



## DETERMINATION

**Case reference:** STP/000600

**Proposal:** To make a prescribed alteration to St John Wall Catholic School, Voluntary Aided; Handsworth, Birmingham by altering the age range from September 2014.

**Proposer:** The Governors of St John Wall Catholic School, Handsworth, Birmingham

**Date of decision:** 10 April 2014

### Determination

Under the powers conferred on me by Schedule 3 of the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2007, I hereby approve the proposal to alter the upper age limit of St John Wall Catholic School from 16 to 18 years, from September 2014, in order to add a sixth form to the school.

### The referral

1. On 11 February 2014, Birmingham City Council (the council) wrote to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA) to advise that the Cabinet Committee of the council had been unable to determine the proposal submitted by St John Wall Catholic School (the school), a voluntary aided secondary school, to alter its upper age limit, within the prescribed period of two months following the period during which representations could be made, which ended 7 December 2013. Therefore the council referred the proposal to the OSA for determination.

### Jurisdiction

2. The statutory notice of 7 November 2013 was published in accordance with the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and Schedule 3 of the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained schools) (England) Regulations 2007 (the Regulations). The Council was unable to determine the proposal to make an alteration to the upper age limit of the school within the required period and, therefore in accordance with paragraph 31 of schedule 3 of the Regulations referred the matter to the adjudicator. I am satisfied that the proposal has been properly referred to me in accordance with the Regulations, and that I, therefore, have jurisdiction to determine this matter.

## **Procedures**

3. In considering this matter I have had regard to all relevant legislation and guidance.

4. I have considered all the papers put before me including the following:

- prescribed information from the proposer as set out in Guidance on School Reorganisations and the statutory notice;
- questionnaire responses and views submitted in response to the proposal; and
- other communications and information from the school and the council relating to the proposal.

## **The Proposal**

5. The proposal is made by the governing body of the school to make a prescribed alteration to the school by increasing the upper age limit of the school from 16 to 18 years so as to provide a sixth form at the school with effect from September 2014.

6. In September 2014, it is proposed that 40 pupils would enter year 12, proceeding to year 13 in 2015. A further 40 pupils will enter year 12 in 2015. The planned size of the sixth form is 80 students.

7. The proposer contends that the potential benefits of this proposal to increase the upper age limit are that it will:

- provide greater choice for the school's students and their parents;
- offer a Catholic education for children in the local community as the other school providing Catholic post 16 education is St Paul's Catholic Girls School and therefore not available to male students;
- improve the local post 16 offer by offering school based sixth form experience for a limited number of students;
- further improve recruitment and retention of high quality teaching and non- teaching staff;
- reduce the number of students who leave the school and do not complete Level 3 courses and qualifications by age 19, thereby supporting the national and local aims of raising participation; and
- raise standards of attainment and rates of progress amongst all students in key stages 3 and 4.

## **Background and Consideration of factors**

### Standards

8. I have considered the most recent inspection report for the school from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and had regard to the school's performance data. The school was described by Ofsted in July 2012 as a good, smaller than average sized school. It is a specialist humanities college and has been awarded the Cultural Diversity Quality Mark at Gold level. It serves a very diverse intake with high levels of free school meals, English as an additional language and special educational needs.

9. The school's performance data for 2012 shows that pupils' point scores were improving in each of English, mathematics and science. The school was in the mid 20 per cent of similar schools for pupils achieving five or more A\*-C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics, and similarly for pupils' progress in English and mathematics. I am satisfied that the standards achieved by pupils at the end of year 11 bode well for continuing their education in a sixth form at the school.

### Aspirations and Support

10. The proposal to introduce a sixth form seeks to raise pupils' aspirations and to ensure that more pupils remain in education and training post 16. Currently over 90 per cent of the school's pupils stay in education at 16 with most moving to sixth form college and a small proportion to the sixth form at other schools. The school has noted, however, that this move does not suit all pupils and that some would benefit from remaining within their existing school ethos and having greater continuity. The school reports that existing transition for some students at 16 is difficult and that their performance subsequently dips. It cites, for example, those students who have more recently arrived at the school during their secondary education and for whom a further change at 16 years is unhelpful. Given that the school intends that sixth formers should participate in whole school initiatives, including those with younger pupils as well as having opportunities for collaborative work in nearby colleges, pupils joining the sixth form at the school would have the benefit of continuity in a familiar ethos coupled with expanding educational horizons. The school argues that this will also have a positive impact on younger pupils who will be influenced by the sixth formers through, for example, mentoring and shared activities on the school council. The advanced subject knowledge of teachers and expertise gained in sixth form work is also expected to impact positively on younger pupils. I am persuaded that the school's argument has merit and that the aspirations of pupils will be raised. I accept that the establishment of a sixth form ought to have benefits for the school overall and for pupils of all ages.

