Office of the Schools Adjudicator

Determination

Statutory Proposal

Case reference:	**STP657**
Proposer:	**The governing body of the Gunnersbury Catholic School**
Referred by:	**The proposer**
Date of decision:	**21 November 2024**

Determination

Under the powers conferred on me by the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013 made under section 21 of The Education and Inspections Act 2006, I have considered the proposal for a prescribed alteration to be made to allow the school to admit girls in Year 7 from September 2025 and every Year 7 thereafter. I reject the proposal.

The proposal

1. On 10 January 2024, the governing body (the proposer) of the Gunnersbury Catholic School (GCS or the school) published a statutory notice conveying the following proposal for a prescribed alteration:

> "The Governing Body of Gunnersbury Catholic School seeks to change the school's pupil admissions gender criteria from boys only to coeducational (mixed gender). It is sought for the first coeducational cohort to be our Year 7 intake of September 2026. Over subsequent years, Gunnersbury would become progressively gender-mixed i.e. as the initial Year 7 moves into Year 8 and so forth."

Jurisdiction

2. The proposal was published under section 11(1)(a) of the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013 (the Regulations) made under section 21 of The Education and Inspections Act 2006 (the Act).

3. The proposal was referred to the adjudicator, by the legal representatives acting on behalf of the proposer, under paragraph 7 of Schedule 3 to the Regulations and section 21 of the Act.

4. I am satisfied that I have jurisdiction to determine this proposal.

5. The parties to this case are the school, the London Borough of Hounslow (LBH, the borough or the LA) and the Catholic Diocese of Westminster (the diocese).

Procedure

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

7. I note here that although the referral was made on 12 April 2024, the case could not be considered until the proposer's legal representatives and the LA had reached agreement on the documentation to be submitted to me for consideration. That agreement was reached at end of May / beginning of June 2024. The final bundle of documents removed any data that Ealing Council had provided to LBH and the school for the purposes of the statutory consultation. Those data had been redacted on that council's request and no party has raised with me any issue about the data not being part of my consideration of the case. I have checked as to whether the data is publicly available on the Ealing Council school admissions website but have not found that any such data has been published there.

8. The documents I have considered in reaching my decision include all of those provided by the proposer with the referral, including:

a) a letter confirming that the proposer has appointed Payne Hicks Beach LLP to represent it in respect of the referral to the adjudicator;

b) documents relating to the pre-publication consultation;

c) the statutory notice and the full proposal;

d) responses submitted by stakeholders during the two consultation periods;

e) the proposer's responses to and analysis of the submissions by stakeholders;

f) admissions data for the school and schools in the LA area for 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024;

g) documents relating to LBH Cabinet consideration of and decision on the proposal, including the Cabinet Report dated 18 March 2024, and a transcript of that part of the Cabinet meeting dealing with the decision in respect of the proposal on the same date;

h) documents from the diocese in support of the proposal;

i) a map of the schools in LBH;

j) responses to my requests for further information from all parties;

k) information taken from the websites of the school, LBH and the Department for Education (DfE) (including the 'Get Information About Schools' (GIAS) website);

l) the DfE's "Travel to school for children of compulsory school age: Statutory guidance for local authorities"; and

m) the statutory guidance entitled: 'Making significant changes ('prescribed alterations') to maintained schools: Statutory guidance for proposers and decision makers (January 2023)' (the guidance).

9. I would like to take the opportunity to thank the school and the LA for their prompt responses to my requests for further information. The diocese did not respond to my initial request (on 29 July 2024) or to any of the subsequent requests for information until 2 October 2024 and this, in part, contributed to a further delay in this determination being completed.

Background

10. According to the DfE's GIAS website, the school is an 11 to 18 voluntary aided school for boys (with girls admitted to the sixth form). It is a non-selective school of Roman Catholic religious character. The Published Admission Number (PAN) for Year 7 in 2025/26 is 184.

11. The proposer described the school in the documentation provided for the referral as follows:

> "At Gunnersbury Catholic School we provide for our students a caring, inclusive, Catholic education – one that enables superb outcomes, on all levels, for these young people. Our Ofsted inspection of January 2023 deemed that Gunnersbury continues to be an Outstanding school in every aspect of our provision. Academically, Gunnersbury students consistently achieve to a level that is amongst the very best in the country. Our 2023 Progress 8 score of +1.11 places the progress of Gunnersbury's GCSE students within the top 2% of all schools nationally. Sixth Form outcomes (A-Levels and BTECs) are similarly strong."

12. About the proposed prescribed alteration, the proposer told me:

"The School wishes to become a Catholic co-educational school from September 2025. It wishes to undertake this progressively, offering admission to both girls and boys at the Year 7 stage only. Admission to girls would not be offered to all year groups, meaning that girls would enter each year group sequentially. Therefore in September 2025 there would be girls (and boys) in Year 7 only, in 2026 girls (and boys) in Years 7 and 8, in 2027, girls (and boys) in Years 7, 8 and 9 and so on. The School's sixth-form has been coeducational for a long period of time, so the School would become fully co-educational by September 2030. The School is an Ofsted 'Outstanding' institution. The School currently has a Pupil Admission Number ("PAN") of 184. The School considers that there is an unmet desire within the local community for co-educational Catholic education and that, as a Catholic School with an acknowledged reputation for outstanding teaching, it is in the interests of the wider community for the School to change its arrangements to offer co-educational teaching to meet that demand. The School does not seek to increase its PAN."

13. The proposal was considered by the decision maker (LBH) at a meeting of its Cabinet which was held on 18 March 2024. At that meeting, the LA rejected the proposal for the following reasons:

"3.1 The recommendation to reject the proposal takes account of:

- Taking account of the DfE statutory guidance for proposers and decision makers – Making significant changes (Prescribed Alterations) to maintained schools, LA Officers recommendation does not simply take account of the numbers of people expressing a particular view, but gives weight to the responses from those stakeholders likely to be most affected by a proposal; in this case responses from local schools objecting to the proposal.

- Regarding the consultation process, the Council is satisfied that the statutory process was followed (3.2 below). It is noted that many of the responders from schools commented that prior to the pre-consultation stage, there was a lack of communication from Gunnersbury Catholic School and that opportunities to communicate their proposal were not taken via the established Place Planning forums; however, officers also consider that Gunnersbury's reluctance to informally discuss plans for their proposal in advance of the initial pre-consultation stage and was not in breach of the DfE guidance. The Local Authority has responded to these concerns raised by strengthening the terms of reference for the termly LA and Secondary School Place Planning meeting of Headteachers, with revisions to enhance the expectation that future school organisation plans being considered by any school can and should be shared in confidence with Headteacher colleagues.

- Officers recognise the rationale of Gunnersbury Catholic School as the 'proposer' seeking to change their category to co-educational. From a School Organisation perspective, we must consider the wider implications for the Hounslow School

community. Based on the responses received, the negative impact on the pupil intake of other Hounslow Schools, in particular Brentford School for Girls and Gumley House School FCJ, is a key factor for consideration and valid in the current context of declining pupil rolls locally and regionally.

- Officers examined every response submitted and carefully considered the risks to Gunnersbury Catholic School remaining as a single sex school against the risks to other local schools should the proposal be approved. With the current decline in numbers creating challenges for schools and presenting budgetary reductions due to fewer pupils on roll, it is essential that the local authority and schools work together to ensure a financially viable community of schools, providing a good choice to families. Whilst acknowledging that Gunnersbury Catholic School has concerns about the impact of declining rolls on their intake, the LA must consider the wider sustainability of all local schools and therefore officers recommend that the proposal is rejected."

  and

  "7.2 The Council has considered the relevance of the proposal to the provisions of the Equality Act 2010. Had the proposal come during a period of oversubscription to schools in the Borough, the Council may have placed more weight to the argument presented that co-educational provision is fairer in terms of equality. Given the current position of falling rolls, and because diversity of choice for parents exists within the education offer from the Hounslow School Community, more weight was given to the impact on sustainability of local schools."

14. I point out here that I have included the outcome of the decision by LBH to provide context. I am not bound by that decision. I consider the proposal afresh below.

15. I note the support of the diocese for the proposal for the prescribed alteration to the school. Support was initially expressed through the diocesan Education Commission in their meeting on 23 October 2023 and again in a letter of support in respect of the referral to the adjudicator, dated 10 April 2024. It reiterated its support in the documentation it provided in response to my request for further information, submitted in October 2024.

Consideration of factors

16. After recording details of the pre-publication consultation by the proposer, I will start by considering whether the proposer followed the correct statutory processes (in respect of prescribed alterations) as set out in the guidance. If it is found that the statutory process has been followed, then I will go on to evaluate the proposer's arguments in support of and the effect of that which is proposed, including a consideration of the proposer's arguments for the prescribed alteration and having regard to the factors, set out in the guidance: education standards and diversity of provision; equal opportunities; community cohesion; travel and accessibility; and funding.

The pre-publication consultation

17. Before covering the statutory processes, I record here that the school carried out a pre-publication consultation prior to the statutory process. I cover this process in depth as the outcomes have been included with the responses received during the later representation stage.

18. About pre-publication consultations, the guidance states:

> "Although there is no longer a statutory 'pre-publication' consultation period for prescribed alteration changes, there is a strong expectation that governing bodies and local authorities will consult interested parties in developing their proposal prior to publication, to take into account all relevant considerations".

19. To be clear, the proposer was not obligated to conduct this consultation, though it recognised and acted upon the 'strong expectation' for it to do so. The pre-publication consultation was carried out by the proposer between 20 November and 18 December 2023. Stakeholders involved in this process were listed to be: children currently attending the school; current and prospective parents; school staff; and local schools.

