



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

Determination

Case reference: STP658 St Aloysius' Roman Catholic College, Islington

Proposer: The Governing Body

Referred by: Islington Council

Date of decision: 18 October 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 to admit pupils to Year 7 at St Aloysius' Roman Catholic College, without reference to their gender from September 2025. I approve the proposal subject to the following condition: that the governing body amend the admission arrangements for September 2025 accordingly no later than 31 October 2024.

The proposal

1. On 1 March 2024, the governing body of St Aloysius' Roman Catholic College, Islington (the school) published a statutory notice to change from being a school for boys only, to becoming a co-educational school by admitting girls for the first time to Year 7 on 1 September 2025, and to continue to do so year on year until it becomes fully co-educational in September 2029.

Jurisdiction

2. The proposal was published under section 19(3) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and paragraph 11(1)(a) of Schedule 2 to The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools)(England) Regulations 2013 (the regulations).

3. The proposal was referred to the adjudicator by Islington Council (the LA) under paragraph 5(4) of Schedule 3 of the Regulations.
4. I am satisfied that I have jurisdiction to determine this proposal.

Procedure

5. In considering this matter I have had regard to all relevant legislation and to guidance issued by the Department for Education (“Making significant changes (‘prescribed alterations’) to maintained schools”, January 2023) (the statutory guidance).
6. The documents I have considered in reaching my decision include:
 - a) the statutory notice published by the school dated 1 March 2024;
 - b) a request by the school to the adjudicator in May 2024 to vary its admission arrangements for September 2025 by having a mixed intake of boys and girls;
 - c) correspondence between the adjudicator and the school concerning that request;
 - d) a letter from the LA dated 12 June 2024 referring the school’s statutory proposal to the adjudicator;
 - e) documents provided by the LA, in particular a document entitled “The LA response to an application from St Aloysius to become co-educational from September” sent to the adjudicator with the LA referral of the proposals (the LA response document);
 - f) information provided by the school and the Diocese of Westminster (the school’s religious authority, the diocese) concerning the proposal, and
 - g) The LA’s secondary schools admissions brochure for 2025.
7. I have also taken account of information received during a meeting I convened on 23 September 2024 at the school, and subsequent correspondence from each of the parties. This meeting was attended by representatives of the school, the LA and the diocese.

Background

8. The school is a voluntary aided non-selective secondary school for boys between the ages of 11 and 16, and for both boys and girls between the ages of 17 and 19 (the sixth form). It is the only secondary school in the borough of Islington with a Roman Catholic religious character. The school has a capacity of 1150 and the Year 7 PAN has been 180 for some time up to and including 2024. There are currently (autumn census 2023) 330 boys on roll below the sixth form. The school serves what it describes as an “impoverished community” and has said that 58 per cent of boys in Years 7-11 are in receipt of the pupil premium and that 24 per cent have special educational needs. The school is located at the

northern end of the borough, very close to its border with the boroughs of Haringey and Camden. A single-sex Catholic secondary school for girls in Islington closed in 2017.

9. The are ten secondary schools located within the London Borough of Islington, some co-educational and some single-sex. In September 2024 the number of Year 7 places available in these schools was 360 for boys, 320 for girls and 995 in co-educational provision. The LA reports that, as a result of falling birth rates, there were 307 vacant Year 7 places in October 2023 across the borough, a vacancy rate of 18 per cent. I asked the LA to provide me with its projections of the future need for secondary school places. These show an anticipated decline of total Year 7 to Year 11 places across the ten schools from 7120 in 2024 to 6562 in 2027. In the same period, the LA's projections for the school are that the number of children there will decline from 281 in 2024 to 248 in 2027.

10. The LA has developed a School Organisation Plan (October 2022) which sets out its strategy for managing surplus places in schools in the borough in the light of the projected need for places. The LA has told me that it does not support the school's proposal, principally because of "overall school place planning concerns in London", and that "We understand that the proposal to make St Aloysius College co-educational is an attempt to make the school more viable, but this does not take account of the primary fact that there are simply not enough children to fill school places across London, and Islington in particular." At the meeting I convened, the LA's representatives insisted that its view was that the proposal would have a serious negative impact on other local schools, although there is some confusion on this point in the correspondence I have seen from the LA.

