



**The Federation of  
St Joseph's, & St Thomas More,  
Roman Catholic, Voluntary Aided  
Primary Schools**



**REPORT ON THE RESPONSES TO THE  
CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSAL TO CLOSE  
ST THOMAS MORE RCVA PRIMARY SCHOOL**

November 2020



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## INTRODUCTION

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St Thomas More VA Primary School is a Voluntary Aided Roman Catholic school that is maintained by Durham County Council. The Governing Body of St Thomas More RCVA Primary School has a duty for the efficient financial running of the school.

The purpose of undertaking this consultation was to seek the views of our community, key stakeholders and partners on the proposal to close St Thomas More RCVA Primary School due to concerns about the financial viability of the school. It was a consultation before a possible Public Notice under Section 15.

This consultation report represents the school Governing Body responses to the consultation and to inform all parties of the outcome by:

- summarising the issues raised by consultees;
- providing a response by the Governing Body;
- sharing the decision of the Governing Body on the next steps.

## SECTION 1: THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

The Governing Body was guided through the consultation process by officers from Durham County Council. The suggested timescale, format of the consultation paper, required content, start and end date, parent/carer and staff engagement expectations were all provided by Local Authority Officers. The projected financial information and forecast of pupil numbers were all provided and approved by Local Authority Officers.

The Governing Body was advised by Local Authority Officers against opening the consultation prior to the summer holidays in July 2020 and was advised that the most appropriate time to begin the consultation was in September 2020 at the beginning of the academic year. The consultation process was conducted with the full knowledge and support of Local Authority Officers.

## SECTION 2: RESPONSES

The Governing Body has received 193 written responses to the consultation on the proposal to close St Thomas More Primary School. They are categorised in the table below.

Respondent Category	Number in favour	Number not in favour	Number neutral	Total
Pupil at St Thomas More School		8		8
Pupil at St Joseph's School				0
Pupil at another school		2		2
Parent/Carer of pupil at St Thomas More School		55		55
Parent/Carer of pupil at St Joseph's School			1	1
Parent/Carer of pupil at another school		12		12
Member of staff St Thomas More School	1	3	2	6
Member of staff at St Joseph's School	1			1
Member of staff at another school				0
Governor at St Thomas More School and St Joseph's School	1	2		3
Governor at another school		2	1	3
Resident		37	4	41
Councillor		1		1
Diocese	1	1		2
MP				0
Trade union representative			1	1
Community group		1		1
Parish/Town Council Rep		1		1
Other	1	33	4	38
Grandparents of pupil at St Thomas More School		17		17
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>193</b>

In accordance with the DfE Statutory Guidance for the Opening and Closing of Maintained Schools (November 2019), copies of the Consultation Document were sent to all parties listed under Section 16(1) of EIA 2006, including the Local Authority. The Governing Body did not receive a response to the consultation from the Local Authority.

Please note that this table reflects the number of formal written responses. Feedback from the consultation sessions for staff and parents/carers is reflected within Section 5 of this report.

In addition, the Governing Body is aware of the Change.org petition entitled 'Save St Thomas More RC Primary School' that received 1435 signatures and 126 comments. The Governing Body has not considered this petition as a formal response to the consultation. However, it is referenced in this document to acknowledge the level of opposition to the proposal.

The Governing Body also acknowledged a letter from Mary Foy MP to the Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle.

## **SECTION 3: PARENT/CARER ENGAGEMENT AND MEETINGS**

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Parents were informed on Monday 7<sup>th</sup> September 2020 that the Governing Body was carrying out the consultation. Four meetings for parents and carers were held via Zoom on Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> and Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> October 2020. Due to the increased regional Covid-19 restrictions, the Governing Body sought legal advice from Local Authority Officers about these meetings and was advised to hold these meetings virtually and not in person.

Parents/carers of all pupils registered at St Thomas More Primary School were invited to attend a meeting. The Diocesan Director of Education, and members of the Governing Body attended all four meetings. The Local Authority's School Places and Admissions Manager attended the first meeting.

## **SECTION 4: STAFF MEETING**

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On Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> September 2020 all members of staff in the Federation were informed of the Governing Body's decision to begin the consultation process. All members of staff in the Federation were invited to respond to the consultation.

On Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> October 2020 a meeting for all staff of St Thomas More School took place. All professional associations were also invited to attend the meeting. Representatives of the NEU (National Education Union) and Unison were present. Durham County Council's Human Resources Department was represented to answer questions and the School Places and Admissions Manager was also present.

