

# **Bishop Wulstan Catholic School**

## **Business and Enterprise College**

*"Growing to fullness with Christ"*

6 March 2007

Mr Mark Gore  
Head of Service - Education Partnerships and School Development  
Children, Young People and Families Directorate  
Warwickshire County Council  
Saltisford Office Park  
Ansell Way  
WARWICK  
CV34 4UL

Dear Mark,

### **Consultation on the Future of Bishop Wulstan Catholic School**

We write on behalf of the Governing Body of Bishop Wulstan Catholic School in response to the Consultation document regarding the future of our School.

Firstly, we would like to express our concern that the LA and yourself have chosen not to hold meetings to gather the feelings and views of the school, parents, staff, the local and the wider community with regard to your proposal. We believe this is an unacceptable position given the seriousness of your proposal. A significant number of parents and students have joined the school since last February. With the new intake for September 2007, this number represents 146 students out of a projected roll of at least 300.

The Governing Body's view on this proposal is in agreement with the Archdiocese i.e. we are opposed in principle to the closure of the school where the effect of such a closure is to remove the practical access of baptised Catholic students to a Catholic school in a given geographical area. We would also add that in the instance of Bishop Wulstan the proposed closure removes access and choice for many non-Catholic students whose parents are expressing a preference for our faith based education.

We are fully aware of the viability issues that have faced this school over many years. During the previous five year period much has been achieved to improve provision in terms of investment for facilities and resources, the building of the sports hall and achievement of specialist status in Business & Enterprise. Despite this work recruitment of students into Year 7 has been very low and effectively reduced our intake to a 2 form entry for the past 5 years. We recognise this is not sustainable for the organisation of groups within the curriculum. We are extremely disappointed that the proposals for a 3-16 Catholic Federation and Fresh Start for Bishop Wulstan have not been successful as we believed these were imaginative solutions to address viability.

Warwickshire County Council is now faced with the decision on whether to proceed to publish statutory notices to close Bishop Wulstan Catholic School. Since our primary responsibility is to support the existing student body, their parents and staff we are very clear that it is in no one's interest to have any further period of uncertainty. Given this fact it is our responsibility as the Governing Body to remind Councillors of the context of this school and its unique provision for existing and potential future students and parents. There is overwhelming support from our parents. The importance of parental choice, preference for a faith-based education in Rugby and the alternative of a small scale secondary provision should not be lost without very careful consideration.

### **Mission Statement – Every Child Matters**

This school is totally committed to a non-selective inclusive vision of a faith-based education for all students and is very proud of this approach where **Every Child Matters**. As a result of the previous and present consultation, parents have overwhelmingly given testimony to the strength of the school in addressing individual needs within a community, a school that replicates a family atmosphere and values. The school's work on Anti-Bullying is particularly noted by parents and students. Inclusion of migrant students and those with English as an Additional Language (EAL) is a strength.

We would ask that Cabinet Members are made fully aware of the letters sent by current and past parents and students to evaluate this school's viability in meeting the challenges of the Every Child Matters agenda. Many associated organisations from education and social services have testified to the valuable work carried out by this school and have recognised its positive impact on individuals and the wider community. It appears that the Every Child Matters agenda is not the one on which a school's success is valued or judged.

### **School Roll and Viability**

Last year the LA Consultation document stated that "the school roll is declining and if the trend were to continue then the roll would be 267 in September 2006 and fall further in future years". The school roll is currently 326 because of in-year admissions. The table below details the school roll over the past 6 years indicating considerable fluctuations between 304 and 363 students. Our prediction for September 2006 was to recruit 285 students whereas in fact it was then 304 and now stands at 326.

<b>School roll statistics taken from Head's reports to Governors, Form 7, PLASC</b>					
Date	Actual School Roll	Predicted Roll	Date	Actual School Roll	Predicted Roll
Sept 2001	<b>351</b>	<b>358</b>	June 2004	<b>330</b>	
January 2002	<b>361</b>		Sept 2004	<b>318</b>	<b>304</b>
June 2002	<b>363</b>		January 2005	<b>330</b>	
Sept 2002	<b>359</b>	<b>362</b>	June 2005	<b>342</b>	
January 2003	<b>360</b>		Sept 2005	<b>326</b>	<b>309</b>
June 2003	<b>362</b>		January 2006	<b>325</b>	
Sept 2003	<b>315</b>	<b>329</b>	Sept 2006	<b>304</b>	<b>285</b>
January 2004	<b>317</b>		February 2007	<b>326</b>	

The school recognises that there is a need to increase numbers especially for Year 7. The school is fully aware of the increased stability that this will bring and its impact on standards

and as the level and proportion of mobility is reduced. The large level of mobility includes significant numbers of students whose first language is not English. The following table summarises the inward mobility currently experienced.