11. The school does not believe this to be the case, since its view is that the proposal would result in it being able to make provision for Catholic girls who are currently leaving the borough to find Catholic schooling elsewhere. It also believes that more Catholic boys with sisters will come to the school if it is co-educational instead of them going out of the borough to secure co-educational Catholic schooling.

12. It emerged at the meeting which I convened that the school has been committed since 2023 to pursuing a change to co-educational provision, and that it had even carried out a consultation locally about doing so from September 2024, but without publishing statutory proposals. The LA had supported its thinking at that time and wrote to the school in September 2023 to that effect, saying that it thought the proposal unlikely to have a negative local impact. I have seen a copy of that letter. The change in the LA's position subsequently has resulted, I was told at the meeting, from there being "a wider officer view" now being taken.

13. The statutory consultation period (the representation period) closed on Friday 29 March 2024. A public consultation meeting was held at the school on Tuesday 26 March 2024 and three written responses to the consultation were received. These were forwarded to me by the LA when it made its referral, and I have been assured by the LA that I am in possession of the entire product of the school's consultation. Also sent with the referral was the LA's "response" to the proposal, in the form of a document which I have been told

consisted of extracts from a paper which was due to be considered by the council's Executive on 27 June 2024.

14. Paragraph 3(1) of Schedule 3 to the regulations says that for a proposal of the sort made by the school's governing body, the local authority is the prescribed decision maker, which must "consider and determine the proposals." Paragraph 5(4) of Schedule 3 states that "Where the local authority does not make a determination within the period prescribed [which is 2 months from the end of the representation period] the proposal must be referred to the adjudicator." Since the deadline for the LA to determine the proposals was 29 May 2024, the intended consideration of them by the LA on 27 June would have been too late. The LA has therefore been required to refer the proposals to the adjudicator, which it did on 12 June 2024.

15. The diocese has expressed strong support for the school's proposals and is currently collaborating with the school's desire to secure academy status as part of the Diocese of Westminster Academy Trust. When I became aware of this latter fact following the referral by the LA, I wrote to the parties seeking their understanding as to the likely date of any approved academy conversion. I pointed out that once any conversion took place, I would no longer have jurisdiction to consider the proposal, and that it would not be good use of public money to begin that consideration until the conversion date was known with some certainty. The school replied that this was now likely to be 1 April 2025, and at the meeting I convened I was told that a later date was now probable. I have therefore been content to proceed with my consideration of the proposal.

Consideration of factors

16. The requirements concerning the publication of proposals by the governing body of a school under the regulations referred to above are set out in paragraph 1 of Schedule 3 to the regulations, and the stages of the process to be followed are contained in the statutory guidance. The correct procedures, including the prescribed timescales, were followed by the proposer, the school in this case.

17. The regulations also provide that:

- a) The adjudicator must have regard to guidance given from time to time by the Secretary of State;
- b) The adjudicator may reject the proposals, approve the proposals without modification or approve the proposals with modifications following consultation with the governing body and the LA;
- c) Where the adjudicator approves the proposals, the approval may be conditional upon the occurrence of a prescribed event.

18. The statutory guidance provides that the adjudicator should take the following into account when deciding proposals:

- a) Educational standards and diversity of provision
- b) Equal opportunities issues
- c) Community cohesion
- d) Travel and accessibility
- e) Funding

19. I shall set out below my consideration of each of these matters. In doing so, I shall refer to the arguments and information provided to me by the parties. However, my decision must be in relation to these factors rather than on the balance of all the arguments which have been put forward to me. Where information given to me illuminates the above matters, I will include it.

20. I point out here that the factors which must be taken into account by the adjudicator are the same as those which the LA would have been required to consider had it determined the proposals within the statutory timescale. The LA has stated that its opposition to the proposals is principally based on “school planning concerns”, and it has not addressed the factors set out in guidance directly. However, I understand school planning considerations to be relevant to some of the factors set out in the guidance, as I shall explain.

Educational standards and diversity of provision

21. The statutory guidance says:

“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.”

