

Consultation on the proposed closure of St Dominic's Catholic Primary School

Overview

We are consulting you about a proposal to close St Dominic's Catholic Primary School on 31 August 2025. This is the first stage in a process that we have to follow that may lead to the school being closed.

In recent years the number of primary age children in Hackney, and in many parts of London, has fallen. The reasons behind this are thought to include lower birth rates, lack of affordable housing for families, as well as Brexit and the recent pandemic. The fall in the number of children, leading to a high number of surplus school places and reduced funding from central government, has meant that our schools are facing difficult challenges.

In 2014, there were 2846 children starting primary schools in Hackney. By May 2024, this number had fallen to 2203 children on roll in Reception - a decrease of 23%. This left 577 reception places vacant (May 2024) - the equivalent of 19 empty classrooms.

Schools receive money from the government for each child on their roll. The yearly cost of each unfilled school place is approximately £6,000. With the growing number of unfilled places in Hackney primary schools, they are under increasing financial pressure. With funding reducing, many schools are finding it harder to work effectively or provide enrichment activities such as extracurricular trips and visits, after school clubs, and tournaments for children. The Council cannot afford to financially support schools that are not sustainable, and must continue to make difficult decisions to make sure our schools are fit for the future, and to protect the high quality education that Hackney is known for.

In the last academic year (2023/24) we had to make the difficult decision to close four primary schools. They closed in July 2024. We took this decision because there were too few children to keep them open and for the schools to remain financially sustainable. While these decisions are never easy, we made them with the interests of all children in mind with the aim of creating a stronger school system in Hackney. Other London councils are facing similar challenges whilst also making difficult decisions to close and merge schools.

Unfortunately, despite the earlier school closures in Hackney, we still have significantly more school places than we have children to fill them. There were 2125 reception children on roll in Hackney schools (17/9/2024), but we have 2675 places. This means that there were 550 surplus places (21%) this September (2024), causing continuing funding challenges for our schools.

Why are we consulting you?

Our goal is to create a stronger school system where every child has access to a broad and enriched educational experience. That is only achievable when schools can admit as many children within their Planned Admission Number (PAN) as possible and maximise the funding they receive. Sadly, for some Hackney primary schools, the number of children attending remains too low and has led to financial deficits in some schools that the Council is unable to maintain.

This has happened at St Dominic's Catholic Primary School and we now have to consider the school's closure. We would not be doing so if we thought there could be a better option.

We now want to hear your comments on the proposal to close St Dominic's Catholic Primary School (Ballance Rd, E9 5SR) on 31 August 2025. We welcome ideas and/or alternative options you may have about the future of the school. Your input, suggestions and feedback are important in helping us to further understand what the school means to the children, parents/carers, staff and local community.

St Dominic's Catholic Primary School

St Dominic's is a one form entry school, judged 'Good' by Ofsted (2023). Over recent years, the school has been affected by falling rolls, and as a result, in 2022, the school reduced its reception Planned Admission Number from two forms of entry (60 pupils each year), to one form of entry each year (30 pupils each year).

In Reception last year, the school had 16 children on roll out of a possible 30 places, see Table 1.

Table 1 - Reception roll number 2023/24 (May census)

PAN (Reception)	No of pupils on roll (Reception)	Surplus places	% surplus of PAN
30	16	14	47%

In May 2024, the school had 230 pupils enrolled from Reception to Year 6, out of a possible 360 places as shown below in Table 2.

Table 2 - Whole school roll 2023/24 (May census)

Planned Admission Number (PAN) (whole school)	No of pupils on roll (whole school)	Surplus places	% surplus of PAN
360	230	130	36%

As of 17/9/2024, there are only 23 children enrolled in the Reception class.

Why are we proposing to close this school?

Despite St Dominic's being judged by Ofsted to be a 'Good' school, it has experienced falling rolls over recent years. The school is located in a building capable of admitting 420 children, but it is only able to fill enough places for a school half that size. The number of pupils on roll has declined by 18%, between the October 2021 and 2023 censuses.

Having reviewed the school's financial position and plans for future sustainability, the Council believes the school can not be maintained without putting the quality of education for the children at risk, and negatively impacting on its children with the highest level of need.