## **SECTION 5: ENGAGEMENT WITH OTHER STAKEHOLDERS**

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The consultation was sent to the following stakeholders: the Local Authority (Durham County Council); the parents/carers of registered pupils at the school; the Governing Body; the Roman Catholic Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle; the teachers and other staff at the school; the teachers and other staff at St Joseph's; the parents at St Joseph's; the trade unions who represent the staff at the school; the local Member of Parliament and all local Councillors; the Parish of the Durham Martyrs; and the Head Teachers of other local Primary Schools.

Information was made available on the school's website.

## **SECTION 6: SUMMARY OF COMMENTS AND CONCERNS**

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This section is a representative selection of the comments and concerns raised during the consultation period together with the Governing Body's response. The comments and concerns have been collated in broad themes and summarised from the written responses received. The feedback and questions from the consultation meetings have been referenced here.

## Theme 1: Timing and process of the consultation

*Concerns were expressed about the consultation taking place during the pandemic; the resulting impact on the mental wellbeing of children, parents and staff; the lack of opportunity for parents/carers to have a face to face meeting; the limitations of the parent/carer meetings; that Durham County Council were not involved/unaware of the consultation; the timing of the announcement of the consultation; that the process could be stopped; that a decision to close the school has already been taken*

Examples of points raised	Governing Body response
I am also extremely concerned that proposals to close a school during a pandemic risks damaging the psychological wellbeing of students at a time when stability and consistency must be an absolute priority	<p>The Governing Body agreed to move forward on the consultation process in good faith before the full implications and the extended nature of the pandemic became apparent. Given the considerable concerns over the cumulative deficit and inability to set a legal budget, and therefore the financial viability of the school, the majority view at the time was that the process should begin. With hindsight, the Governing Body accepts and acknowledges that beginning a consultation process during the current and ongoing coronavirus crisis is far from ideal and postponement could have been explored as an option.</p> <p>The online meetings to discuss the reasons outlined in the consultation document for proposed closure of the school were considered the most appropriate given the circumstances. This was in line with the Local Authority's advice and actions.</p>
Furthermore, the consultation process itself has been damaging on our children's emotional wellbeing; the morale of parents and staff and has hit the St Thomas More community hard, depleting our numbers.	
It is even more concerning to consider closing a school in these unprecedented times – in the midst of a pandemic. Our children have lived through huge disruption; fear for their own health and the health of their loved ones and being separated from friends and family	
It's noted that the closure has been a possibility for a number of years, was it the hope that due to the ongoing pandemic it would merely be swept under the carpet?	
We do not feel that a consultation process has been fair and just during the unprecedented time of a global pandemic when engagement opportunities have been extremely limited.	
The information sharing meetings that were offered to parents were not sufficient for parents to engage with the governing body over the questions they had.	
Information was only available online; information sharing meetings were also only online. I am aware of parents who were unable to engage because they did not have sufficient digital access.	
Carrying out a consultation during the current COVID restrictions is farcical. There is not ability to have a proper consultation or debate in a hall where questions can be properly asked, and the participants can indicate their approval or disapproval for the points made. Having several separate Zoom calls of less than an hour apiece is no substitute.	
Many of us have suffered a loss, job losses, financial hardship (furlough) and uncertainty which has not only impacted us but also our children. In uncertain times the one common denominator and stable offering our children had to look forward to is their school where they	