I begin with the issue of whether the proposals meet the needs of parents. I shall set out how the proposals would affect the nature of the available schooling in Islington before going on to consider whether the available provision might or might not meet parental need if the proposal is approved. First, there is the question of gender balance. I have given above the balance of secondary school provision in Islington for boys and girls in September 2024. The school has reduced its PAN for admissions in 2025 to 150, as have other (co-educational) secondary schools in Islington in line with the LA’s School Organisation Plan. This means that the gender balance of Year 7 places in the borough in 2025 will be as follows, depending on whether the proposals are approved or not.

If proposals rejected	If proposals approved
Boys only: 330	Boys only: 180
Girls only: 320	Girls only: 320

Co-educational: 880	Co-educational: 1030
Total: 1530	Total: 1530

The LA response document (containing comments extracted from the paper which was due to be considered by the council's Executive on 27 June 2024) says that if a 50/50 split between boys and girls in co-educational provision is assumed, the balance of gender provision, which in 2024 was 51 per cent boys and 49 per cent girls, would become in 2025 45 per cent boys and 55 per cent girls if the proposals were approved. This appears to show more places available to girls than boys, casting a negative light on the proposals. However, it is not appropriate to assume that co-educational places are made available on an equal basis between boys and girls because they are made available without reference to gender, which is different. The gender difference which would result from the proposals being approved would be that a higher proportion of secondary places would then be available as girls only places than the number available as boys only places, nothing more. There would be no gender difference in the total number of places available to each.

22. Gender balance is of course not the only feature of the secondary school places which would change under the proposals, since there is also the matter of denominational provision. As I have said, St Aloysius is the only Catholic secondary school in Islington. The only other secondary school in Islington with a religious character is St Mary Magdalene Academy, which is a mixed secondary school with a Church of England religious character. If the proposals are approved, this would mean that there would be secondary schooling available to the parents of Catholic girls and boys in the same way that Church of England provision is available to parents of both girls and boys.

23. The school's statutory proposal referred explicitly to its intention to "ensure that our provision matches the local need", saying that "co-educational schools are more sought after than single sex schools" and that its proposals would "ensure a more effective provision of Catholic education at secondary level in Islington".

24. The LA challenged the school's view that there was a demonstrable unmet need in its response document, saying that only 39 parents (of both boys and girls) of the 205 children leaving Catholic primary schools in the borough in 2023 had sent their child to a co-educational Catholic secondary school elsewhere in north London. It backed this up with data from the 2024 cohort, which it analysed in terms of the numbers of parents who had chosen different types of schooling both inside and outside the borough and in terms of whether these were in single sex or co-educational schools or were or were not Catholic schools. The school has sent me data which provides an analysis of all leavers from the borough's Catholic primary schools who it says were Islington residents (which I consider is more helpful in terms of the question of unmet need in the borough). It told me that all this data had been obtained from the LA. The LA has not challenged the data. However, the two parties have chosen to emphasise different aspects of what these data show, and each has provided me with extensive material on this point.

25. I have considered all this information carefully, and it seems to me that contained within it there are some useful facts. I have noted that in 2024 the parents of 25 girls and 14 boys leaving Catholic primary schools in Islington have sent their child to a Catholic co-educational school outside the borough and that the parents of a further 11 girls chose a Catholic girls' school elsewhere. So, as the school told me, the parents of 50 children (about one in four of the total Year 6 leaving cohort from these primary schools) have sent their child to a Catholic secondary school without an equivalent in Islington.

26. Although parental preference is also affected by perceptions of school performance (which I will refer to below), it seems to me that this is fairly unequivocal evidence that the proposals, which would fill the gap in Islington both of secondary Catholic education for girls and of secondary co-educational Catholic education, would meet a need for a not insignificant number of Islington residents. I am less impressed by the statement of the LA which, having seen the school's correspondence referred to above, said to me that:

"...we believe that the evidence provided does not sufficiently demonstrate a strong demand. The fact that some families choose to send their children to Catholic schools outside the borough could be influenced by a variety of factors, not solely the lack of a Catholic co-educational school in Islington. In the absence of any detailed research or parental survey, the proposals appear to be built on an assumption that more families would choose the school if it were co-educational. It could equally be argued that the school may lose applications from those seeking a boys-only Catholic education." The LA then told me that "...our main concern however relates to overall school place planning in London, and the local authority's duty in this respect", which I shall consider below.