<i>Changes since Sept 2006</i>	Local Schools	Out of Area	Overseas	Total
<i>New Admissions – origins</i>	11	6	27	<b>44</b>
<i>Leavers – destinations</i>	1	6	0	<b>7</b>

These factors will need to be seriously considered in the light of closure proposals. We also now have 55 students to admit for September 2007 and only one school has places for Year 7 in the Rugby Area. It is worth noting that several other schools in Warwickshire have similar recruitment difficulties at Y7 intake including two with a lower % level of subscription than Bishop Wulstan. The Consultation paper predicts a roll of 295 without any account taken of in-year admissions. Previous experience indicates these will be at least 30 to 40 students.

The Consultation with the Catholic and wider community clearly showed support for the Fresh Start and linked Federation proposals. Whilst the data did not provide overwhelming and categorical evidence, the profile of increased preference demonstrated the opportunities of the 3-16 vision. Regrettably the support from the community was insufficient to ensure that the new school would be full and guarantee a 3-form entry which would address the curriculum and grouping issues.

#### **Curriculum Organisation and Viability - Standards and Achievement**

Currently as a small school we pride ourselves on the breadth and organisation of the curriculum. We are active in a large number of collaborations to enrich our curriculum. In Years 7 – 9 the full National Curriculum entitlement is delivered. In Key Stage 4 the provision of subjects in the option blocks is wide ranging and includes:

Applied Business	Art & Design	Asdan	Food Technology
Graphics	Resistant Materials	English Lit	French
Geography	History	Health & Care	Leisure & Tourism
Music	Performing Arts	Physical Education	Science (Double)
Additional languages (Polish, German, Turkish, Portuguese)			

We are proud of the development of the vocational GCSEs in this school and this underpins the specialist status we offer in Business & Enterprise. Students with other skills or aptitudes can access out of school provision including College courses in Hair & Beauty, Small Animal Care, Motor Vehicles and Public Services

However, we do recognise that grouping students within this curriculum structure is not ideal given a 2-form entry. One of the most damaging aspects of the recent uncertainty has been the inability for the school to put the Specialist School programme fully in place, particularly the capital plans to improve standards and achievement.

We acknowledge that headline results, especially at KS4 are below the government standards. However, we believe there is more to being a successful school than raw GCSE scores. Our view is that greater consideration should be given to our success with students who would - and will - find it difficult to access the curriculum in larger schools. The school recognises that its own Value-Added indicators need to be improved. However, there are many schools across the country achieving lower Value Added than that of Bishop Wulstan. This includes 6 secondary schools within Warwickshire.

**Financial Viability of the School** - The school has not had a deficit budget over the past four years and has reserves carried forward. It is managing a 5-year plan taking into account changes of student numbers, Standards Funds and the revenue from derived specialist status. The school constantly addresses the staffing profile to ensure financial viability whilst maintaining standards. The school plans to have a balanced budget for 2007-08 and for 2008-09. The student adjustment for this year's budget is £170,000 extra.

We recognise that the average cost per student is higher in this school for two reasons. The additional small school's grant is payable to all secondary schools in Warwickshire with fewer than 601 students. This grant takes into account the difficulties in making economies of scale regarding certain staffing and premises expenditure and protects the quality of curriculum provision. In addition we benefit from a base allocation similar to other schools to ensure premises and basic provision is in place. These are reasonable measures to protect small schools and are not restricted to Bishop Wulstan.

**Staffing and Viability** - Currently all teaching staff employed by the school are specialists and are qualified in the subjects they teach (with the exception of two classes in English). In many secondary schools this is not the case especially in Science and Mathematics.

The new staffing structure based on Teaching and Learning Responsibilities (TLRs) has created improved teams and addresses issues faced by small schools in the delivery of teaching and learning. The Support Staff are organised to reflect the priority of teaching and learning in this school. Progress has been made over the past year despite all the difficulties and uncertainties. The Governing Body believes the staff should be praised for their professionalism and commitment to the school during this difficult time.

**Conclusion** - As stated at the outset the Governing Body is opposed in principle to the closure of our school whereby the parental choice to access Catholic provision is removed. In line with the Archdiocese, the Governing Body recognises that if the proposal to close moves to statutory notice we would wish to ensure that every opportunity to explore access to alternative Catholic education for all students, regardless of faith, is made available. This would include guarantees for adequate and sustainable transport policies. Equally any transitional and future arrangements for existing students must be given the highest priority.

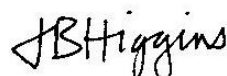
In the medium to long term, the Governing Body would also support the Diocesan Schools Commission view that an exploration for re-establishing Catholic secondary provision through a demonstration of basic need in Rugby and surrounding area is required. Planned new housing developments and increase in Catholic and other migrant populations are likely to require additional secondary provision in the future and this should be fully considered by Warwickshire County Council during this consultation.

By many important measures and considerations this is a **Good School**, where every child does matter and is recognised as such by students, parents and staff whose opinion should not be ignored.

Yours sincerely,



Mary Deery  
Chair of Governors



Brendan Higgins  
Headteacher