



# Gunnersbury Catholic School

## Pre-statutory Consultation Report

This report summarises the elements of the pre-statutory consultation and the responses received through each in relation to the proposal:

The Governing Body of Gunnersbury Catholic School, after due consideration of the options for future admissions to the school, seeks to change our pupil admissions gender criteria from *boys only* to *coeducational* (mixed gender). It is sought for the first coeducational cohort to be our Year 7 intake of September 2025; subject to formal approval from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Westminster, Hounslow Local Authority and the Schools' Adjudicator. Over subsequent years, Gunnersbury will become progressively gender mixed i.e. as the initial Year 7 moves into Year 8 and so forth. Our Sixth Form is already long established as a coeducational setting.

### Background

Within Gunnersbury Catholic School's local vicinity (namely the London Boroughs of Hounslow and Ealing) there is extensive unmet demand for Catholic coeducational secondary school places. First-choice preference applications for the local Catholic coeducational secondary schools far exceed the Pupil Admission Numbers (PANs) of these schools. In contrast, first-choice preferences for our single-sex Catholic educational provision have declined to levels considerably below PAN. In transitioning to become a coeducational school, Gunnersbury Catholic School can help to address the educational requirements of those pupils whose families have unsuccessfully sought for a place within a mixed Catholic school.

The change to admitting both girls and boys would be progressive. In September 2025 the change to mixed education would begin with Year 7. Following this the transition to a mixed school would then take place year by year, whereby the initial Year 7s move into Year 8 and so forth. As a result, any students who had joined Gunnersbury prior to September 2025 would still be taught in single-sex subject classes and tutor groups until they joined the Sixth Form.

At Gunnersbury Catholic School we provide for our students a caring, inclusive, Catholic education – one that enables superb outcomes, on all levels, for these young people. Our Ofsted inspection of January 2023 deemed that Gunnersbury continues to be an *Outstanding* school in every aspect of our provision. Academically, Gunnersbury students consistently achieve to a level that is amongst the very best in the country. Our 2023 Progress 8 score of +1.11 places the progress of Gunnersbury's GCSE students within the top 2% of all schools nationally. Sixth Form outcomes (A-Levels and BTECs) are similarly strong. Adjusting Gunnersbury's admissions policy to coeducational entry would enable both girls and boys to experience Gunnersbury's outstanding education from Year 7 upwards. Foremost, this change in admissions will provide an appropriate and necessary response in addressing the overwhelming local parental/guardian demand for Catholic coeducational secondary provision. Furthermore, governors

consider that admitting girls will offer additional opportunities and shared experiences to ensure that girls and boys are best supported to become part of, and effectively contribute to, a society that we seek to be more equitable and fair – not least in matters of gender.

Adjusting Gunnersbury Catholic School's admissions to coeducational would:

- Appropriately respond to the local overwhelming demand for Catholic secondary mixed-gender schooling
- Further our rich diversity – a foundation of our Catholic values
- Create a school setting that further reflects the composition and desired dynamics of modern society, thereby most effectively affording pupils with experiences and learning that best prepares them to positively contribute to our world now and in the future
- Build upon our legacy of educational excellence with the future provision of high-quality Catholic education for girls and boys of the local community

## **Governors Consultation Process**

### **Timeline of prestatutory consultation**

The prestatutory consultation took place from Monday 20 November 2023 – Monday 18 December 2023.

#### **Distribution of prestatutory consultation document**

- The prestatutory consultation document was published on the school website on Monday 20 November 2023
- The consultation document, accompanied by a letter from the Headteacher and Chair of Governors were sent to parents on the first day of consultation
- The prestatutory consultation document was sent to the local authorities of Hounslow and Ealing, who subsequently distributed the document to the governing bodies and schools of the local area
- All staff were emailed the consultation document, along with details of how to share their views
- All pupils were emailed the consultation document in addition to a letter from the Headteacher and Chair of Governors encouraging for pupils to share their views on the proposal via the online response form
- A 'pop-up' directed all school website visitors to the prestatutory consultation page where the prestatutory consultation document was to be found (along with links for stakeholders to share their views)

The consultation document explained how stakeholders could share their views on the proposal, namely: through completing the online response form

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd948TkkgJHIz8KsCypVdesc6Xmhqh1453LAo\\_fLpXJ1S25d8g/viewform?usp=sf\\_link](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd948TkkgJHIz8KsCypVdesc6Xmhqh1453LAo_fLpXJ1S25d8g/viewform?usp=sf_link)

or

by emailing their views to the email address [consultation@gunnersbury.hounslow.sch.uk](mailto:consultation@gunnersbury.hounslow.sch.uk)

## Consultation meetings

To share detail and encourage dialogue on the proposal, 'in-person' consultation meetings were arranged for: staff (27 November 2023); parents and other stakeholders (4 December 2023); pupils (one year group at a time throughout the consultation period with additional meetings to convey the proposal to and receive feedback from SEND students).

In addition to the 'in-person' meeting an online (Zoom) meeting was arranged for parents and other stakeholders on 6 December 2023.