27. As far as the question of meeting unmet parental need is concerned however, while I agree that careful research would throw further light on this argument, I also think that the balance of the evidence which is available lies in favour of the points made by the school.

28. I move now to the next point under this heading – the question of whether the proposals are likely to have a positive effect on educational standards, and the related issue of school viability. The LA has asked me to consider the latter issue, and although it has not explicitly linked it to the question of standards, I am happy to take into account what the LA has said on the issue of place planning as I agree that changing pupil demographics can affect school standards. I do not take the view that a school's size determines the quality of the education which it provides, but I do accept that if the roll of a school falls year-on-year the consequential loss of funding faced by it does present it with staffing and management difficulties which are likely to affect standards.

29. The LA's response document showed the background of falling school rolls that is affecting schools in Islington and provided me with a copy of the School Organisation Plan which it has developed. This includes a strategy for managing surplus places in schools using the tools of PAN reductions, maximising the numbers of pupils in Islington schools and options involving closures, amalgamations and federations. Addressing the school's proposal to move to co-educational provision, the LA said that this may be seen as assisting with maximising pupils numbers, but it said that it was not convinced that the

proposal would have the effect of securing the school's viability, and gave some reasons such as changing demographics in London and the resultant evolving religious affiliations and consequential educational needs of communities. It showed how the number of first preferences expressed for Year 7 places at the school had declined in recent years (although the chart showing this also shows a recovery in 2023 and 2024). A further element of the document referred to the falling rolls which had led to the closure of Mount Carmel Catholic Girls School (Mount Carmel) in Islington in 2017 and showed the existing year group numbers at the school, saying that it must also be borne in mind that there are currently falling rolls at Catholic primary schools in Islington. The LA said that "The challenge is whether the proposals will ensure the long-term viability of the college."

30. I can only derive from this set of observations by the LA that it has at least anticipated the likelihood that the school will cease to be viable in the near future. Its response document points out that the school currently has fewer pupils on roll than did Mount Carmel when the decision to close that school was taken, although the LA has also said to me about this that "We... acknowledge that past circumstances may not directly apply to the current situation."

31. The LA has said that the proposal may not be sufficient to ensure the school's viability in the future, and that it does not support it for that reason. As I have discussed above, the likelihood is however that the proposal will result in more parents rather than fewer seeking a place at the school. Neither does the LA's observation that the proposal ignores the fact that "there are simply not enough children to fill school places across London, and Islington in particular" seem to be particularly helpful in this context. The proposal either will or will not support numbers at the school, whatever the broader context. My view is that the proposal is likely to improve viability and to the extent that this is a contributor to standards, to support such standards.

32. The school has pointed to the fact that it was judged by Ofsted in 2020 as "Requires Improvement", but that it is now rated as "Good". It has also been keen to tell me, in its own words, that the school "...is currently the third best-performing secondary school in terms of results, outperforming most co-educational secondary schools in Islington despite the fact that it is a single sex boys' school, and the majority of pupils come from deprived backgrounds. It also has very high levels of attendance (for which it has received national awards)."

33. The LA has had the opportunity to comment on these remarks but has not done so. It has however confirmed the school's statement about current school performance by giving me the Department for Education 'Progress 8' figures (the index of improvement for pupils at the school between their attainment on entering the school and that at the end of Year 11) for 2023 for all ten secondary schools in Islington. Five of these show performance above the national average, and St Aloysius has the third highest index (0.16). It therefore seems apparent to me that if the implementation of the proposals leads to more Islington pupils attending the school than is the case currently, educational standards for Islington children will, on current performance, be improved. I was told at the meeting which I held

that the school does not currently cater for children of the Catholic faith exclusively. I therefore asked it to provide me with its understanding of the religious affiliation of the boys currently in Years 7 to 11. These figures show were: Roman Catholic: 29 per cent, other Christian: 30 per cent and Muslim 26 per cent.