20. The pre-publication consultation document was distributed in the following ways:

- "The [pre-publication] consultation document was published on the school website on Monday 20 November 2023
- The consultation document, accompanied by a letter from the Headteacher and Chair of Governors were sent to parents on the first day of consultation
- The [pre-publication] consultation document was sent to the local authorities of Hounslow and Ealing, who subsequently distributed the document to the governing bodies and schools of the local area
- All staff were emailed the consultation document, along with details of how to share their views
- All pupils were emailed the consultation document in addition to a letter from the Headteacher and Chair of Governors encouraging for pupils to share their views on the proposal via the online response form
- A 'pop-up' directed all school website visitors to the [pre-publication] consultation page where the [pre-publication] consultation document was to be found (along with links for stakeholders to share their views)"

21. The pre-publication consultation materials provided the following information in respect of the potential proposal:

> "Adjusting Gunnersbury's admissions policy to coeducational entry would enable both girls and boys to experience Gunnersbury's outstanding education from Year 7

upwards. Foremost, this change in admissions will provide an appropriate and necessary response in addressing the overwhelming local parental/guardian demand for Catholic coeducational secondary provision. Furthermore, governors consider that admitting girls will offer additional opportunities and shared experiences to ensure that girls and boys are best supported to become part of, and effectively contribute to, a society that we seek to be more equitable and fair – not least in matters of gender.

Adjusting Gunnersbury Catholic School's admissions to coeducational would:

- Appropriately respond to the local overwhelming demand for Catholic secondary mixed-gender schooling
- Further our rich diversity – a foundation of our Catholic values
- Create a school setting that further reflects the composition and desired dynamics of modern society, thereby most effectively affording pupils with experiences and learning that best prepares them to positively contribute to our world now and in the future
- Build upon our legacy of educational excellence with the future provision of high-quality Catholic education for girls and boys of the local community"

22. During the pre-publication consultation period, the proposer provided the following opportunities for direct engagement with stakeholders:

- An email address, specifically for submitting responses, was provided.
- An online response form was provided.
- Each year group was addressed about the proposal by the school's deputy headteacher, with additional meetings held to convey the proposal to and receive feedback from children with special educational needs and / or disabilities (SEND).
- A consultation meeting was held for staff on 27 November 2023.
- A 'drop-in' session with school leadership was held at the school on 4 December 2023 from 4.30 to 5.30pm.
- A 'virtual consultation session' with school leadership was held via Zoom on 6 December 2023 at 5pm.

23. In terms of attendees, 40 staff attended the staff meeting, one stakeholder attended the 'drop-in' session on 4 December 2023 and seven stakeholders attended the 'virtual consultation session' on 6 December 2023. A total of 147 stakeholders submitted views via the online response form and there were six emailed responses.

24. The proposer compiled a table of data showing the outcomes of the responses to the online form, which I have put into Table 1.

Table 1: Outcomes from the pre-publication consultation online form

Stakeholder	Approve	Disapprove	Neither
School staff members who are also prospective parents	2	0	0
School staff members	14	0	0
Current parents	49	28	3
Prospective parents	7	0	1
Children attending the school	18	14	4
Other	2	5	0
Total	**92**	**47**	**8**
Percentage	**62.6**	**32**	**5.4**

25. Out of the six email responses, two were in favour of co-education and four objected. One of those four also submitted the same objection through the online form.

26. I have read through the summary of the responses made by stakeholders during the representation period. It is not necessary to include them all verbatim. However, I have attempted to provide what I believe to be a representative summary of the points raised below.

Those in support of the proposal:

- It will be of huge benefit to the school and the community and a ‘logical’ decision.
- “I wish it could have happened sooner.”
- There is a lack of choice for parents for mixed Catholic education in the area. It will give Catholic children in the area who may not have a chance to attend a Catholic co-educational school the opportunity to do so.
- A welcome development, enriching our community and ensuring the “sustainability of our excellence”.
- Co-education is best for students’ personal development and is of ‘huge benefit’ to both sexes. Single sex education is ‘archaic’.
- Co-education fosters diverse perspectives, promotes social interaction between genders, prepares students for real-world gender integration, provides a more inclusive learning environment that reflects the broader societal structure, encourages collaboration and helps break down gender stereotypes, contributing to a well-rounded educational experience.

- “We don't segregate genders in society, so learning in coeducational environment should help young people to gain important social skills.”

- “As long as the high standards of education/discipline remains I think this would be a great idea.”

- Those with younger daughters who have sons already in the school expressed that it would be ‘great’ to know their daughter could attend the same school.

- It would benefit girls to be educated at such “an amazing school”. It will enrich the school and allow the children to learn skills which will enable them to build healthy and natural connections throughout their lives.

- “The co-educational nature of Gunnersbury has been proven to work in Sixth Form and I can see no reason why it wouldn't work within the main body of the school.”

- It will bring many opportunities for the school and its children, including in the development of its sports provision.

Those who object to the proposal:

- “If it ain’t broke why fix it, Gunnersbury have had fantastic success, boys thrive, why change it”?

- Parents should have the choice of single sex or co-education. If the school becomes co-educational then girls will continue to have the option for single sex, but boys will lose that option as there will not be a boys’ school in the borough. That is unfair on boys who prefer / do better in single sex school.

- Would be very disappointed if the school changes to co-education, as boys learn better in a single sex school. It is ‘okay’ in the sixth form as children are older. It will change the dynamic of the whole school for the boys.

- The school should prioritise the education needs of boys and provide outstanding education for boys. They have different needs and learn differently to girls.

- Boys mature slower than girls. Boys should concentrate on their studies and not be distracted by having girls in the school. It will change their focus, discipline and behaviour. Boys need to be able to build their identity and go through puberty with confidence without girls in school with them. Boys mature slower than girls.

- There are already other suitable co-educational Catholic schools in the area as well as a number of girls’ schools in close proximity in a borough with a declining population of girls.

- “If the school are not filling their quota, I suggest opening their catchment area or improved promotion and representation in the community and beyond”.

- There are concerns that boys in the school already would suffer as a result of the school being distracted whilst it focuses on the change to incorporate girls and in attempting to increase the number of applications for places.

- The proposer has cited parental preference as a reason for the proposed alteration. This was believed to be incorrect and lacking the data to make the argument credible.

- After making the point that the school, though its marketing, has made the point each year that ‘boys and girls learn differently’ and ‘we know how to teach boys’, the school appears to be ‘giving up on boys’. There are concerns that boys will do less well in exams in a mixed environment than they do in a single sex environment. Teaching styles need to be different for both sexes.

- It will ruin the school’s legacy and standards will drop. Its excellence will be at risk. “Gunnersbury won’t be Gunnersbury any more”. The school will be just like all other schools.

- Concerns were expressed about where the boys, who would not get in because girls were being admitted, would be admitted for school. Boys who live further from school will not have the chance to be admitted and benefit from the excellent education the school provides.

- One respondent (a student) expressed concern that having girls in the school would increase the chances of the boys becoming sexually active and it then affecting academic performance. Some respondents were of the view that the admission of girls would be ‘divisive’.

- There will not be many girls in the school at first and this means that they might not be comfortable there.

- It will have the effect of other single sex schools in the borough having to admit both sexes.

Those who neither approved nor objected to the proposal:

- The proposed start date is too early. Proper preparation needs to be made for the change and this will take more time than has been allowed. It could be a really good idea if not rushed.

- Although the school offers a safe place for boys to find their identity in a society that is redefining their place in it, there was an understanding the ‘things have to change’ and trust the school to do the right thing for future students.

- Students currently at the school have had a positive experience, though were worried about “how weaker girls would fair” at the school.

- The change will not directly affect the family responding (as their children will have left the school).

- Some did not mind about the change but would prefer it to stay as it is. Whilst there would be the opportunity for new friends, boys and girls should still have privacy from each other.

27. The documents provided by the proposer for this referral provided evidence that it had considered the submissions made during this process. It was recorded that:

> “At their extraordinary meeting on Tuesday 19 December 2023 governors met to consider the outcomes of the [pre-publication] consultation. All stakeholders’ responses were individually considered by the governing body. It was recognised that the majority of responses received through the pre-statutory consultation were in favour of Gunnersbury Catholic School becoming coeducational. On considering all of the information and responses gathered through the [pre-publication] consultation, it was decided by the governors that transition to coeducation in September 2025 was the appropriate course of action for Gunnersbury Catholic School to seek. As such, the governing body took the decision to progress to submitting, in January 2024, a Statutory Proposal for Gunnersbury Catholic School to admit both girls and boys to Year 7 in September 2025.
>
> To best address the apprehensions of stakeholders who were not in favour of the transition, governors determined for a set of Frequently Asked Questions/Themes with governing body answers to be created and shared alongside the Statutory Proposal.”

28. I have seen the FAQs created for the statutory process. The documentation also recorded the diocese to have given its ‘in-principle’ support to the proposal at this stage.

29. I note that, during the pre-statutory consultation process, criticism was made that the school had not shared information about its proposal with secondary headteachers in the LA prior to the pre-statutory consultation process. However, since the guidance does not require this, I do not criticise the school in that respect.

The statutory process

30. The guidance sets out five stages to the statutory process when making prescribed alterations in the following order: publication; representation (formal consultation); decision; referral; and implementation. The process is in the referral phase (in that the governing body of the school have referred the decision of the LA to the schools adjudicator). I will consider stages 1 to 3 below.

<u>Stage 1 - Publication</u>

31. This stage involves the publication of a statutory notice, bringing to the attention of stakeholders the intention of a proposer to start the process of consulting on a proposal. Paragraph 1 of Schedule 3 of the Regulations sets out expectations in respect of the contents of the statutory notice and where that notice must be published.

