



11th July 2024

Dear Parents,

I am sorry to inform you that the Trust has been advised by the Department of Education (DfE), that our proposal to provide Catholic Education into Year 9 on St Joseph's Middle School site from this September, will need to be delayed.

Despite overwhelming support for the proposal from parents, the community and local parish, unfortunately at the very latest stage possible in the consultation process, an objection was received from the County Council that went straight to Department for Education. This was a surprise to us all, as we had previously received positive, written support from a local, Northumberland County Councillor.

We are keen to discuss the objection directly with the Council, and have a meeting planned in the coming days. We have been very clear that the creation of the small satellite, for existing children from St Joseph's Hexham, is purely with the interests of the children at heart. For those parents who desperately wish for their children to stay in the nurturing, Catholic environment, this provision was long-awaited. St Joseph's Middle School is it would seem, the only Catholic Middle School in the country who do not have a clear pathway to a Catholic High school within a suitable radius.

The Council informed the DfE that they were not able to support this proposal and requested the Trustees of Bishop Wilkinson consider whether it is in the best educational interests of the students of St Joseph's, as well as the interests of the 'other local schools and communities in the West of the county', due to it having a negative impact upon them. We feel this objection needs to be explored further, as we are unsure how preventing it from going ahead would actually be in the best interests of the St Joseph's children and families in Hexham.

Due to recent changes in the guidance from the DfE, our proposal will need to go through a slightly longer process to proceed to approval stage. This is sadly not likely to take place until the end of September.

We are incredibly disappointed that we are unable to provide your child with a continuation of their Catholic education at the St Thomas More satellite, from the start of the new academic year in September 2024. We have been informed that to go ahead with the plan at this stage, without formal approval being granted, we would be in breach of the DfE funding agreement, and it would be inadvisable to proceed.

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Registered office: Barmston Court, Washington, SR5 3NY

Our leaders within St Joseph's and St Thomas More have taken a significant amount of time in the weeks since our Open Evening, to plan all the constituent parts needed for this partnership to be a resounding success. We had already ensured extensive curriculum planning, allocation and training of staff and timetabling was completed. However, this means that as soon as we receive approval, we are ready to go.

Over the coming weeks we will keep the St Joseph's community informed as soon as we hear any further information. We hope that this will be at the earliest opportunity, however, we understand that our parents must ensure the children's education is protected and accept their High School places allocated to them by the County Council.

We wish all our children who are leaving us every success at their new schools from September. We are sincerely sad to see them leave us and apologise for any disappointment caused by this delay. We are so committed to offering Catholic education beyond Year 8 in Hexham and hope we can overcome the current objections to us offering a St Thomas More satellite @ St Joseph's.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'N. Hurn', is enclosed in a thin black rectangular border. Below the signature is a horizontal line.

Chief Executive Officer
Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust

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