34. I have already described how children (and in particular, girls) leaving Catholic primary schools in Islington can be shown to migrate to Catholic schools outside the borough. I asked all the parties to give me their perceptions of which schools would be those most likely to be preferred by the parents of such children (in general). I show below the four closest co-educational Catholic schools to St Aloysius, which were those listed by the school. The LA gave me a list of all 68 Catholic secondary schools in the Dioceses of Westminster and Southwark and their distances from St Aloysius but did not give an opinion on which parents might reasonably access. The diocese said that one of these schools (Bishop Douglas) and another much further away might be the preference for parents but said that both were heavily oversubscribed and gave priority for admission based on distance from the school (making access by Islington parents unlikely). The school had earlier told me that in 2023 one of the four schools (Maria Fidelis) had been the school to which 20 children from Islington Catholic primary schools had transferred (just over half the total of 39 who transferred to a co-educational school outside Islington) - a statement not challenged by the LA.

The four closest Catholic co-educational secondary schools to St Aloysius

School	Local authority	Distance from St Aloysius in a straight line	Progress 8 (2023)
Bishop Douglas School, Finchley	Barnet	2.6 miles	0.88
All Saints Catholic High School	Hackney	2.9 miles	0.31
Maria Fidelis Catholic School	Camden	3.1 miles	-0.33
St Thomas More Catholic School	Haringey	3.3 miles	0.39

35. I surmise from the above that just over half of the children whose parents had chosen to send them to a co-educational Catholic school outside Islington in 2023 (those who had been able to access a place at Maria Fidelis) were now in a school whose Progress 8 index was below that of St Aloysius. Again, my view of this is that assuming the school attracts equivalent parents in the future if the proposals are approved, then there would be an uplift in standards for Islington children.

36. My final concern in relation to whether the proposals are likely to contribute to the raising of educational attainment is in respect of the likely effect on other schools. It is a principal feature of what the LA has told me that the proposal would have a detrimental effect on three schools in particular. Although, as I have mentioned, I have recent correspondence from the LA which says that it does not think this likely (a letter dated 22 July 2024 signed by the Corporate Director, Children's Services), its representatives, at the meeting which I held, maintained their view that there would be a consequential effect for other schools.

37. The LA's response document had summarised the responses to the consultation about the proposal. Two of these responses had come from local schools which said that they opposed the proposals because they thought it likely that they would affect their intake. At the meeting which I held, the representatives of the LA said that they believed the proposals posed a threat to these two schools, and to a third school. I therefore asked the LA to provide me with their evidence for making these assertions. It sent me a document which was, to all intents and purposes, a slightly revised version of its original response document. On the point in question, it repeated what had been said there by two of the three schools referred to in the meeting but said nothing about the third. It provided me with no further justification for the LA's view other than to again summarise the fears expressed by the two schools.

38. I have no doubt that the schools which objected to the proposals have expressed what are their genuine concerns in the light of the background of continuing falling rolls and the fact that the proposal would provide new places for girls at St Aloysius. However, I need to examine what has been said in order to set it alongside my considerations above about the likely effect of the implementation of the proposals on educational standards overall.

39. The first school is a girls' community secondary school located centrally in Islington. It is popular and successful and oversubscribed. The LA guide for parents gives data for Year 7 admissions in September 2023 which shows that it received a total of 455 preferences, of which 125 were first preferences, for the available 140 places and that those admitted were either siblings of girls already on roll or lived within a mile of the school. The school said that the proposals have not been sufficiently researched and implies that its own intake could be affected. Given that St Aloysius' proposal is to offer 150 co-educational places, not all of which are remotely likely to be filled immediately, and that the school objecting to the proposal has the highest Progress 8 index of all Islington's secondary schools, I think it highly unlikely, certainly in the short-run that there will be any adverse effect on the intake of this other school.