32. The guidance states that:

> "A statutory proposal must contain sufficient information for interested parties to make a decision on whether to support or challenge the proposed change."

33. It also sets out the minimum that any proposal would be expected to contain (in Annex A of the guidance). The school provided me with a copy of the confirmation of the booking of the advertisement of the statutory notice with the West London Gazette and Public Notice Portal, and a copy of the statutory notice that was placed in those publications. I find that the statutory notice included all of the information that is to be included in such a notice and as is set out in the guidance.

34. The full proposal must be published on a website along with a statement setting out details of how stakeholders can engage within the representation period. The proposer told me that the statutory notice was placed on the school website in line with the guidance between 10 January and 7 February 2024.

35. A brief notice must also be published in a local newspaper and, as the proposer is a governing body, the notification must also be "posted by the governing body in a conspicuous place on the school premises and at or near all of the main entrances to the school". The proposer told me that the statutory notice was displayed from 10 January to 7 February 2024 in 'conspicuous places' on the school premises including: reception; the staffroom; the dining hall; entrances to school buildings; and within the main building. The school provided around 28 photographs of the notice being displayed in these places, as well as on various school access gates. The date and times that the photographs were taken were also provided. (10 January 2024 between 10.02am and 11.52am).

36. I am satisfied that the proposer met the requirements in terms of the publication of the statutory notice and details of the proposal.

Stage 2 – Representation (formal consultation)

37. About this stage, the guidance states as follows:

> "The representation period must last for 4 weeks from the date of the publication. During this period, any person or organisation can submit comments on the proposal to the local authority to be taken into account by the decision maker. It is also good practice for representations to be forwarded to the proposer to ensure that they are aware of local opinion."

38. In accordance with paragraph 2 of Schedule 3 to the Regulations, a consultation was carried out from 10 January to 7 February 2024. This was compliant in that it was for the

required four weeks. I note that the consultation also took place in term time, thereby ensuring that the consultation did not take place during school holidays. Proposals were invited from stakeholders which had to be directed to an email or postal address at the LA (which was the decision maker), whilst the school provided paper copies of the statutory notice and proposal if requested.

39. In terms of the consultation meetings held, the school told me:

> "The pre[-]statutory consultation took place over four weeks from 20 November 2023 to 18 December 2023. Substantive communication and meetings were arranged during this period including:
>
> - staff meeting on 27 November 2023 at 4pm (attended by vast majority of staff);
> - an in-person public meeting/ drop-in session on 4 December 2023 at 4:30pm – 5:30pm;
> - online public meeting on 6 December 2023 at 5pm; and
> - all pupils were informed at assemblies and encouraged to ask questions and contribute to consultation.
>
> To support the attendance of stakeholders, all meetings were scheduled during term time, staff meetings were scheduled in the school day and the online and in-person meetings took place in the late afternoon and early evening. These consultations were in line with the Hounslow statutory consultation procedures for previous changes made by the school, such as amalgamations.
>
> Having held these meetings, and given there was no change to the proposal from the pre-statutory phase to the statutory phase, the School did not convene meetings during the statutory consultation (representation) period. This is due to the fact that following the extensive pre-statutory meetings and communications, where the proposal was widely shared and views of interested parties received, it considered that stakeholders/interested parties had been notified and enabled to share their views and queries on the proposal. Additional meetings during the statutory period were considered duplication and possibly confusing, not least as the proposal had not changed from the pre-statutory phase to the statutory phase."

40. The guidance does not set out any requirements in respect of consultation meetings during the Representation period. However, where they are held as part of the statutory notice period, the guidance says that best practice is to take the timing of such meetings into account, for example:

> "• by holding consultations and public meetings (either formal or informal) during term time, rather than school holidays and, where appropriate, extend[ing] any pre-publication consultation period if it overlaps school holidays etc;

• by planning where any public and stakeholder meetings are held to maximise response;"

41. I find that the school took account of the best practice set out in the guidance in its approach to consultation meetings.

42. The LA recorded in the formal decision of the Cabinet on 18 March 2024 that seven email responses were received during the 4-week formal consultation period. Out of the seven, one was in support of the proposal and the remaining six objected to it. The six objections were made by three local schools (that submitted objections from different stakeholders in each). The LA recorded receiving no response from the diocese during the formal consultation period.

43. The six objections expressed the following concerns / views:

43.1. Brentford School for Girls (governors):

- Concerns about the impact on the 'unique and diverse' make-up of the BSG community and on other girls' schools in the local vicinity.
- It raises questions about whether GCS has the right facilities and pastoral and safeguarding experience in house to admit girls.
- It would lead to a reduction in the diversity of schooling choices for parents and particularly parents of boys.
- The reason given by the proposer for the decline in applications being related to the preference for parents for Catholic co-education is questioned. It is more likely to be because of falling numbers of children across London.
- The point made by the proposer, that there is insufficient demand for single sex Catholic education in West London boroughs, is actually unmet demand which could be dealt with by way of increasing the reach of the school's marketing.

43.2. Brentford School for Girls (staff):

- The claim that there is an increase is families wanting a place for their children in a co-educational Catholic school is disputed. The number choosing a co-educational Catholic school in Hounslow is the same as those choosing a single sex school.
- There is not the evidence available to support the idea that more families want a co-educational education as there is no evidence to suggest that the applicants met the Catholic criteria.

- The proposer should not place reliance on the number of parents responding to the pre-consultation as an indicator of an ‘overwhelming increase’ in Catholic families wanting co-education.

- Data should be reviewed in the light of Catholic families placing ‘Catholicity’ above catchment and distance and in the context of diocesan ‘quotas’.

- Concern that the impact on the Catholic girls’ school has not been considered and also where the boys who do not get into GCS will go.

- There are fewer girls in the local school age population and there are three girls’ schools within close proximity. Admitting girls to GCS would have an impact on those schools.

- What is proposed is in contrast to the collaborative partnership working that exits in Hounslow schools.

43.3. Gumley House RC Convent School, FCJ (governors):

- The governors object to the proposal on the grounds that it will not better serve the community and that full consideration has not been given to responses received during the pre-publication period.

- GCS is the only Catholic boys’ school in Hounslow and there is no such school in nearby Ealing. The proposal would remove choice for families in the area and would create imbalance that is particularly detrimental for Catholic boys.

- A significant number of local families still choose a Catholic boys’ school as first of second preference. Those families would be left with no option that matches their preferred education for their sons.

- The proposal would have a disproportionately harmful impact on numbers applying to Gumley House RC Convent School FCJ. Research shows that numbers will drop (as they did when another school previously opened in 2015). This may lead to Gumley House RC Convent School FCJ having to consider admitting boys, leading to there being a reduction in the number of single sex girls’ schools as a consequence.

- The loss of a Catholic boys’ school will create difficulties for other local schools for admission in normal entry points and for fair access when single sex education is preferred.

- The proposer has not given full consideration to all the responses received during the pre-publication consultation.

43.4. Gumley House RC Convent School, FCJ (staff):

- The staff conveyed their deepest concerns about and frustrations resulting from the proposal.
- The proposer failed to make any attempt to establish collaborative communications about the proposal. It failed to communicate the proposal effectively and consulted at the busiest time of the academy year.
- The information used to support the proposal has been inaccurately presented in order to create a falsely positive emphasis. The numbers presented by the proposer to support its view do not reflect Catholic applications patterns or school intake.
- If the proposal were to be agreed, the needs of one school would be prioritised over the collective needs of the borough.

43.5. St Mark's Catholic School (headteacher):

- There was no pre-pre-publication discussion with other schools.
- The proposal will have a detrimental impact on other schools in the borough.
- There should remain an option for parents for single sex education in the borough.
- There is doubt over the proposer's claim that there are insufficient places for Catholics within the Brentford area of the borough and concern that there will be too many places for girls.
- That the diocese 'advised' GCS to remove the requirement for a Certificate of Catholic Practice (CCP) in its admissions appears to contradict the argument that there are insufficient places for Catholic students in Hounslow.

43.6. St Mark's Catholic School (deputy headteacher):

- If GCS admits girls, it will likely admit more than its current 39 per cent of its intake from Hounslow.
- GCS will be in direct competition with other local Catholic schools admitting girls, including Brentford School for Girls.
- The greatest impact is likely to be to admissions to Gumley House RC Convent School, FCJ.

- This proposal was not discussed at any local education partnership meetings and the school did not consult more closely with other Catholic schools in the borough.

- There would be no single sex boys' Catholic school in the borough, impacting on parental choice.

- There is no statistical evidence to show there is an 'overwhelming local parent / guardian' demand for co-educational Catholic secondary provision.

- Although there is some understanding of why the proposer wishes to make this change, it will likely result in St Mark's Catholic School having to change its own admission arrangements in the future.

44. The guidance states:

> "Decision makers will need to be satisfied that the appropriate fair and open representation period has been carried out and that the proposer has given full consideration to all the responses received during any pre-publication consultation."

45. I am satisfied that the formal consultation was conducted appropriately. It lasted for the required period, was held at an appropriate time, and was conducted fairly and openly. Taking into account the pre-publication consultation period, I find that stakeholders with an interest in the outcome were made aware of the statutory proposal and were given sufficient opportunity to comment, to attend meetings and ask questions.

Stage 3 - Decision

46. I note here that the LA discharged its duty to make a decision on the proposal as set out under paragraph 3 (1) of Schedule 3 of the Regulations. It did so within two months from the end of stage 2 of the process, which is the timeframe set out under paragraph 5(3) of Schedule 3 to the Regulations. I can also see that the LA published its decision on its website on 19 March 2024, which is within the 1-week timeframe for such set out in the guidance.