feel safe and feel normal,	
Why were St Joseph's parents and members of the community not invited who will be impacted by the decision?	The consultation was shared with the parents/carers of all pupils registered at St Joseph's and they were invited to respond to the consultation.
The Information Sharing Meetings were designed to give us, the parent body, the opportunity to ask questions of the Governing Body, the Diocese and Durham County Council, however, Durham County Council (DCC) declined to attend 2 of the 4 meetings. We were, therefore, denied the opportunity to learn of, or question DCC's position/justification of the proposed closure. We ask you, is this fair?	<p>Officers from Durham County Council were involved in the process from the outset and were fully informed about and aware of the Governing Body's decision to consult upon the future of the school based upon concerns about the financial situation.</p> <p>The Governing Body worked with and informed all relevant officers in the Durham County Council.</p>
Durham County Council was not at all the parent meetings and key staff within the local authority only found out about the consultation after it was published on the school website and the acting executive Headteacher sent out emails. Even the key stakeholders were not informed.	
Parents have also engaged with the local authority to raise their concerns. This has been discussed with the mayor and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and I was surprised to learn that they know very little of the proposal.	
Durham County Council was not at all the parent meetings and key staff within the local authority only found out about the consultation after it was published on the school website and the acting executive Headteacher sent out emails. Even the key stakeholders were not informed.	
To release the documents now as primary school admissions are due to open will only serve to make the predicted falling roll an unnecessary reality.	The timing of the consultation was based upon guidance from Durham County Council officers and was designed to give the longest possible timeframe for consultation.
I feel the timing of the announcement was strategically planned to impact on the intake for next year if the school remains open as no parent will put their children's names down at a school which may close or is at least currently in consultation over closure.	
It is not too late to reconsider your position on this proposed closure.	The Governing Body's only resolution was to consult on the proposal due to concerns on the financial viability of the school.
To continue to plan to close this amazing and excellent school and destroy a community is beyond wrong without considering some, if not all, of the above suggestions as well as others that additional parents I know will have.	
The consultation document is written in a manner that suggests to the reader that the outcome is a foregone conclusion.	The Governing Body entered into this consultation process to 'consult' on the financial viability of the school.
Some governing body members appear to have already made a decision to close the school and the consultation is somewhat tokenistic.	

## Theme 2: Alternative options to be considered

Views were expressed that the governing body should consider alternatives to closures. These include looking at leadership roles and staffing structures; ensuring the stability of leadership so that a leader can address the issues; explore options to save money and generate income; having a strategic approach to address the issues; moving into an academy trust.

Examples of points raised	Governing Body response
<p>There are much larger schools in the local area who have a deputy Headteacher and /or Headteacher who teaches – please can the governing body advise if this option has been explored?</p>	<p>The Governing Body discussed this suggestion at length and its response is covered in the Governing Body’s decision at the end of this report.</p>
<p>Unfortunately, since the federation of St Joseph’s and St Thomas More in 2016, the school has had four headteacher or acting headteachers.</p>	
<p>The school needs a stable leadership team put in place – they need a permanent team whose leadership and strategic vision extends beyond the simple knee-jerk decision making of the current governing body.</p>	
<p>Changes to the senior leadership team has meant St Thomas More has not had period of time where it [can] build upon its successes. A period of calm would allow the current management team the chance to build upon new protocols and ensure all avenues of saving St Thomas More are investigated.</p>	
<p>The school could reduce to three classes in the short term. St Mary’s Wingate has three classes. The remaining classroom could be used for nursery provision.</p>	
<p>A number of actions could be explored and have not been. These include: reducing to 3 classes, requiring management to teach alongside their leadership commitments, reducing the size of the leadership team across the two schools, coordinating subject areas across the federation, reviewing all SLAs that the school purchases, establishing before and after school care, establishing a nursery, exploring whether it would be possible to hire out the building or grounds out of school hours in order to generate income.</p>	<p>The Governing Body discussed this suggestion at length and its response is covered in the Governing Body’s decision at the end of this report.</p>
<p>The school site has a large outdoor area, some of which could be sold to obtain revenue but also keep essential school places.</p>	
<p>Conducting a major spending review. I cannot see any evidence of a comprehensive spending review.</p>	<p>The Governing Body discussed this suggestion at length and its response is covered in the Governing Body’s decision at the end of this report.</p>
<p>By collaboratively adopting a solution focused approach and working strategically to boost pupil numbers and thus attracting extra revenue this can be achieved. To close the school without so</p>	<p>The Governing Body discussed this suggestion at length and its response is covered in the Governing Body’s decision at the end of this report.</p>

<p>much as putting in place such a strategic collaborative working party would be a tragedy and a betrayal of the vision to create a sustainable community of faith.</p>	
<p>I believe there could be other options trialled and considered before the school is closed permanently such as moving into an academy trust. Could the federation be dissolved to aid academisation?</p>	<p>The Governing Body discussed this suggestion at length and its response is covered in the Governing Body's decision at the end of this report.</p>

### Theme 3: Financial position

*Views were expressed that the financial position of the school is not accurate or fully explained as shown in the consultation document; that information is needed on the capital costs to repair the building; that the financial position could be addressed resulting in savings to ensure the school is viable; that attracting more pupils to the school would solve the financial issues;*