40. The second school is a co-educational community school located nearer to St Aloysius. This school was also oversubscribed with a total of 232 applications, of which 60 were first preferences, for 120 places in September 2023, but admitted only 112 to Year 7, 35 of whom were children who had not received an offer at one of their stated preference schools, and for whom this was the nearest available place. The school had the lowest Progress 8 index of all Islington schools in 2023. The objection which it submitted to the

proposals also suggested that there was no evidence of the need for more school places for girls and that the proposal would “dilute” current provision and thereby affect the school directly. It said that if the proposal were to admit only Catholic girls then this might be justified. It is of course the case that the school would not be able to make such a proposal since all maintained schools are required to offer any applicant a place if one exists. The only legal way of offering secondary school places to Catholic girls in a school with a Catholic religious character is to offer places to all girls but to give priority on the grounds of faith in the ways permitted in legislation and the School Admissions Code, if that is the wish of the school’s admission authority.

41. Representatives of St Aloysius recognised at the meeting with the parties that this second school may “lose out” as a result of its proposal, but said that it was likely in any case to suffer from a falling intake as a consequence of its relatively poor performance. It was pointed out that some other schools in Islington currently benefit from the presence of Catholic girls because there is no Catholic secondary school located in the LA’s area which they are able to attend.

42. The third school mentioned at the meeting, but for which the LA has provided nothing further, is a co-educational Church of England secondary school also located centrally in the borough. It is very heavily oversubscribed having more than twice the number of first preferences (454) than available places (210) in 2023. It admitted a large number of siblings of children already on roll and the child admitted from the most distant home address lived just over a mile away. St Aloysius has pointed out that this school’s level of oversubscription means it is most unlikely to be affected by the proposals. It is also the case that this school has made no objection to the proposals.

43. I am left with the following:

- a) views expressed by the LA that the proposals are unlikely to significantly increase the school’s intake and therefore to improve its viability are probably mistaken. I should point out that were the LA right about this, then its other concerns about the effect on other local schools of the proposals would necessarily fall away;
- b) the proposals are likely to satisfy an unmet parental need – that of obtaining local Catholic secondary education for girls, for those who desire it;
- c) the proposals are likely to result in a number of children (mostly girls), who would otherwise travel to a secondary school outside the borough not having to do so, meaning that other local schools in Islington would not be affected by girls being admitted to St Aloysius;
- d) those children (mostly girls) who would have stayed in the borough at another school but no longer choose to do so will be able to find a place at St Aloysius which now offers a higher quality of education than most other schools there, and

- e) if the proposal is implemented, the improved access to education at St Aloysius for girls living in Islington probably outweighs any negative effects which might be caused as a result of reduced pupil intakes on school standards elsewhere in Islington.

Other Factors.

44. I set out earlier the other matters which decision makers must have regard to. First, there is the issue of equal opportunities.

45. The guidance says that decision makers must comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty (the PSED), which requires them to have regard to the need to:

- a) eliminate discrimination...or any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010 (the EA);
- b) advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and
- c) foster good relations between such groups.

It is my understanding of the PSED that I am not required to conduct a formal equalities impact assessment of the proposals as part of my consideration of them. I have however given my consideration to the matters below.

46. The proposals are that the school shall cease to be a single sex school and become a school which admits children without regard to gender. Sex is a protected characteristic under the EA, which also provides under Schedule 11 paragraph 1(1) that the general duty in section 85(1) of Part 6 of the EA not to discriminate concerning the admission of pupils to the school "so far as relating to sex, does not apply in relation to a single-sex school". A single-sex school is defined in Schedule 11 paragraph 1(2) as "a school which admits pupils of one sex only".

47. The school's admission arrangements currently make provision for the admission of boys only. Therefore, if the school becomes a co-educational school, the admission arrangements will no longer comply with section 85(1) of the EA. The school is aware of this, as it initially requested the adjudicator to agree to a variation of the school's admission arrangements for September 2025 to allow for the admission of girls below the sixth form.

48. The regulations provide for adjudicators to give conditional approval to proposals. Paragraph 8(1)(f) says in a case where there is an:

"...event which (if the approval is expressed to take effect only if they occur) must occur by the specified date in the approval...."

...in the case of mainstream schools, the agreement to any change to the admission arrangements relating to the school....as specified in the approval."

In other words, if I give my approval to the proposals, I am able to specify necessary changes to the school's admission arrangements as a condition of that approval. I will deal with this below.