### Curriculum

11. The school acknowledges other available post 16 education in the area and seeks to make complementary and collaborative provision rather than to be competitive. Planning the 2014 sixth form curriculum for the school is underway in collaboration with Joseph Chamberlain College, a sixth form college. The school's sixth form curriculum is intended to be small and specialist, offering only two

pathways. Courses to be offered will be tailored to the needs identified by the school. These are to provide A level provision, with a specific focus on helping pupils who may be the first in their family to attend university to prepare for university entrance. There will be an emphasis on developing essay writing and higher order thinking skills. The school also intends to provide some “pre-apprenticeship” courses in, for example, childcare for level 1 and 2 learners. In this they aim to respond to the needs of more vulnerable pupils including some for whom English is an additional language and those with special educational needs. These plans are appropriate given the size of the school and its context and its intention to work collaboratively and in networks with other providers according to pupil needs.

### Finance

12. There will be no availability of external capital funds so the proposal is built around the efficient use of existing accommodation and the possible addition of a Portacabin. Accommodation demands may be eased by the possibility of an additional lesson at the end of the day for sixth-formers when there is less pressure on classrooms. The possibility of some students being involved in network collaborative courses may result in some off-site teaching, again reducing demands on accommodation at the school. Plans allow for a common room and study area for sixth form pupils to be created at the school from existing accommodation. This and associated developments are expected to cost £10k which will be funded by the governing body.

13. The proposal does not detail the subject specific courses which may be offered but in response to a public consultation held on 17 November 2013 the possibility of A level courses in, for example, mathematics, English, history, law, chemistry and physics was suggested. Such a range would be expensive to offer with varyingly high resource needs. While the school may save money through its plans to work collaboratively with other post 16 providers care will be needed to ensure that costs are kept within budget and that the sixth form is not subsidised by monies designated for younger pupils. I am generally satisfied with the funding arrangements.

### Views of Interested parties

14. The council, at the request of the school’s governing body, conducted a pre-statutory notice consultation from 25 September 2013 to 25 October 2013. This was circulated to statutory consultees and others. The diocese was consulted and supports the proposal. There were public meetings and an invitation to comment on the proposal was offered to schools and colleges in the area and some beyond. Parents and teachers were provided with the opportunity to submit responses to a questionnaire seeking their views. Pupils’ views were also sought. I am satisfied that the consultation was carried out appropriately as required by the Regulations.

15. Responses to the consultation were overwhelmingly positive. Approximately 450 responses were received to consultation questionnaires. There was a widespread view that altering the age range to create a sixth form is much needed and over-due. Parents and teachers feel it necessary for the continuing education of pupils of 16 years as well as to motivate younger pupils and to contribute to raising

standards. Pupils were more equivocal. The vast majority felt that a sixth form would be a good thing, but fewer said that they would like to join a sixth form at the school. This is, perhaps, not surprising given the small size and highly specific provision intended for the sixth form.

16. Parents trust the staff to provide a high quality A level education. Teaching staff welcome the prospect of a sixth form. However, some have expressed concern at being suitably skilled to teach at this level. The school has acknowledged this need and will provide for the necessary professional development.

17. The proposal is supported by the council and there is no opposition from local secondary schools or other education providers. South and City College Birmingham wrote in support of the proposal. It is suggested by the governors of the school that the widespread support for the proposal reflects the small size of the intended sixth form, existing good relationships and continuing opportunities for collaboration. There have been no objections. I am satisfied that the requirements for consultation have been met and the responses given proper consideration.

### Need for Places

18. The current capacity of the school is 600 with 605 on roll at the time of publication of the proposal. The proposed capacity is 680. The current admission number for year 7 of the school is 120 and the proposed admission number remains 120. Year 12 would take up to 40 students on a year by year basis. As these move to year 13 the sixth form would have up to 80 pupils. The number of post 16 places created by this proposal is, therefore, modest. I am satisfied that there would be demand given the widespread support for the proposal and the fact that it would offer the choice of a school based sixth form education to pupils who would otherwise have to change their place of education at sixteen years. The popularity of the school evidenced in its over-subscription, coupled with the small size and nature of the proposed sixth form, further persuade me that there will be demand for the sixth form places to be provided. They are unlikely to have a significant impact on other providers.

### Admissions Criteria

19. I have noted that the proposal makes no reference to admissions procedures for the sixth form. If the school should wish to recruit external students from beyond the school it will be required to publish its sixth form admissions criteria and to comply with the statutory requirements of the School Admissions Code 2012.

### **Conclusion**

20. In considering this proposal I have had regard to all the relevant legislation and guidance.

21. I have noted the popularity of the school evidenced in its oversubscription and in the support shown during the consultation responses. I am satisfied that the reasons put forward by the school for altering its upper age limit to add a sixth form are reasonable and that the proposal will increase local choice and diversity, meet

the demands of parents and pupils and should help to raise aspirations and attainment among a school population representing high levels of disadvantage. I consider that the proposal offers educational benefit to pupils throughout the school and that it is unlikely to have a negative impact on other local providers. I am also mindful that the proposal is supported by the council and the diocese and that the proposal has not been the subject of any objections

### **Determination**

22. Under the powers conferred on me by Schedule 3 of the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2007, I hereby approve the proposal to alter the upper age limit of St John Wall Catholic School from 16 to 18 years, from September 2014, in order to add a sixth form to the school.

Dated: 10 April 2014

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Dr Oona Stannard