47. The decision has been referred to the schools adjudicator in accordance with paragraph 7(c)(i) of Schedule 3 to the Regulations and within the 4-week time limit from the decision by the LA, as set out under paragraph 7(2) of Schedule 3 to the Regulations.

48. I am now the decision maker. My role is not to go behind the reasons for the LA rejecting the proposal; I will, therefore, not comment on the previous decision-making process any further.

49. I find that the proposer correctly followed the statutory process (in respect of prescribed alterations) as set out in the Regulations and guidance. I now move on to evaluate the arguments the proposer makes for, and the effect of, that which is proposed.

Evaluating the arguments the proposer makes for the prescribed alteration

50. The guidance makes clear that:

> "Proposers can seek to change their school from single sex to co-educational (or vice versa) but they should be able to show that this would better serve their local community."

51. About this, the proposer told me:

> "As enshrined in its proposal, the School considers that there is an unmet desire within the local community for co-educational Catholic education and that, as a Catholic School with an acknowledged reputation for outstanding teaching, it is in the interests of the local community for the School to change its arrangements to offer co-educational teaching to meet that demand. The School has carefully considered the impact on the local community of its proposal taking effect and believes that any adverse impact on local schools would be either minimal or non-existent, and certainly insufficient to outweigh the benefits to the local community - and in particular the Catholic community - if the School were to change its status."

52. Additionally, the proposer has, throughout the pre-statutory consultation and representation periods and in its referral to the adjudicator, stated that the reasons for its proposal to change to co-educational provision are:

> "At Gunnersbury Catholic School we provide for our students a caring, inclusive, Catholic education – one that enables superb outcomes, on all levels, for these young people. Our Ofsted inspection of January 2023 deemed that Gunnersbury continues to be an Outstanding school in every aspect of our provision. Academically, Gunnersbury students consistently achieve to a level that is amongst the very best in the country. Our 2023 Progress 8 score of +1.11 places the progress of Gunnersbury's GCSE students within the top 2% of all schools nationally. Sixth Form outcomes (A-Levels and BTECs) are similarly strong. Adjusting Gunnersbury's admissions policy to coeducational entry will enable both girls and boys to experience Gunnersbury's outstanding education from Year 7 upwards. Foremost, this change in admissions will provide an appropriate and necessary response in addressing the overwhelming local parental/guardian demand for Catholic coeducational secondary provision. Furthermore, governors consider that admitting girls will offer additional opportunities and shared experiences to ensure that girls and boys are best supported to become part of, and effectively contribute to, a society that we seek to be more equitable and fair – not least in matters of gender."

53. The proposer provided evidence in support of its proposal and I consider that along with submissions from other parties in this section as well as information from the DfE GIAS website into the schools in the relevant area.

54. I pause here to note that the guidance refers to decision-makers considering the 'relevant area'. I have not been able to find a definition of this term in the primary legislation, relevant regulations or the guidance. I have therefore given the term its everyday meaning, namely the area which is reasonably accessible to children of secondary school age living in the vicinity of GCS. GCS is in LBH, but it is situated close to the border of Ealing and I have also taken into account that many of the other single sex boys' secondary schools are further afield and boys' Roman Catholic secondary schools further still. To delimit my analysis, I have used the following distances forming two 'relevant areas':

- The statutory walking distance of three miles for children aged 8 or over as set out in the DfE's "Travel to school for children of compulsory school age: Statutory guidance for local authorities".

- A 10-mile limit in respect of boys' schools (including Roman Catholic boys' schools), which is necessary as there are only two boys' schools and no boys' Roman Catholic schools within the three mile walking distance from GCS.

55. I consider the secondary schools in those areas to be schools which are relevant for me to take into account in my role as decision-maker in this case.

56. For context, I first looked at the characteristics of all of the secondary schools in LBH using the DfE's GIAS website. This lists 21 secondary schools in LBH, which I have put into Table 2 with their characteristics and distance from the postcode in which GCS is situated (straight line, in miles).

Table 2: Secondary schools in LBH with their characteristics and distance from the postcode in which GCS is situated (straight line, in miles)

School name	**Distance (miles)**	**Gender**	**Type**	**Religious character**	**Ofsted**
GCS	-	Boys	VA	Roman Catholic	Outstanding
Brentford School for Girls	0.66	Girls	AC	No	Good
Bolder Academy	0.79	Mixed	FS	No	Good
Nishkam School West London	1.05	Mixed	FS	Sikh	Outstanding
The Green School for Girls	1.09	Girls	AC	CofE	Good
The Green School for Boys	1.15	Boys	FS	CofE	Good
Isleworth and Syon School for Boys	1.47	Boys	AC	No	Good
Gumley House RC Convent School, FCJ	1.82	Girls	AC	Roman Catholic	Good
Heston Community School	2.46	Mixed	AC	No	Good
Kingsley Academy	2.47	Mixed	AS	No	Good
Chiswick School	2.48	Mixed	AC	No	Good

School name	Distance (miles)	Gender	Type	Religious character	Ofsted
Lampton Academy	2.57	Mixed	AC	No	Outstanding
St Marks Catholic School	3.11	Mixed	AC	Roman Catholic	Outstanding
The Heathland School	3.63	Mixed	C	No	Outstanding
Cranford Community College	3.99	Mixed	AC	No	Good
Springwest Academy	5.07	Mixed	AC	No	Good
Logic Studio School[2]	5.07	Mixed	S	No	Good
Space Studio West London[2]	5.38	Mixed	S	No	Good
Rivers Academy West London	5.38	Mixed	AC	No	Good
Reach Academy Hanworth Park[1 2]	5.43	Mixed	FS	No	No data available
Reach Academy Feltham[1 2]	5.45	Mixed	FS	No	Outstanding

Key:

AC – academy converter
AS – academy sponsor-led
C – community
FS – free school
S – studio
VA – voluntary aided
Mixed – the same as 'co-educational'
[1] all through school
[2] these four schools are not included in the dataset provided by the proposer (in Tables 7 to 10) because two are studio schools and two are all-through schools (Reach Academy Hanworth Park opened on 1 September 2024)

57. As shown in Table 2, all schools catering for secondary-aged children in LBH have been graded at least 'Good' by Ofsted, with six schools graded 'Outstanding' one of which is GCS, where data was available for such. Out of the 21 schools in Table 2, 71.4 per cent have a mixed intake, 14.3 per cent only admit girls and 14.3 per cent only admit boys. I note that if GCS was to become co-educational, the number of schools with a mixed intake would rise to 76.2 per cent and the number of schools only admitting boys in the LA would decrease to 9.5 per cent. There are only three Roman Catholic secondary schools in LBH (one for boys (GCS), one for girls and one mixed). If GCS was to become co-educational, there would be no single sex boys' Roman Catholic school left in LBH.

58. The proposer has consistently stated that the underpinning reason for its proposal is the 'overwhelming demand for Catholic co-education' in the area. It provided the data to illustrate where that view originated. I have put that data into Tables 3 to 6.

Table 3: Intake data for LBH co-educational and single sex schools – entry 2021

LAH School Groups	Total Year 7 Places	Total First Preference Applications	Percentage of Total First Preference Applications to Total Year 7 Places
Catholic Co-educational Schools	186	389	209
Mixed Schools	2239	2103	94
Single Sex Schools	1006	623	62
Catholic Single Sex Schools	364	222	61

Table 4: Intake data for LBH co-educational and single sex schools – entry 2022

LAH School Groups	Total Year 7 Places	Total First Preference Applications	Percentage of Total First Preference Applications to Total Year 7 Places
Catholic Co-educational Schools	186	338	182
Mixed Schools	2239	2242	100
Single Sex Schools	1006	545	54
Catholic Single Sex Schools	364	171	47

Table 5: Intake data for LBH co-educational and single sex schools – entry 2023

LAH School Groups	Total Year 7 Places	Total First Preference Applications	Percentage of Total First Preference Applications to Total Year 7 Places
Catholic Co-educational Schools	186	354	190
Mixed Schools	2239	2372	106
Single Sex Schools	1006	524	52
Catholic Single Sex Schools	364	178	49

Table 6: Intake data for LBH co-educational and single sex schools – entry 2024

LAH School Groups	Total Year 7 Places	Total First Preference Applications	Percentage of Total First Preference Applications to Total Year 7 Places
Catholic Co-educational Schools	186	339	182
Mixed Schools	2239	2367	106
Single Sex Schools	1006	507	50
Catholic Single Sex Schools	364	195	54

59. From the data in Tables 3 to 6, I can see that:

- The number of first preference applications for the period covered by the data for places in Roman Catholic co-educational schools has been higher than the number of places available. This does show that there is a high demand for places in such schools. However, when applying a linear trendline to the dataset the demand has been decreasing over that period.

- In terms of the first preferences expressed for all types of single sex schools between 2021 and 2024 there has been a decrease in the number of first preferences expressed for places over the period covered.

- The data for Roman Catholic single sex schools show that the number has decreased over time, though after the drop in 2022, has since been increasing.

60. Whilst the first preference is a useful starting point, parents can express six preferences for school places through the Pan-London Admissions Scheme. The proposer has provided data (originally provided to it by the LA) showing the numbers of parents expressing one of the six preferences for each school in the area from 2021 to 2024. I have put that data into Tables 7 to 10 below (where P1 (first) to P6 (sixth) are the six preferences).

Notes about the data:

- Logic Studio School and Space Studio West London admit from Year 10 and are therefore not included in the datasets below.

