

DETERMINATION

Case reference: VAR/000511

Admission Authority: The Governing Body of Holy Family Catholic High School, Sefton

Date of Decision: 29 June 2011

Determination

In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 I approve the variation to the admission arrangements of Holy Family Catholic High School, a voluntary aided secondary school.

I determine that the admission arrangements will be amended to include the parishes of English Martyrs and Our Lady Queen of Peace which are served by English Martyrs Catholic Primary School and Our Lady Queen of Peace Catholic Primary School.

The referral

1. The Governing Body of Holy Family Catholic High School ("the School") has submitted a request for an in-year variation to its admission arrangements for the school year 2012/13 to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator. The School seeks to amend its admission arrangements to include the parishes of English Martyrs and Our Lady Queen of Peace which are served by English Martyrs Catholic Primary School and Our Lady Queen of Peace Catholic Primary School, following the decision by Sefton Council ("the Council") to close St Wilfred's Catholic High School on 31 August 2012.

Jurisdiction

2. The referral was made to me in accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (the Act) which states that:

"where an admission authority (a) have in accordance with section 88C determined the admission arrangements which are to apply for a particular school year, but (b) at any time before the end of that year consider that the arrangements should be varied in view of a major change in circumstances occurring since they were so determined, the authority must [except in a case where the authority's proposed variations fall within any description of variations prescribed for the purposes of this section] (a) refer their proposed variations to the adjudicator, and (b) notify the appropriate bodies of the proposed variations".

3. I am satisfied that the proposed variations are within my jurisdiction.

Procedure

4. In considering this matter I have had regard to all relevant legislation, guidance and the School Admissions Code. The documents I have considered in reaching my decision include:

- Minutes of the Cabinet members meeting of 19 April 2011
- Diocesan Protocol “*Admission to Sefton secondary Schools*”
- the referrals and supporting documents from the governing body of the School
- minutes of the governing body meeting on 18 May 2011
- maps of primary schools within a 3 mile radius and of secondary schools within a five mile radius of the School
- admission criteria for Holy Family Catholic High School for 2012/13
- the net capacity assessments (NCA) for the School
- booklet for parents ‘Admission to Sefton Secondary Schools 2011/12
- Ofsted reports dated January 2008 and January 2011

Consideration of Factors

5. On 19 April 2011 it was formally agreed by the Council that St Wilfred’s Catholic High School would close on 31 August 2012. This decision by the Council was taken after the admission arrangements for the School had been determined for 2012/13. In order to ensure that there would be sufficient places for pupils for those families seeking an education in a Catholic secondary school two Catholic secondary schools in the area were asked to consider making variations to their determined arrangements for 2012/13.

6. The Liverpool Archdiocesan Schools Department, supported by the Council made a request to the governing body of the School to vary its admission arrangements to include two of the four parishes and the linked Catholic primary feeder schools that are currently aligned to St Wilfred’s Catholic High School. There has been full consultation with those concerned and positive responses from those consulted. It is accepted that a single successor school could not be named as there is no Catholic secondary school within the area with spare capacity to accommodate up to 120 additional pupils each year in year 7.

7. The variation will enable the School, the Diocese and the Council to advise parents of the proposed changes before they express preferences for 2012/13, in the autumn of 2011 and make them aware of which Catholic High school the primary schools and parishes will feed in to. The two parishes of English Martyrs and Our Lady Queen of Peace which are served by English Martyrs Catholic Primary School and Our Lady Queen of Peace Catholic Primary School would be linked to Holy Family Catholic High School for admissions in September 2012.

8. The Diocese has developed a protocol regarding the new admission arrangements; and realignments have been determined after consultation and take account of the current configuration of Catholic parishes, and their relation to the primary and secondary school links that are being proposed.

9. In response to parental enquiries about a dedicated bus service to the School and improvements to transport arrangements, discussions are underway with Merseytravel.

10. The School is currently a smaller than average school that has experienced a decline in its roll over recent years as a consequence of demographic changes. The latest net capacity assessment for the school indicates that it could accommodate up to 876 pupils. The published admission number was reduced following consultation to 135 for 2012/13 and actual admissions in each of the last 3 years have been below 130 with projected numbers for the next 4 years ranging between 102 and 113.

11. The most recent inspection report which provides an assessment of provision and standards indicates that the School is a good school with outstanding features which include care, guidance and support for students that focuses on securing success for each one. The latest interim report notes that the school's performance has been sustained.

Conclusion

12. The Council's decision to discontinue St Wilfred's Catholic High School was made after the School had determined its admission arrangements for 2012/12 and therefore clearly constitutes a major change of circumstances. The School, Diocese and Council are seeking to manage the situation pragmatically in order to secure sufficient places to meet parental preferences for Catholic secondary education in the area from September 2012.

13. I am therefore of the view that the requested variation for the School is needed, practically achievable and that it will not have any adverse effect on other schools.

14. In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 I approve the variation to the admission arrangements of Holy Family Catholic High School, a voluntary aided secondary school. I determine that the admission arrangements will be amended to include the parishes of English Martyrs and Our Lady Queen of Peace which are served by English Martyrs Catholic Primary School and Our Lady Queen of Peace Catholic Primary School.

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Dated: 29 June 2011

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Carol Parsons