A possible merger with St Scholastica's Catholic Primary School (Kenninghall Road, E5 8BS) was considered but the distance between the schools was considered too far. A consultation on a proposal for the school's closure should therefore begin.

What would it mean for the children?

All children on roll would be offered places at schools local to their home. The Council plans to work closely with the Roman Catholic Diocese of Westminster (RCDOW) to support families to move to other Catholic schools if that is their preference. The nearest alternative Roman Catholic schools are St Scholastica's Catholic Primary School (Hackney) and St Elizabeth Catholic Primary School (Tower Hamlets), both approximately 35 minutes walk from St Dominic's.

Families with children who have an Education, Health & Care Plan (EHCP) will be directly assisted by the Council's Special Educational Needs Service to support them through the transition, along with families with children who receive specialist support. EHCP applications that are in process will continue to be assessed with support from the plan coordinators.

Families of pupils receiving support for special educational needs and disabilities, but who do not have an EHCP, will receive advice and guidance when considering changes to provision or settings. Specialist local authority staff are available to provide support to schools.

We will work closely with school leaders to ensure that each child's feelings are properly considered, making the change of school as smooth and positive as possible, where the opportunities for making new friends and trying different activities are the focus.

What would it mean for my child being part of a different and potentially larger school?

We know that for some of the children at St Dominic's, moving to a different and potentially bigger school might be difficult. Even though the new school will feel different to your child(ren), we will make sure they get the right support to settle quickly. We want to hear children's voices in the options being considered so we will ask the school for help in gathering their thoughts and feelings.

How would the admissions process work?

A dedicated admissions officer will assist you with information and support to apply for alternative school places, taking into consideration any issues and concerns you have. You have the right to apply to other schools and move your children at any time.

If you have children with an Education, Health & Care Plan (EHCP) you will be contacted as soon as possible to begin discussion about alternative schools you prefer in case the council decides in April 2025 to close St Dominic's. The timeline for achieving a closure is shown in the table below called 'Timeline'.

What would it mean for the staff and Head of School/Executive Headteacher?

The closure of St Dominic's will affect all staff including the Head of School/Executive Headteacher. The Council will provide all staff with support to have the confidence to apply for new roles. There may be redeployment opportunities available within the Council for staff affected by redundancy. Our priority would be to ensure that staff at risk of redundancy are supported fully throughout this transition, just as we would be supporting our children and families. This will include a programme of support, advice and training activity including access to the Council's employee assistance programme, offering confidential advice and counselling.

Would there be any changes to the school building?

The St Dominic's site is partially owned by RCDOW and the Council. If the school closes, the Council and the Diocese will need to consider alternative options for the future use of the site.

What happens next?

This paper is part of a six week public consultation on the proposal to close St Dominic's Catholic Primary School. The consultation began on 8 October and will end on 19 November 2024 at 5pm.

There are a number of ways you can respond to the consultation, and these are set out at the end of this paper.

The Council will consider all the views put forward during this consultation period before making a decision on whether to publish proposals required by law. If proposals are published, there will be a further period for comments, called the representation period. This would last for 28 days. A final decision would be taken by Hackney’s Cabinet at a later date. The timeline for this proposal is shown in the table below (dates may be subject to change).

Timeline

Date	Event
8 October - 19 November 2024	<p>Informal consultation</p> <p>The dates for a parent/carer meeting and an additional engagement opportunity will be confirmed separately by St Dominic's Catholic Primary School.</p> <p>Your input, suggestions and feedback are important in helping us to further understand what the school means to the children, parents/carers, staff and local community.</p>
January 2025	Results of the informal consultation are considered by Hackney Cabinet. A decision is made whether to publish a statutory notice for the closure of St Dominic's.
February - March 2025	A statutory notice is published for a 4-week representation period
April 2025	The outcome of the representation period and any objections are considered by the Cabinet and a final decision on the closure proposal is made.
Summer term 2025	School closure arrangements are carried out (subject to Cabinet’s decision), if the proposals are approved.
31 August 2025	St Dominic's Catholic Primary School officially closes.
September 2025	Former pupils of St Dominic's start at their new schools.

How can I get more information?

You can find out more about this proposal from the Hackney Education website at bit.ly/school-proposals

How do I respond to this consultation?