<p><b>Examples of points raised</b></p>	<p><b>Governing Body response</b></p>
<p>If running the school is not financially viable efforts should be made to support the school to increase numbers and revenue. ALL school budgets are tight.</p>	
<p>We are unsure as to how the governing body has arrived at the figures that they have presented in the consultation document; there is no breakdown of the data included in the figures identified.</p>	<p>The two schools in the federation operate completely independent budgets. The funding for each school is separate.</p>
<p>Your only basis in law for consulting on the proposal to close the school is that it is financially unviable. There is a clear imbalance of spending between the two schools in favour of St Joseph's. I would suggest that to rely on a deficit of £23,000 and unexplained financial projections for the next 5 years is stretching the statutory basis of financial unviability too, to the point that it can be argued that it is not proven.</p>	<p>A review of expenditure of St Thomas More School took place in Autumn 2019 which resulted in decreased staffing costs and reductions in services and resources.</p> <p>The figures used in this report are the figures provided to the Governing Body by Durham County Council. The figures set out in the proposal were checked with an approved by Durham County Council Officers before the consultation opened.</p>
<p>The cumulative overspend at St Thomas More at the end of academic years 18/19 and 19/20 was £23,000; and yet it is indicated to be an additional £80,000 at the end of this academic year (giving a cumulative deficit of £103,000). The governing body have not explained how this deficit has increased so significantly over the year.</p>	
<p>I am sure that somebody with good business and accounting sense could come up with a viable business model to turn this all around.</p>	
<p>I can see there are simple cost saving options that have not been addressed. Your available finance documents such as SFVS shows a high ratio of staff to pupils and a high leadership structure for the size of the school surely these things could be addressed prior to making the prospect of closure a public consultation?</p>	<p>The Governing Body has over time taken advice from Durham County Council officers to support ongoing financial reviews.</p>

The governors have decided to consult on the closure of St Thomas More rather than St Joseph's based on the condition of the building and cost of repairs, however we have not been given access to any buildings report.	The consultation was based upon the financial viability of the school. The financial viability concerned the revenue budget. Capital spending consideration was not an overriding factor in the consultation.
I asked for due diligence documents pertaining to the academisation proposal during the zoom meeting and was assured that they would be made available.	The due diligence reports were uploaded to the school's website following the online meetings.

## Theme 4: Educational provision

*Views were expressed that the provision of education at St Thomas More RCVA School is unique and that a closure would end the provision; that it is valued as a Catholic school; that it is a high achieving school; that it would be a loss to the community; that the school standards are not as high at St Joseph's school; that the accommodation at St Joseph's School would not be adequate to accommodate all of the children; that St Joseph's School is too far for families to travel; that St Thomas More children would lose their identity; that a closure of St Thomas More School would have a negative impact on other local schools*

Examples of points raised	Governing body response
I am angry/disbelieving astonished + completely let down and disappointed that you would even consider closing this top performing and vital and integral part of the Belmont/Carrville + surrounding area/communities school.	The consultation was focused upon financial viability.
I have spoken to a number of other Parents and Carers of children who currently attend the school and they have talked so much about the care and compassion their children receive from staff as well as the best quality of education and it breaks my heart as the prospect of not being able to provide this for our children.	The Governing Body does not doubt the care and compassion that the pupils receive from the staff. Whatever the outcome, the Governors are confident that this same care and compassion would be and is offered at St Joseph's.
Whilst at school children and families experience not only a Catholic education but Catholic values and a Catholic way of life.	The Governors completely agree with this view. The proposal outlined that should St Thomas More close, a school place at St Joseph's would be guaranteed, offering the same Catholic education.
STM is a good school. It is the (joint) 3 <sup>rd</sup> highest performing Catholic primary school in County Durham based on overall performance at Key Stage 2, even more impressively, it is ranked (joint) 13 <sup>th</sup> out of all the primary schools operating in County Durham. It deserves a chance to prove its viability.	The Governing Body discussed this suggestion at length and its response is covered in the Governing Body's decision at the end of this report.
We have serious concerns about sending him to St Joseph's as academically it is not as good as St Thomas More and taking into consideration that it will then have all the children from both schools, it will be overcrowded potentially have a negative impact on the level of education and well being of the children.	OFSTED have consistently judged St Joseph's School to be a good school. Children make good progress and have high-regard for their school. Staff across the Federation are dedicated and caring and ensure a strong Catholic ethos permeates in both schools.
Another issue is OPAL which St Thomas More have and St Joseph's do not.	While St Joseph's does not currently offer OPAL, this is a leadership decision and there is no reason why this cannot be on offer at St Joseph's
Moving all the children to St Joseph's would	St Joseph's currently does have space to