49. I discussed earlier the effect of the implementation of the proposals on the provision of school places in Islington in terms of the number available only to boys or only to girls. It would be a breach of the requirement in the EA not to disadvantage persons on the grounds of sex if there were such an imbalance in this matter that those of one gender would not have appropriate school places available to them. That will not be a consequence of the implementation of the proposals, as I have stated above.

50. In general, it is my view that the proposals extend equality of opportunity to Catholic girls living in Islington because, if implemented, this will mean that this group will be able to go to a secondary school near to their home which provides education in accordance with the tenets of their faith, as Catholic boys living in Islington are currently able to do. I can only believe that this being the case, any negative effect on relationships (such as within Catholic families with both boys and girls of secondary age who must currently go to different schools) of the present schooling arrangements are likely to be reduced if the proposals are implemented.

51. I stated above that the school does not admit exclusively children of the Catholic faith, but that its composition across all year groups is approximately equally split between Catholic, (other) Christian and Muslim boys. Other faiths represented in the school are what the school has described as "Orthodox", Buddhist, Hindu and those of no religion. As a single-sex school the opportunity provided by this mix for those of different faiths to, as the guidance puts it, "learn with, from and about each other" is extended only to boys. I understand the point which the LA has made about the parents of some boys preferring single-sex schooling (and that this may result in reduced numbers seeking places at the school if it becomes co-educational), but I am also aware that the representatives of the school told me in our meeting that they had never heard the parent of a current pupil express such a view. If both boys and girls across the religious cultures in the school's local community are present in the school, I can only believe that this will work to foster cohesion in the community in the longer term.

52. The information which I set out above concerning the probable effect of the proposals on the future movement of some girls living in Islington to their place of secondary education was that, on balance, it seemed likely that fewer would travel out of the borough. While the effect of this is likely to be small, I do take the view that the impact will be to reduce the use of public and private transport going forward, and certainly not to increase it.

53. The school has told me that it has made contingency plans for minor alterations to toilet and other facilities in the school which would be necessary were girls to be admitted to Year 7 from next September. The diocese made an oral commitment to providing necessary funding for alterations to the premises during the meeting of the parties, and has confirmed this in writing saying:

“...the Diocese are committed to providing the financial support for the physical adaptations that may be required as a result of this change”

and that “ ... the Diocese will allocate funding to cover the adaptations required from our annual VASCA Grant.”

54. It is not possible to make approval of proposals conditional upon the availability of funding of this sort (since this is not a specified event under the regulations). However, it is valuable that the diocese has made a commitment that I am confident would ensure that the necessary facilities will be available in the school if the proposals are approved.

55. The LA told me on 22 July that, effectively, it was too late to make changes to the admission arrangements of a school in London for September 2025 because the Pan-London admissions system for the capital had been in set in place and could not be changed. I asked it to provide me with the evidence that stood behind this assertion, as I did not consider this likely. The LA kindly contacted representatives of the managers of the scheme and conveyed to me their view that “in exceptional circumstances a further preference could be added for parents until 17 December 2024”. This means that if the proposals are approved, there will be sufficient time for the admission arrangements to be amended in the way described above, although they do need to be amended before 31 October 2024 as this is the closing date for secondary school applications for places in September 2025.

Conclusion

56. I have explained above why I have come to the view that the proposals are likely to:

- (i) meet the needs of local parents and to contribute to the raising of educational standards overall;
- (ii) improve equality of opportunity;
- (iii) contribute to community cohesion;
- (iv) reduce the use of private and public transport, and
- (v) be capable of being implemented in time for the 2025 admissions process to operate.

57. Having considered the factors above I approve the proposals without modification but subject to the condition that the school amend its admission arrangements to provide for the admission of pupils to Year 7 in 2025 without reference to their gender.

Determination

58. 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 to admit pupils to Year 7 at St Aloysius' Roman Catholic College without reference to their gender from September 2025. I approve the proposal subject to the following condition: that the school governing body amend its admission arrangements for September 2025 accordingly no later than 31 October 2024.

Dated: 18 October 2024

Signed:



Schools Adjudicator: Dr Bryan Slater