- Reach Academy Feltham and Reach Academy Hanworth Park are not included in the dataset provided by the LA. Originally, I asked the LA about why it was the case that Reach Academy Feltham was not included in the dataset (as Reach Academy Hanworth Park had not been opened by that point). In its response, the LA told me:

  "As an all-through school there is an automatic transfer for the Reach Academy Feltham (RAF) pupils in the current Year 6 to move up into Year 7. This is not part of the Secondary Transfer Admissions process, and the PAN is not included in the Secondary Transfer data, as any admissions to RAF Year 7 would be through the In-Year admission process. The RAF children in Year 6 are not required to make an application unless they want to apply for another school."

  Obviously, Reach Academy Hanworth Park is not included in the dataset as it has only just opened.

- The data is for 'on-time' applications only and is pan-London (i.e. not just for parents residing in LBH).

Table 7: Preferences expressed for places in schools in LBH in 2021

School Name	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	Totals
Bolder Academy	122	178	132	106	74	80	692
Brentford School for Girls	79	83	84	66	61	53	426
Chiswick School	171	90	106	90	82	76	615
Cranford Community College	225	159	124	95	69	71	743
Gumley House RC Convent School FCJ	101	140	110	87	65	64	567
GCS	121	146	158	109	104	57	695
Heston Community School	140	167	162	107	74	43	693
Isleworth and Syon School for Boys	77	69	75	54	58	59	392
Kinsgley Academy	55	69	84	74	49	46	377
Lampton School	202	319	246	164	112	105	1148
Nicksham School West London	92	56	55	48	49	38	338
Rivers Academy West London	173	111	49	36	38	40	447
Springwest Academy	132	104	52	38	23	26	375
St Mark's Catholic School	389	263	235	152	119	77	1235
The Green School for Boys	93	77	90	75	61	55	451
The Green School for Girls	152	118	126	89	69	73	627
The Heathland School	402	282	224	160	134	102	1304
Total	2726	2431	2112	1550	1241	1065	11125

Table 8: Preferences expressed for places in schools in LBH in 2022

School Name	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	Totals
Bolder Academy	181	128	141	106	108	79	743
Brentford School for Girls	80	62	76	58	55	54	385
Chiswick School	189	109	107	88	86	93	672
Cranford Community College	278	166	109	89	74	45	761
Gumley House RC Convent School FCJ	89	153	122	102	56	61	583
GCS	82	137	125	118	60	47	569
Heston Community School	143	170	129	98	68	56	664
Isleworth and Syon School for Boys	91	85	108	66	46	47	443
Kinsgley Academy	59	92	94	61	53	47	406
Lampton School	194	322	262	158	110	96	1142
Nicksham School West London	130	83	66	46	51	36	412
Rivers Academy West London	195	75	44	46	30	29	419[3]
Springwest Academy	131	124	51	23	28	27	384
St Mark's Catholic School	338	284	202	148	98	60	1130
The Green School for Boys	95	103	84	71	67	52	472
The Green School for Girls	108	145	104	87	64	64	572[3]
The Heathland School	404	267	248	160	109	76	1264
Total	2787	2505	2072	1525	1163	969	11021[3]

Key:

[3] I amended these totals from the data presented to me by the proposer as they were inaccurate.

Table 9: Preferences expressed for places in schools in LBH in 2023

School Name	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	Totals
Bolder Academy	157	115	112	102	66	95	647
Brentford School for Girls	71	74	67	68	59	60	399
Chiswick School	210	136	130	84	85	98	743
Cranford Community College	231	141	129	80	73	52	706
Gumley House RC Convent School FCJ	82	125	137	94	79	56	573
GCS	96	111	124	107	75	61	574
Heston Community School	153	165	137	109	84	45	693
Isleworth and Syon School for Boys	75	95	86	77	55	34	422
Kinsgley Academy	82	90	120	71	54	68	485
Lampton School	228	389	279	168	114	92	1270
Nicksham School West London	140	65	65	75	49	48	442
Rivers Academy West London	190	82	54	28	25	32	411
Springwest Academy	140	102	51	36	24	29	382
St Mark's Catholic School	355	284	211	153	102	45	1150
The Green School for Boys	87	82	87	63	62	45	426
The Green School for Girls	114	134	124	85	81	60	598
The Heathland School	488	349	206	168	109	80	1400
Total	2899	2539	2119	1568	1196	1000	11321

Table 10: Preferences expressed for places in schools in LBH in 2024

School Name	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	Totals
Bolder Academy	134	135	123	101	82	80	655
Brentford School for Girls	59	67	69	51	54	46	346
Chiswick School	302	134	125	110	92	83	846
Cranford Community College	173	151	105	86	60	43	618
Gumley House RC Convent School FCJ	75	100	90	66	61	45	437
GCS	120	125	119	98	62	46	570
Heston Community School	143	152	148	84	63	47	637
Isleworth and Syon School for Boys	69	65	79	67	65	44	389
Kinsgley Academy	72	90	95	74	50	42	423
Lampton School	274	355	275	160	100	78	1242
Nicksham School West London	169	77	78	49	45	28	446
Rivers Academy West London	146	92	60	36	24	14	372
Springwest Academy	172	102	43	39	36	27	419
St Mark's Catholic School	339	249	176	125	81	55	1025
The Green School for Boys	75	73	72	67	58	42	387
The Green School for Girls	109	111	98	70	58	48	494
The Heathland School	443	302	197	158	92	77	1269
Total	2874	2380	1952	1441	1083	845	10575

61. The data in Tables 7 to 10 show that there is a decrease in the total number of preferences expressed for schools in LBH over the four year period (when a linear trendline is applied to the dataset). This is to be expected given the decrease in demand for places in

schools across London; this issue has been recognised in submissions by all parties in this case.

62. Table 11 shows the data for GCS for 2021 to 2024, taken from Tables 7 to 10 for ease of reference.

Table 11: Preference data for GCS for 2021 to 2024

Years	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	Totals
2021	121	146	158	109	104	57	695
2022	82	137	125	118	60	47	569
2023	96	111	124	107	75	61	574
2024	120	125	119	98	62	46	570
Totals	**419**	**519**	**526**	**432**	**301**	**211**	

63. These data show that whilst there has been a decrease in the number of preferences expressed for places at the school between 2021 and 2024, the number has plateaued since 2022. The number of preferences expressed has, therefore, not been decreasing at the same rate as the number of preferences for the LA overall. The highest number of preferences expressed over the period covered by the data has been P3, followed by P2, P4, P1 and then P5 and P6. However, whilst the number of first preferences is the fourth highest out of the group, the number of first preferences has been increasing between 2022 and 2024 and is in 2024 was just one preference less than in 2021. The trend of the number of parents expressing second to sixth preferences (P2 to P6) has decreased overall over the same period. In any event, the school provided data showing that it has been able to make offers / admit to the PAN in each year covered by the data in Table 11; corroborated for 2024 by the admission data on LBH website. There has certainly been no shortage of parents seeking places for boys at the school.

64. I pause here to note that:

64.1. In the bundle of documents, the school provided data (originating from the LA) showing that there were places available (2.5 per cent of the total in Years 7 to 11) in January 2024. Most of the vacancies were in Year 8 (21) (this year group will now be in Year 9). About this, the proposer told me that:

"At the initial allocation stage, in March 2022, 184 pupils were offered places at GCS. In contrast to previous years, GCS had a minimal waiting list at that point. As is normal for schools, following initial allocation in March some pupils returned their places having chosen to attend different schools. With a limited waiting list there were insufficient pupils to fill all the vacancies created by the returned places. GCS started the school year with a shortfall of 22 pupils."

From the data provided for 2021, 2023 and 2024, and as confirmed by the proposer, the situation in 2022 was unusual.

64.2. The LA provided place planning data for 2024 to 2027 showing the number of children that would be admitted in Year 7 to GCS falling from 177 (2024) to 171 (2027). However, according to the admissions data on the LBH website the school has admitted to the PAN in September 2024. Taking into account the pattern of preferences expressed for the school, I would therefore consider it more likely than not that the school will continue to make offers / admit to the PAN for the foreseeable future.

65. GCS is close to the boundary of LBH. Parents applying for places for their children will not be restricted by borough boundaries and I have therefore looked at which schools are within three miles of the postcode in which GCS is located (taken from the DfE's GIAS website). I have listed those schools and their characteristics in Table 12.

Table 12: Secondary schools within three miles of the postcode of the GCS site

School name	**Distance (miles)**	**Borough**	**Gender**	**Type**	**Religious character**	**Ofsted**
GCS	-	LBH	Boys	VA	Roman Catholic	Outstanding
Ealing Fields High School	0.23	Ealing	Mixed	FS	No	Good
Brentford School for Girls	0.66	LBH	Girls	AC	No	Good
Bolder Academy	0.79	LBH	Mixed	FS	No	Good
Elthorne Park High School	0.8	Ealing	Mixed	C	No	Outstanding
Nishkam School West London	1.05	LBH	Mixed	FS	Sikh	Outstanding
The Green School for Girls	1.09	LBH	Girls	AC	CofE	Good
The Green School for Boys	1.15	LBH	Boys	FS	CofE	Good
Isleworth and Syon School for Boys	1.47	LBH	Boys	AC	No	Good
Ark Acton Academy	1.66	Ealing	Mixed	AS	No	Good
Drayton Manor High School	1.81	Ealing	Mixed	AC	No	Outstanding
Gumley House RC Convent School, FCJ	1.82	LBH	Girls	AC	Roman Catholic	Good
Ark Soane Academy	1.89	Ealing	Mixed	FS	No	Outstanding