cause overcrowding at St Joseph's. Our concern is that St Joseph's is not only too overcrowded but that there is not enough indoor and outdoor space to provide our children with safe and nurturing learning environment.	accommodate all pupils currently on roll at both schools.  The leadership of the school is responsible for ensuring that any planned change would not have an adverse impact on the education of any pupil and is actively planning for a range of possible outcomes.
The impact on the children of St Joseph's, particularly their SEN provision. We have already been told that some 'spare' classrooms at the school will be re-purposed, even though that space is being used for much needed nursery provision.	There is currently no nursery provision at St Joseph's.
Will it be practical for families to make their way up to Gilesgate taking into consideration the distance, time, weather conditions and perhaps no money for transport?  Also children from Belmont/Carrville whose families do not have cars will then be unable to access a Catholic education – has this been considered by the Governing Body?	The parents remain responsible for transporting their sons/daughters to the school they attend. Schools may provide transport options, but are not required to do so. The Local Authority is responsible for the provision of transport for those families for whom it is an entitlement.
We are concerned that our children's school would become oversubscribed through children moving from St Thomas More to Cheveley Park. This could adversely affect class sizes and possibly performance.	Schools that are oversubscribed are not required to admit additional pupils. School leaders are required to ensure that any pupils admitted to a school do not adversely affect others.

## Theme 5: Numbers on roll

*Views expressed that the number of children in reception has increased; that this signifies an upward trend; that information was needed about how many pupils on roll would make the school viable; there will be a need for school places due to housing development and a COVID baby boom; the projection of numbers on roll is underestimated and does not take into account the increased number in September 2020; the projection figures are not accurate*

Examples of points raised	Governing body response
More needs to be done to promote the school. The consultation document states the main reason to be a falling roll and therefore insufficient funds. It only took a few small attempts by the 'Friends of St Thomas More' in terms of leaflets and posters and a minor Facebook campaign to get a full intake into reception 2020.	The intake into the Reception class was 16 children which is below the pupil admission number of 17. The projected pupil numbers are based upon the Durham County Council projections. These projections are provided to all schools across the Local Authority to plan for pupil places. The figures do not predict a rise in demands for school places. To address the in-year deficit the Local Authority has informed the Governing Body that an additional 20 pupils would need to be admitted to the school roll in the current academic year. However, this would not address the cumulative deficit.
At the information meeting we asked how many children would be needed on roll to make St Thomas More school viable, but you were unable to answer.	
Current residential developments in Sherburn Village (well over 100 houses) and future housing plans, for example, 450 houses near Sherburn House all lead to additional demand for future school places.	
The financial argument for closure is very short sighted due to the potential for numbers to increase as the local population increases.	
The local population is not in decline as suggested. 'The local authority projections show	

no evidence of increase' in the proposal are, quite frankly, wrong and should be investigated.	
In June 2020 alone County Durham and Darlington NHS Trust registered 400 extra pregnancies above the usual average number. That is only for June. It appears the projections you are using have not taken that baby boom into account.	
Surely the diocese and DCC should not eliminate all surplus capacity?	
The projected number of pupils for St Joseph's have not been disclosed which raises concerns regarding the availability of space in each year group to incorporate the children from St Thomas More and the continued viability of that school going forward.	The schools operate independent budgets. St Thomas More Primary was not able to set a budget. St Joseph's Primary School was.

## Theme 6: Governing Body

*Views expressed that the school has not been promoted in the local community; that more work could have been done and could be done to promote the school to attract more families; that the finances have not been adequately managed; that there has been a lack of strategic leadership; that the decision to consult was delayed and should have been revisited; that the structure and membership of the Governing Body could be reviewed*

Examples of points raised	Governing body response
The governing body has failed to promote the school, it has not advertised the school or encouraged the school to promote itself with the result that the numbers have fallen. A Governing Body is there to help the school, to check on the work done in the school and also to check that the fabric of the building is in a good state. We now hear that the building needs too much work at too much expense.	Before moving to consultation, governors proposed and considered several options to identify a long-term solution to the financial situation, and discussed and evaluated proposals with both the Diocese and the Local Authority. The Governing Body acknowledged the concerns raised in responses to the consultation. Members of the Governing Body have a range of skills and expertise which they use to inform discussions and, when appropriate, they seek the advice of local authority officers when making decisions. As volunteers, the governors endeavour to work in the best interests of the children across the federation.
I strongly believe that the Governing Body need to have a better oversight of spending. It is clear for all to see that the Headteacher's office and staff room have had complete overhauls in the last few years – how can spending be justified when there are structural/building repairs to be carried out and a lack of resources for pupils? What other expenses have occurred without direct benefit to pupils?	
The lack of creativity, foresight and strategic vision from the Governing Body means that opportunities to safeguard St Thomas More School have not been acted on.	
Lack of foresight and strategic direction - whilst acknowledging that the change in leadership has presented challenges to delivering a strategic vision.	
There was a back and forth in decisions about the way ahead resulting in significant time lapses. No progress was made for months between January and 19 <sup>th</sup> May 2020 when a decision was	

