a corresponding rise in secondary pupil numbers in several years time.

In addition, the Camborne Pool Redruth area is one that has been earmarked for housing development in the future. The timescale and impact of such development is difficult to predict and demand for additional places is likely to materialise in the medium (the next decade or so) rather than the short term, as indicated by the table above. We would therefore consider that there may be some impact on the numbers on roll of existing schools by the creation of additional places in the short term.



Admissions

The Local Authority takes the issue of fair admissions to schools and its role in the local coordination of admissions very seriously. We work effectively with other schools in Cornwall which are their own admissions authority and will work closely with the Directors of St Michael's to ensure they are aware of the procedures for providing the Authority with their admissions arrangements.

We will also ensure that the option of applying for a place at a Free School is fairly and clearly presented to parents. Cornwall's prospectus for secondary transfer in September 2012 will be finalised in summer 2011. If the school's admissions arrangements for September 2012 are not finalised for inclusion in the prospectus, it may be necessary to make arrangements to notify parents of the arrangements separately.

Cornwall's current School Transport Policy contains provisions for entitlement to free or subsidised transport on denominational grounds where parents can demonstrate that they belong to, and actively support, a church relevant to the denominational school in questions. For secondary schools the school must be within a ten mile radius of the home. In addition, children of secondary school age from low income families are entitled to free transport to the nearest school preferred by reason of a parent's religion or belief where this is between 2 and 15 miles away.

As Cornwall does not currently have any faith secondary schools, the proposed Free School could generate additional transport costs for the local authority as a result of the above policies. However, transport to schools on denominational grounds is not a statutory duty and Cornwall is currently in the process of reviewing its School Transport Policy.

Curriculum

The St Michael's Free School proposal anticipates that the school will have a maximum number on roll of 300 pupils, and that class sizes will be limited to 20. Whilst we appreciate the school's desire for small class sizes, we have concerns about the financial viability of delivering a broad curriculum entitlement as outlined in the proposals in a school of this size and class organisation. The Local Authority would not consider a 300 place secondary school to be financially viable because it would not be possible to fund a curriculum offer which would provide the full range of curriculum entitlement for the young person. Any admission number below the 300 envisaged would be likely to add further financial pressure on the school.



Integrated support services

Cornwall Council's Directorate of Children, Schools and Families has developed integrated Locality Teams across Cornwall to ensure that children, young people (aged -9 months to 18, plus those aged up to 24 who are in care and have learning difficulties and/or disabilities) and their families receive the universal services that they are entitled to and the additional services they need.

The Camborne, Pool and Redruth Locality Manager has already been involved in site visits and discussion with relevant parties and St Michael's about the proposed Free School. Any provision available through the services of the locality would be accessible to the community attending the free school in just the same way as other existing education provision. The locality provides an effective partnership approach to ensure that services are delivered around the needs of children and families. These services include:

- Services delivered from a network of Children's Centres including delivery of the core offer for Children's Centres, Extended Services, Parenting, Play and the Family Information Service;
- Youth and Community Services delivered from Young People Centres, Youth Centres and Youth Cornwall Outreach Projects;
- Additional Support Services delivered or commissioned through a Locality team providing family support, behaviour management support, education welfare support, primary mental health support, early years support, support for children with special educational needs, support for children with disabilities.

In addition the Free School development at the proposed Trevu site in Camborne, which is currently a Children's Centre, would provide an opportunity to work with the local community to review the delivery of the Children's Centre offer and not to diminish it. The required reinvestment of the £750,000 Sure Start Capital is essential to this process and ensures continued improvement of Children's Services in this area of considerable need.

Planning

The school's favoured location, the Trevu building in Camborne, is very close to the town train station on the main railway line through the county and the road to the school includes a level crossing very near to the school's entrance. Whilst we appreciate that the school sees great benefits to this location in terms of pupils travelling to the school, we have serious concerns regarding traffic impact and pupil safety. We believe that a potential change of use of the centre to a Free School would





have implications that should be fully explored by a transport assessment and travel plan in order to ensure pupil safety and lessen impact on the local community.

We are supportive of the move to change the proposed date of opening of the school to September 2012, as we believe this will give the school more time to work through the above issues and engage with partners prior to the school's opening.

Should you wish to discuss any queries please contact [REDACTED], [REDACTED] ([REDACTED]) in the first instance.

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Corporate Director
Children, Schools and Families

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]