School name	Distance (miles)	Borough	Gender	Type	Religious character	Ofsted
Twyford Church of England High School	1.94	Ealing	Mixed	AC	CofE	Outstanding
The Ellen Wilkinson School for Girls	1.98	Ealing	Girls	F	No	Outstanding
Ada Lovelace Church of England High School	1.99	Ealing	Mixed	FS	CofE	Outstanding
Heston Community School	2.46	LBH	Mixed	AC	No	Good
Kingsley Academy	2.47	LBH	Mixed	AS	No	Good
Chiswick School	2.48	LBH	Mixed	AC	No	Good
Brentside High School	2.54	Ealing	Mixed	F	No	Good
Lampton Academy	2.57	LBH	Mixed	AC	No	Outstanding
Christ's Church of England Comprehensive Secondary School	2.65	Richmond upon Thames	Mixed	VA	CofE	Good
The Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School	2.73	Ealing	Mixed	VA	Roman Catholic	Outstanding
Villiers High School	2.78	Ealing	Mixed	F	No	Outstanding
Dormers Wells High School	2.83	Ealing	Mixed	AC	No	Good

Key as for Table 2, including:
F – foundation

66. Table 12 lists 25 schools within three miles of the postcode in which GCS is sited. Out of the schools listed, 12 of those are in LBH, 12 are in Ealing, and one in Richmond-on-Thames. Less than half of the schools nearest to GCS are in LBH. All the listed schools have been graded at least 'Good' by Ofsted, with 11 schools graded 'Outstanding'. Out of the schools in Table 12, 75 per cent have a mixed intake, 16.7 per cent admit girls only and 8.3 per cent admit boys only. I note that if GCS was to become co-educational, the number of schools with a mixed intake would rise to 76 per cent and the number of schools only admitting boys within three miles of GCS would decrease to eight per cent. There are three Roman Catholic secondary schools in this area (one for boys (GCS), one for girls and one mixed).

67. If GCS was to become co-educational, there would be no single sex boys' Roman Catholic school left in the area three miles from the postcode of its site. I do not think it

unreasonable to assume that the admission of girls to GCS would likely displace up to half of the boys from the Year 7 intake from the admissions year for which the proposal takes effect. This would mean that the parents of up to 92 boys every year would need to find places in other schools. In that event, I looked at the options, using the DfE's GIAS website, that would be available to parents who would look to apply for places in boys' schools and in boys' Roman Catholic schools within ten miles of the postcode of the GCS site (I chose this distance to see how far children may have to travel to access boys' schools). I have put the list of boys' schools (that are not of Roman Catholic religious character) into Table 13 and the Roman Catholic boys' schools into Table 14.

Table 13: Boys' schools other than GCS (and not Roman Catholic) within ten miles of the postcode of the GCS site

School name	**Distance (miles)**	**Borough**	**Type**	**Religious character**	**Ofsted**
The Green School for Boys	1.15	LBH	FS	CofE	Good
Isleworth and Syon School for Boys	1.47	LBH	AC	No	Good
The Fulham Boys School	5.02	Hammersmith and Fulham	FS	CofE	Good
Tiffin School[4]	5.7	Kingston upon Thames	AC	Christian	Good
Marylebone Boys' School	6.17	Westminster	FS	No	Good
Coombe Boys' School	7.38	Kingston upon Thames	AC	No	Good
Ernest Bevin Academy	7.39	Wandsworth	AC	No	No data available
Rutlish School	7.46	Merton	VC	No	Outstanding
Westminster City School	7.55	Westminster	AC	Christian	Good
Southborough High School	8.15	Kingston upon Thames	AC	No	Good
Hasmonean High School for Boys	8.32	Barnet	AC	Jewish	Good
William Ellis School	8.35	Camden	VA	None	Requires Improvement
London Nautical School	8.92	Lambeth	F	None	Requires Improvement

Key as for Tables 2 and 12, including:
[4] Selective
VC – Voluntary Controlled

Table 14: Roman Catholic boys' schools other than GCS within ten miles of the postcode of the GCS site

School name	Distance (miles)	Borough	Type	Ofsted
Newman Catholic College	4.45	Brent	VA	Good
The Cardinal Vaughan Memorial RC School	4.57	Kensington and Chelsea	AC	Outstanding
The London Oratory School	5.25	Hammersmith and Fulham	AC	Outstanding
Wimbledon College	6.51	Merton	VA	Good
Salvatorian Roman Catholic College	7.44	Harrow	AC	Good
Richard Challoner School	7.79	Kingston upon Thames	AC	Outstanding
St Aloysius RC College[5]	9.21	Islington	VA	Good

Key as for Table 2, including:
[5] The adjudicator has now approved a statutory proposal for this school to become a co-educational school, therefore for admissions in September 2025 there will only be six Roman Catholic boys' schools remaining for those parents seeking a single sex education for their boys, further reducing the options available.

68. Table 13 lists 13 boys' schools (not Roman Catholic) within 10 miles of the postcode of the GCS site, all bar three of which have been judged to be at least 'Good' by Ofsted, with the two judged to be 'Requires improvement' being furthest away in any event. Table 13 shows that there are two boys' schools within one and a half miles of the postcode of the GCS site, should a single sex education, without a Roman Catholic religious character, suffice. All others are over five miles away, however. I note there is a reduced range of options for Roman Catholic boys' schools within 10 miles of the postcode of the GCS site listed in Table 14. The nearest is 4.45 miles away, and I note there are no boys' Roman Catholic schools in Ealing, the nearest of the London boroughs to LHB and from where GCS admits many of its boys.

69. During the pre-publication consultation and publication stages, local schools expressed their concerns about the impact of the proposals on the intake of girls to Brentford School for Girls, Gumley House RC Convent School, FCJ and St Mark's Catholic School. I have considered the effect of admitting girls to GCS who would ordinarily have been admitted to other schools. Using the same assumption as earlier, that admission in 2025 is likely to be around 50 per cent of the Year 7 intake (up to 92 girls), I have looked at the schools those girls would be likely have been admitted to if the proposal was not agreed. Clearly, the girls could have been admitted to any school which currently admits girls. Table 2 shows that the nearest girls' schools to GCS are Brentford School for Girls and The Green School for Girls (both which are not of Roman Catholic religious character)

and Gumley House RC Convent School, FCJ. Given that the parents of the girls admitted to these two non-Roman Catholic girls' schools have opted for places at a single sex school with no religious designation, I find it less likely that there will be many parents (choosing to apply for places for their children at those schools) who would opt to apply for places at a co-educational Roman Catholic school. In my view, it is more likely to affect those who might ordinarily apply to Gumley House RC Convent School, FCJ. According to Table 12, the nearest co-educational Roman Catholic schools are The Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School in Ealing and, in LBH, St Mark's Catholic School. To a lesser extent, given that it is further away, girls who would ordinarily apply to St Mark's Catholic School may apply for places at GCS (on the basis that both that school and GCS would be options for those wanting Roman Catholic co-education).

70. Taking preference data for Gumley House RC Convent School, FCJ for the four year period covered in Tables 7 to 10 and putting it into Table 15 below, it is clear that the school has been oversubscribed between 2021 and 2024. However, the number of preferences expressed by parents for places at the school over that period has decreased by 130.

Table 15: Preference data for Gumley House RC Convent School, FCJ for 2021 to 2024

Years	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	Totals
2021	101	140	110	87	65	64	567
2022	89	153	122	102	56	61	583
2023	82	125	137	94	79	56	573
2024	75	100	90	66	61	45	437
Totals	**347**	**518**	**459**	**349**	**261**	**226**	

71. The PAN at Gumley House RC Convent School, FCJ has been reducing over time. In 2021, the PAN was 192 and from 2022 it was 180. The PAN will be further reduced in 2025 to 168. According to data on the LBH website for admission in 2024, Gumley House RC Convent School, FCJ only admitted 157 girls out of its PAN of 180. The PAN reductions appear to have been the result of falling admissions over a number of years. There is the potential for the admission of girls to the school to be further adversely affected should GCS become co-educational.

72. In order to see if there would be an effect, of GCS becoming co-educational, on St Mark's Catholic School I have added that school's preference data into Table 16. St Mark's Catholic School is the only Roman Catholic co-educational school in LBH. The Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School, which is also co-educational, is closer to GCS than St Mark's Catholic School. However, it is in Ealing and there is nothing I can find on the Ealing Council website which provides preference data. Also, as previously stated, Ealing Council have not given permission for the data they disclosed to LBH as part of the process of the statutory consultation to be disclosed through the school to me. I cannot therefore evaluate the potential effect on The Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School through a consideration of preference and admission data, though the proposer included in its proposal that the school received 1025 applications for 310 places in 2023. I note that the diocese told me that The

Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School is oversubscribed, and that the diocese says this is further evidence of the need for more schools offering Roman Catholic co-education.

Table 16: Preference data for St Mark's Catholic School for 2021 to 2024

Years	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	Totals
2021	389	263	235	152	119	77	1235
2022	338	284	202	148	98	60	1130
2023	355	284	211	153	102	45	1150
2024	339	249	176	125	81	55	1025
Totals	**1421**	**1080**	**824**	**578**	**400**	**237**	

73. The number of preferences expressed by parents for places at St Mark's Catholic School over the period 2021 to 2024 has decreased by 210. However, with a PAN over that period of 186, it is clear that the school will not have had difficulty admitting to the PAN. The LBH website confirmed that the school admitted to its PAN in September 2024. In 2025, even if GCS were to admit 92 girls who might have been admitted to St Mark's Catholic School, it does not appear to me that would have a detrimental impact on that school admitting to its PAN in future years.