made to halt the consultation and consult on academisation. A decision was then made on 25 <sup>th</sup> June to return to the original plan of consulting to close the school. A reappraisal of what was the best option should have been undertaken. It was five months later and circumstances had changed considerably since the original decision.	
That the current Governing Body step down to allow the school to be led in a more dynamic and imaginative manner. The current governing body are, without doubt, a well-meaning collection of individuals, but their lack of energy is overtly visible to everyone who has contact with them.	The Governing Body noted this concern.

## Theme 7: The Diocese

*Views expressed that the decision has already been made as there are plans for use of the land and buildings; that the Diocese wishes to close the school so that it can make money; that a closure would harm the reputation of the Church; that Catholic children are moving to non-Catholic schools; that the Diocese should give money to the school to cover the deficit.*

Examples of points raised	Governing Body response
At worst there are strong indications that this process is one of design by the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, over several years, as they see the school as a burden, want to remove it and then use the land to generate monies going forward.	St Thomas More is a voluntary aided, maintained Primary School. The Governing Body has foundation governors appointed by the Bishop, but is maintained by the Local Authority. The Governing Body's decision to consult was in response to financial concerns and discussion with the Local Authority. It was a Governing Body decision not a diocesan decision.
Whilst I'm aware that it has been stated that no decisions have been made about the use of the site should the school close, I have no doubts that the site will be used for housing.	The restrictive covenant applies to the whole site, including land owned by the diocese and the local authority.  This consultation was based around financial viability. The future of the site should the school close was not part of the Governing Body's discussions.
During the sharing meeting it was implied that the land STM is built on could not be used for any other purpose (than the provision of Catholic education) due to the restrictive covenant placed upon it but surely this is misleading and the restrictive covenant could/would simply be removed following the closure of the school to allow re-development.	
I can only conclude that after 30 years an opportunity to close the school has finally been provided to the Diocese. This is the clearest demonstration yet of the Diocese looking after its own interests rather than that of the children.	
The diocese needs to be wary of actions it takes if parents, grandparents and children believe trusts have been broken it could have an irreversible effect on the whole of the church.	The Governing Body noted this concern.
They have proven to me that money, academisation status or both is considered a higher priority than my children's education and wellbeing and if my parental choice is taken away	The Governing Body acknowledges parents' right to choose a school for their children, therefore as part of the consultation it sought to guarantee places at St Joseph's should St Thomas More

from me then I will be left with no other option but to look at non-Catholic schools for my children.	close.
The Diocese has chosen not to fund St Thomas More.	St Thomas More is a maintained school. The maintaining authority is Durham County Council not the diocese. Over time the diocese has used the available capital grants to support the building. It is the revenue budget that this is the primary concern here.

## SECTION 6: THE DECISION OF THE GOVERNING BODY

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The full Governing Body met on Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> October 2020 to consider the responses to the consultation. All governors had full access to all written responses and to the questions raised via the staff meetings and parent/carer meetings prior to the meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> October 2020. The responses included in this document were collated at the meeting.

The Governing Body would like to thank all those who took time to submit responses as these were wide ranging and allowed a full and informed consideration of the views of the various stakeholders.

The Governing Body resolved not to proceed to statutory public notice but to explore other options to address the financial viability of St Thomas More Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary.

The Governing Body is aware that Durham County Council as the maintaining authority has forecast a deficit budget of £103,000, but is committed to working with the Local Authority to find ways of addressing the financial situation that do not result in the closure of the school on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2021.

The reasons for this decision are as follows:

- the overwhelming local support for the school from parents/carers and other members of the community, including their stated commitment to work with the school to find collective ways to address the financial viability;
- the need to further explore alternative ways to address the in-year deficit through consideration of alternative leadership models and the possible reduction of the number of classes;
- the need to celebrate the school's strengths and successes within the catchment area.

This report concludes the Governing Body's consultation process which commenced on Monday 7<sup>th</sup> September 2020.