You can give your views on this proposal by:

- completing the response form attached to this consultation document, or
- online by clicking on the following link: bit.ly/school-proposal-consultation
- or by visiting consultation.hackney.gov.uk

If you choose to fill in a paper response form, please hand it into the office at St Dominic's Catholic Primary School, or post it to:

Hackney Council
Education Services
School Place Planning
Hackney Service Centre, 3rd Floor
1 Hillman Street
London, E8 1DY

The closing date for comments and suggestions is **Tuesday, 19 November 2024 at 5pm.**

If you have any questions about this proposal, please email school.sufficiency@hackney.gov.uk

If you require this document in a different format please contact us and we will get back to you in the next five working days.

Accessibility statement: If you require this document in a different format, please email school.sufficiency@hackney.gov.uk

We will consider your request and get back to you in the next five working days.

If you would like to find out what this document says please tick the appropriate box, put your name, address and phone number at the bottom of this page and return it to the address below.

- এই দলিলে কি লেখা আছে সে সম্পর্কে যদি আপনি জানতে চান তাহলে অনুগ্রহ করে উপযুক্ত বাক্সে টিক দিন, এই পাতার নিচে আপনার নাম, ঠিকানা ও ফোন নম্বর লিখুন এবং এটি নিচের ঠিকানায় ফেরত পাঠান। (Bengali)
- 如果你想知道這分文件的詳細內容，請在方框內打鉤，在本頁下面寫下你的名字、地址和電話號碼並寄到下面的地址。 (Chinese)
- Si vous désirez connaître le contenu de ce document, veuillez cocher la case appropriée et indiquer votre nom, adresse et numéro de téléphone au bas de cette page et la renvoyer à l'adresse indiquée ci-dessous. (French)
- Ger hun dixwazin bizanibin ku ev dokument çi dibêje, ji kerema xwe qutika minasib îşaret bikin, nav, navnîşan û hejmara telefona xwe li jêrê rûpel binivîsin û wê ji navnîşana jêrîn re bişînin. (Kurdish)
- Jeśli chcesz dowiedzieć się, jaka jest treść tego dokumentu, zaznacz odpowiednie pole, wpisz swoje nazwisko, adres i nr telefonu w dolnej części niniejszej strony i przeslij na poniższy adres. (Polish)
- Haddii aad jeclaan lahayd in aad ogaato waxa dokumeentigani sheegayo fadlan calaamadi godka ku haboon, ku qor magacaaga, cinwaanka iyo telefoon lambarkaaga boggan dhankiisa hoose ka dibna ku celi cinwaanka hoose. (Somali)
- Si desea saber de lo que trata este documento, marque la casilla correspondiente, escriba su nombre, dirección y número de teléfono al final de esta página y envíela a la siguiente dirección. (Spanish)
- Bu dökümanda ne anlatıldığını öğrenmek istiyorsanız, lütfen uygun kutuyu işaretleyerek, adınızı, adresinizi ve telefon numaranızı bu sayfanın alt kısmına yazıp, aşağıdaki adrese gönderin. (Turkish)
- اگر آپ یہ جاننا چاہتے ہیں کہ دستاویز میں کیا لکھا ہے تو ازراہ کرم مناسب باکس میں صحیح کا نشان لگائے اور اپنا نام، پتہ اور فون نمبر اس صفحہ کے نیچے لکھئے اور اسے نیچے دئے گئے پتہ پر واپس بھیج دیجئے۔ (Urdu)
- Nếu bạn muốn biết tài liệu này nói gì hãy đánh dấu vào hộp thích hợp, điền tên, địa chỉ và số điện thoại của bạn vào cuối trang này và gửi lại theo địa chỉ dưới đây. (Vietnamese)
- אויב ווילט איר וויסן וואס דער דאקומענט זאגט, ביטע טיך די פאסיגע קעסטל, שרייב דיין נאמען, אַדרעס און טעלעפאן נומער און שיק עס צוריק צו די אַדרעס אונטן. (Yiddish)

If you would like this document in any of the following formats or in another language not listed above, please complete and send the form to the address below. In large print In Braille On disk On audio tape

In another language, please state: _____

Name: _____
Address: _____
Telephone: _____

Return to: Freepost, LBH
Consultation Team, Hackney Town
Hall, Mare Street, London, E8 1EA