74. From my consideration of the evidence submitted in support of the proposed prescribed alteration, I make the following findings:

74.1. The proposer says that there is 'overwhelming' demand for mixed compared to single sex Roman Catholic education. The proposer has relied in particular on the higher number of first preferences made by parents for places at St Mark's Catholic School compared to the lower number expressed for places at GCS. There is evidence that the two Roman Catholic co-educational schools closest to GCS (St Mark's Catholic School and The Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School) receive a greater number of preferences for places each year than GCS or Gumley House RC Convent School FCJ, the only two single sex Roman Catholic schools in the same area (though I have limited data for The Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School). Additionally, as referred to earlier in this determination the proposer has, subsequent to the proposal being publicised, been able to show there is support for its proposal from some sectors (which showed more comments for the proposal than against).

74.2. I observe that there are many reasons why a parent might express a preference for a school (some examples: location; Ofsted grade; reputation; and child's friendship group). It cannot automatically be assumed, therefore, that the first preferences recorded in Tables 3 to 6 reflect only preference for either single sex or co-educational provision. Nor is the data conclusive proof that there is a high demand for Roman Catholic co-educational provision, rather than of a high demand for places at St Mark's Catholic School (or Cardinal Wiseman) for other reasons.

74.3. The preference data for St Mark's Catholic School between 2021 and 2024 actually show a decrease in respect of the first preferences expressed for Roman Catholic co-educational provision, although it remains high overall, and an increase in preference for places in other types of mixed schools in that period (though lower than the preferences for Roman Catholic co-education). As well as St Mark's Catholic School being oversubscribed by the first preferences expressed for places, I also note that Cranford Community College, The Heathland School, Bolder Academy and Lampton School have also been oversubscribed by the first preferences expressed either at points during or throughout that period (and do not have any designated religious character). Nickham School West London, which is designated of Sikh religious character, is also oversubscribed by first preferences throughout the period covered by the data.

74.4. The preference data for LBH show that there is a reduction in demand for places across all schools in the borough. However, the number of first preferences expressed for GCS has risen in the last three years. It is also the case that GCS has been oversubscribed in the period covered by the data in tables above (2021 to 2024) such that it has made offers / admitted to the PAN in that period, despite the LA projecting GCS admitting less than the PAN in 2024.

75. In my view, given the above, the data relevant to demand from the local community for co-educational provision is not, accordingly, straightforward or capable of being reduced to a headline conclusion. I accept that some of the data can be said to support an argument that there is unmet demand from the local community for Roman Catholic co-educational provision: for instance there are more preferences expressed for places in the one Roman Catholic co-educational school in LBH than there are for each of the Roman Catholic single sex schools. However, it does not follow from this that the proposal would better serve the local community. The effects, including any adverse effects, of implementing the proposal on the local community are also relevant to my consideration. I will now consider the effects of the proposal by reference to the factors referred to in the guidance.

Evaluating the effect of the proposal

76. I will undertake my evaluation by reference to the five matters referred to in the section of the statutory guidance referring to Stage 3.

<u>Education standards and diversity of provision</u>

77. The guidance states that:

"Decision makers should consider the quality and diversity of schools in the relevant area and whether the proposal will meet or affect the needs of parents, raise local standards and narrow attainment gaps."

78. About this aspect, the LA told me:

"We have a sufficiency of places, and all of our Secondary schools are Good or Outstanding. Hounslow has a diverse offer which includes single sex, mixed gender, faith (Catholic, CofE, Sikh) single sex and mixed, all through, and studio schools (Years 10-13)."

79. The proposer told me:

"Academically, Gunnersbury students consistently achieve to a level that is amongst the very best in the country. Our 2023 Progress 8 score of +1.11 places the progress of Gunnersbury's GCSE students within the top 2% of all schools nationally. Sixth Form outcomes (A-Levels and BTECs) are similarly strong."

80. It is evident that GCS has excellent academic results and that any child attending the school has the potential to perform at the highest level. However, I have a number of related concerns about the proposal under this head:

80.1. Should I agree that GCS become a co-educational Roman Catholic School, it would certainly increase the secondary school options for those parents who wish for such an education for their daughters. However, it would have the effect of reducing the diversity of provision across the borough, in the sense that it would reduce the number of places available for boys and the number of places available in single sex boys' Roman Catholic education. Given that GCS also attracts boys of parents who reside in Ealing (a point strongly made by the proposer), the change would also reduce choice for the parents of boys in Ealing.

80.2. It is likely that such a change would also put pressure on the only Roman Catholic girls' school (Gumley House RC Convent School, FCJ), because it would likely lead to girls attending GCS who would otherwise attend Gumley House). It is possible that this could cause Gumley House RC Convent School, FCJ to be unviable in the longer term.

80.3. Returning to a point I made earlier in the determination – that it would not be unreasonable to assume that around 92 boys could be displaced by the change from single sex to co-educational from the date of implementation and every year thereafter – parents who wish for their boys to have a single sex Roman Catholic education will have no options in LBH or Ealing and very limited options further afield.

81. The proposal would create the possibility of raising the standards for those girls who would not have been admitted to the school or any school that achieves the results achieved at GCS. However, as above, I am concerned about the reduction in diversity in the borough and the effect for the boys that would not be admitted on account of the school admitting girls. I will return to the latter point in the next section.

In short, whilst the implementation of the proposal would increase the number of co-educational places within LBH, it will reduce diversity in terms of limiting parents' choices for different types of secondary schools.

Equal opportunities

82. The guidance states:

"The decision maker must comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), which requires them to have 'due regard' to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and
- foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it."

83. One of my findings earlier in the determination was that there is clearly no need for GCS to admit girls to increase the numbers of children admitted to the school. I realise that is not the reason for what is proposed. However, I make this point because should GCS become co-educational, a number of boys who would be ordinarily admitted to the school could not be and would need to be admitted to other schools. Assuming that a significant proportion of the parents of those boys would still want a Roman Catholic boys' education, options are limited in number and by distance; the closest being 4.45 miles from the postcode of the GCS site. Given the distances to those schools, there is the potential that boys who cannot get into GCS would be afforded a lower priority in those schools in Table 14 that utilise distance from the school as a way of prioritising admission (which is the case for nearly all of the schools listed).

84. I asked the proposer to forward the equality impact assessment (EIA) undertaken for this proposal. Looking at the EIA, completed on 19 December 2023, the key outcome of the impact analysis section of the assessment was that "All genders become eligible to apply for a place at GCS". On the face of it, that is true. However, I cannot see anywhere on the form where the proposer has taken into account the effect on other schools in the area (particularly girls' and girls' Roman Catholic schools in the intersectionality assessment section) or of the impact of the boys who would not be admitted because the school admits girls instead.

85. I have considered for myself the equalities impact of implementing the proposal. I make the following observations:

85.1. GCS becoming co-educational would have the effect that there would be no boys' Roman Catholic school left in LBH. Ealing does not have any boys'

Roman Catholic schools which means that there would be no such option for parents (for 4.45 miles from the postcode on which GCS is sited). It is likely to be difficult for boys living in LBH to secure places in many of these other single sex Catholic boys' schools. From the responses the proposer received during the pre-publication and representation consultation periods, whilst there is a large number in support of the proposal, there are still a sizeable number of stakeholders who would prefer there be an option of boys' Roman Catholic education at GCS and three schools local to the proposer that expressed their concern about the proposal.

85.2. The effect on St Mark's Catholic School of GCS becoming co-educational is likely to be negligible and I note that is the view of the diocese. However, there is likely to be more of an impact on Gumley House RC Convent School, FCJ which has been experiencing a decline in the numbers of parents expressing preferences for places at the school and in admissions over time.

85.3. All secondary schools in LBH have been judged to be 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by Ofsted in their last inspection (save for Reach Academy Hanworth Park which has only just opened this academic year and has not yet been inspected). This lessens the impact of the proposer's point that allowing girls to access education at GCS would improve educational standards. The proposer has cited the latest Progress 8 scores, which are impressive. However, it is difficult to understand how extending this opportunity to a mixed cohort will benefit the large number of boys who will be denied that educational opportunity, who will not easily be able to access Roman Catholic single sex education and who will have few other such options which do not require travelling further than would be preferable. The distance may also cause those children not to be admitted where proximity of the home address to the school is used to prioritise admission.

85.4. Options for parents wanting a Roman Catholic education for their sons if they were not to be admitted to GCS are more limited. In terms of educational standards, all of the schools listed in Table 14 have been judged to be at least 'Good' by Ofsted and there are three schools judged to be 'Outstanding' by Ofsted at the most recent inspection (as was GCS). However, the closest school to the postcode of the GCS site is 4.45 miles away, indicating a minimum journey which would be beyond the three miles statutory walking distance for children aged 8 or over. This may mean the LA or parents incurring transport costs for the boys to these schools, a point I will return to. Given the distances, there is the potential that boys displaced from GCS will be afforded a lower priority if the schools in Table 14 utilise distance from the school as a way of prioritising admission. Having looked at the 2025 admission arrangements of the schools listed in Table 14, I can see that is in fact the case for all but The Cardinal Vaughan Memorial RC School and The London Oratory School.

86. In conclusion, the proposal would adversely impact equality of opportunity for Roman Catholic boys both in relation to their sex and their religion. If the proposal is implemented, parents of Catholic and non-Catholic girls who go or could go to Gumley House RC Convent School, FCJ or Brentford School for Girls will be able to secure places at GCS; but the parents of boys no longer able to secure a place at GCS cannot simply secure places at the girls' schools. These boys will need to travel further afield in order to secure a place in a Catholic secondary co-educational secondary school (St. Marks and Cardinal Wiseman both being oversubscribed) and much further afield in order to secure a place in a single sex Catholic boys' school, if indeed securing such a place is possible at all. Whilst I appreciate that there is no entitlement for any child to a place at a single sex school or a school of a particular faith, I take into account this adverse impact of the removal of single sex Roman Catholic boys' school places on equality of opportunity.

Community cohesion

87. About evaluating the community cohesion aspect of any proposal relating to a prescribed alteration, the guidance states:

> "Schools have a key part to play in providing opportunities for young people from different backgrounds to learn with, from and about each other; by encouraging through their teaching, an understanding of, and respect for, other cultures, faiths and communities. When considering a proposal, the decision maker should consider its impact on community cohesion. This will need to be considered on a case-by-case basis, taking account of the community served by the school and the views of different groups within the community."

88. The proposer says:

> "The School has carefully considered the impact on the local community of its proposal taking effect and believes that any adverse impact on local schools would be either minimal or non-existent, and certainly insufficient to outweigh the benefits to the local community - and in particular the Catholic community - if the School were to change its status"

89. I have carefully considered whether the proposal would have the effect of undermining cohesion between different communities. Taking into account the submissions from the parties in this case, I have not found there to be evidence that there will be any such effect.

Travel and accessibility

90. The guidance states:

> "Decision makers should be satisfied that proposed changes will not adversely impact any particular group, including those with protected characteristics or who are disadvantaged (for example, those who are eligible for free school meals or pupil

premium). Decision makers should also consider how the proposal will support the local authorities' duty to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport to school.

The decision maker should consider whether a proposal will result in unreasonably long journey times or increased travel costs for local authorities or families, as well as any increase in the use of motor vehicles which is likely to result from the change, and the likely effects of any such increase.

Decision makers should be satisfied that the proposers have taken into account whether the proposal will result in a significant increase in the number of children who are unable to travel sustainably, for example due to a lack of suitable walking, cycling or public transport routes. Further information is available in the statutory Home-to-school travel and transport guidance for local authorities."

91. I set out earlier that the proposer has not considered the fact that, by admitting girls, a number of parents of Roman Catholic boys (possibly around 50 per cent of the cohort in each year) will have to find places in other schools. The proposer has undertaken little, if any, consideration of the impact of the implementation of the prescribed alteration on transport and accessibility.

92. The closest Roman Catholic boys' school to the postcode of the GCS site is 4.45 miles, indicating a minimum journey which would be beyond the three miles statutory walking distance for children aged 8 or over. This may mean the LA incurring additional transport costs for the boys to attend single sex Roman Catholic schools further away. It is more likely that these costs will be borne by parents. Where parents value the importance of a Catholic education for their children, they will have no other option than to try to secure places at schools located beyond statutory walking distance and probably much further afield. This will increase journey times for the children concerned, and either place additional burdens on the public transport system or cause car journeys to and from schools which would otherwise have been unnecessary.

93. Whilst children aged 11 to 15 may be eligible for Zip Oyster photocards, this only entitles them to free travel on buses and trams. There remain fares to pay on the Tube, DLR, London Overground, Elizabeth Line and national rail services, albeit that there is some discount.

<u>Funding</u>

94. The guidance states:

"The decision maker should be satisfied that any land, premises or necessary funding required to implement the proposal will be available and that all relevant local parties (e.g. trustees of the school, diocese or relevant diocesan board) have given any agreements required for this."

95. The proposal does not include any plan to increase the PAN and so there would be no capital costs in respect of expansion. However, as a predominantly boys' school (girls are admitted to the sixth form), there will be a need to ensure that appropriate facilities are available for girls from Years 7 from the date of implementation and then to girls in Years 8 to 11 over the course of the following four years.

96. About this the proposer wrote in the statutory notice:

"Transitioning to become a coeducational school would therefore not alter the current financial arrangements for Gunnersbury Catholic School over the long term. The current educational provision at Gunnersbury reflects excellent value for money. Were Gunnersbury to become a mixed gender school, there would be initial 'one-time' costs associated with the provision of further girls' bathrooms. It is estimated that the bathrooms will cost circa £38K – this would be met through the capital funding at Gunnersbury."

97. As part of the decision making process by the LA, LBH Cabinet were provided with comments from the LA's Chief Financial Officer. Those comments recorded that there would not be any direct financial implications for the LA from the proposal and, other than falling rolls generally across London, at the secondary education level "there is limited financial impact on the Dedicated Schools Grant [DSG]".

98. I asked the proposer to provide a more detailed breakdown of the costs associated with admitting girls to GCS from September 2025, including more precisely what those costs are and how they would be funded. It provided the following detailed response:

"The School considers that there would be limited additional expenditure associated with preparing staff for a change to the gender composition of the student body. The teaching staff are skilled educators who have been trained to teach all genders.

In addition to their experience educating the mixed sixth form, many staff have significant additional experience in teaching mixed genders in previous employments. The School is continually making efforts to further the educational provision for students and as part of those efforts, the School already liaises and collaborates with mixed schools both locally and nationally.

Were the School to transition to mixed schooling, it would utilise these relationships to support an outstanding coeducational provision. This collaborative partnership has few associated costs beyond occasional minimal travel expenses. The School would also seek to add to the expertise and knowledge of female sporting provision Page 4 of 5 through the employment of a PE teacher well-qualified in this area. Funding of this employment would likely be neutral through the natural departure of teachers (notably current PE staff not employed permanently by the School). Were there to be no imminent departure of PE staff; the cost of employing an additional member of staff (~£45K) will be met – until the department returns to its existing size – through

the School's forecast accumulated school budget surplus of +£172,170 on 1 April 2025.

Costs to prepare the School's site facilities for a mixed gender intake are not as extensive as may be thought given that: (i) the new sports faculty was constructed with changing areas and toilets for both genders; (ii) the Sixth Form faculty was built for utilisation by both male and female students e.g. toilets for both males and females; and (iii) the School's welfare facilities are relatively extensive (having been refurbished and enlarged during the pandemic) and are already utilised by both genders (11-18 year old boys and sixth form girls).

The School has identified that the provision of further female bathroom facilities within the School's main building would nevertheless be an immediate cost requirement to facilitate the transition to coeducation. An estimate provided by one of the School's regular building contractors (during the pre-statutory phase) places the cost of providing such facilities within the main building at ~£38k. This cost would be met by Devolved Formula Capital Funds (current balance of +£74,074) and cost overruns could be bridged by the Governors Fund (end of 2023-24 academic year balance of +£305,282). It is possible (depending on the gender balance of the initial mixed intakes) that further female bathroom facilities would be required in the third year of a transition (2027-2028). Expenditure can be based on the existing estimate (accounting for inflation). Refurbishment of bathrooms, whether male or female, is an ongoing demand of capital and maintenance budgets in all schools. Again, the School would seek to meet these costs with Devolved Formula Capital Funds and bridge outstanding amounts through Governor Funds.

Unforeseen short-term or mid-term costs of a proposed transition can be met through the School's estimated budget surplus (+£172,170) and/or the Governors Fund (+£305,282)."

99. In its response, the diocese told me that:

"Should the Adjudicator approve the change of status for Gunnersbury to become a mixed entry school, as a VA School, the Diocese would be able to provide access to funding to providing the financial support for the physical adaptations to the school facilities that may be required as a result of this change."

100. No cost implications relating to land have been raised by any party. From the information provided by the proposer, I can see that there will be costs to convert the school to incorporate toilet and changing room facilities for girls. However, the proposer has said this can be funded from the school's budget and the diocese has offered financial support for these adaptations. The LA has confirmed that the change will have little, if any, financial implications for the DSG. I am satisfied that there would be no adverse funding implications arising from the implementation of this proposal.

Conclusion

101. The proposals will not lead to unfunded additional financial costs for the school and the diocese have pledged financial support for any necessary adaptations to buildings. I find that the proposal will not have the effect of undermining community cohesion.

102. I note the opposition to the proposal by other local Roman Catholic and other secondary schools I have referred to. The concerns of these schools appear to have been given little weight by the proposer on the basis that the effect upon them would be minimal. I do not find that to be the case particularly in terms of the potential impact on the number of applicants to Gumley House RC Convent School, FCJ.

103. The proposal creates the possibility of raising standards for those girls who secure places at the school who could not otherwise have been admitted to the school, although, if the proposal is not implemented, those girls may gain places at other schools that achieve the same level of results achieved at GCS. Nevertheless, I am not satisfied that this will lead to an increase in standards across the area as a whole. Indeed, there is a risk that the standards at other schools will be lowered. There is a risk that Gumley House RC Convent School, FCJ will become increasingly unviable, further reducing diversity in terms of limiting parents' choices for different types of secondary schools in LBH.

104. As stated previously the proposal will adversely impact equality of opportunity for Roman Catholic boys both in relation to their sex and their religion. Whilst there is no entitlement for any child to a place at a single sex school or a school of a particular faith, the removal of around 92 boys places, constituting around 50 per cent of the single sex Roman Catholic boys' places in LBH (and neighbouring Ealing), is likely to disadvantage those boys who will be displaced. There will simply be fewer boys' places available in the area.

105. I find that there is likely to be some increased financial implications in terms of travel due to the increased number of boys, who will not be admitted to GCS, needing to travel further afield to alternative schools or alternative single sex boys' schools and considerably further afield to attend a single sex Roman Catholic boys' school, if the boys are able to meet the admissions criteria necessary to secure places at such schools. Those additional costs will be likely to fall on the local authority or on parents.

106. For the reasons set out in detail above, I reject the proposal for a prescribed alteration for the school to admit girls.

Determination

107. Under the powers conferred on me by the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013 made under section 21 of The Education and Inspections Act 2006, I have considered the proposal for a prescribed alteration to be made to allow the school to admit girls in Year 7 from September 2025 and every Year 7 thereafter. I reject the proposal.

Dated: 21 November 2024

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Dr Robert Cawley