## Consultation Responses

### Staff Consultation Meeting – 27 November 2023

The meeting was led by the Headteacher (Kevin Burke) and Chair of Governors (Andrew Flatt)

40 Staff attended the meeting

The Headteacher and Chair of Governors shared the proposal with staff and then opened up for questions from colleagues

#### Staff questions:

**Staff 1** Will we keep the 'Catholic' in 'Gunnersbury Catholic School'

**KB-** Yes the only change would be on the admissions policy

**Staff 1** Would the priest reference return?

**KB** The Certificate of Catholic Practice has been removed on advice from the Diocese. If we were over-subscribed then it might return

**Staff 2** Will other schools be affected by the proposal?

**KB** Over the last 3 years over half of our pupils have not come from Hounslow so any one school should not be disproportionately influenced were we to become co-ed

No objections to the proposal were shared by staff

### In-person Parent/Stakeholders Meeting – 4 December 2023

The meeting was arranged to be led by the Chair of Governors (AF) and Headteacher (KB)

1 Stakeholder attended the meeting

#### Main themes discussed with abridged Gunnersbury responses

**Stakeholder** How many girls did we think we'd recruit?

**AF** We really couldn't estimate and that there was no model for us to refer to. I thought it

	would be evolution, and it would be incremental
<b>Stakeholder</b>	Was this part of an expansion by Gunnersbury?
<b>AF</b>	No, we are not seeking to expand.
<b>Stakeholder</b>	There would need to be some changes at Gunnersbury as a consequence of the move
<b>AF</b>	Yes, we recognise this and there would be appropriate training delivered to all staff. Many of whom have experience of teaching in a co-ed environment. Gunnersbury is about us getting the very best out of every student, boy or girl, and delivering our superb outcomes to a more diverse group of Catholic students
<b>Stakeholder</b>	Where was the origin of the data that we based our proposal on?
<b>KB</b>	The data has been provided through Hounslow LA.

## **On-line Parent/Stakeholders Meeting – 6 December 2023**

### **Presented by:**

Ms Linda Pope -vice chair of governors; Mr Kevin Burke – Headteacher

### **Attended by:**

7 Stakeholders

The Zoom meeting began with a presentation on the proposal. Following the presentation Kevin Burke (KB) responded to the questions that were submitted prior to and during the session.

### **Stakeholder Questions with abridged Gunnersbury responses**

#### **Questions submitted prior to the meeting**

**Stakeholder Question:** I sent my sons to Gunnersbury school because it is a single sex school where the environment caters to achieving the best for boys. We were promised a school who understands boys and how to get the best out of them. I don't want this compromised by including girls. A catholic boys school in the area should be protected. The governors have mentioned potential teacher changes which could prove disruptive for existing pupils on top of a new school ethos. I believe this will have a detrimental impact on Gunnersbury school. If the school are not filling their quota, I suggest opening their catchment area or improved promotion and representation in the community and beyond.

**KB:** Any pupils currently at Gunnersbury will continue only to be taught with boys until the Sixth Form. We'll continue to know how boys learn whilst combining that with effectively providing for the learning of girls. Our outcomes reflect our expertise as teachers furthermore the success of both boys and girls in the sixth form reflects our capability to enable the very best achievement within a mixed setting. From time to time I work as an Ofsted inspector and the qualities that we have here at Gunnersbury are shared with other outstanding schools whether they are single-sex or mixed. Successful schools have a calm, ordered, respectful environment and I don't see the transition to co-ed affecting this.

There will be no planned change to our staff but in common with all schools we are facing great challenges in filling the places of staff who have left. Many potential staff wish to only work in a mixed environment. Greatest risk of disruption to the education at Gunnersbury is the shortage of teachers that exists in London and beyond. Our catchment area isn't contained – any pupil living anywhere can apply. Unfortunately we have far fewer prioritising a place at Gunnersbury than there are places to offer. We have extensively promoted our school to primary schools in the area, both catholic and non-Catholic, but the number of applicants reflect an overwhelming preference for mixed schooling.

**Stakeholder Question:** What extra measures will you be putting in place to ensure lack of disruption to the students starting Y11 in 2025?

**KB:** First and foremost we will be continuing to do all that we currently do with Year 11s including: an increased timetable with two extra lessons a week compared to the rest of the school; Saturday lessons; intervention/revision lessons during the half-term and Easter holidays; over the course of the year a series of mock examinations are sat by the pupils within the exam hall. Overlying this, the changes that we made to the school timetable following Covid added a further 4 lessons to the individual timetable of each pupil in every year group. Were Gunnersbury to become coeducational, students in Year 11 in 2025 wouldn't have girls joining them. Coeducation will begin in Year 7 and move upwards year-on-year. Whilst we will need to make some adaptations, our track record (not least our continued and further success following Covid) indicates that we are very capable of effectively responding to change and continuing to progress Gunnersbury as we do so.

**Stakeholder Question:** Has there been any communication, either by school or diocese, regarding the impact of the proposals on other local schools?

**KB:** Our proposal has been shared with all of the schools within the local area and the Local Authorities. This pre-statutory consultation is part of the process of sharing the proposal to all stakeholders. A myriad of factors affect the applications of pupils to schools including: the local population of school-age children; Ofsted ratings; examination results; even the nature of school buildings. Although it is difficult to accurately predict in any year what will happen even to one's own school population we do not think that a change to coeducation will extensively or disproportionately influence the admissions of any individual local school. Not least as over the last three years over 50% of our intake has been from boroughs other than Hounslow. What we do know is that there are 100s of pupils who have been unable to achieve their first preference and be allocated a place at one of the local catholic coeducational schools. Conversely the number of pupils seeking a single-sex Catholic education at Gunnersbury has declined and first preferences are far below the number of places that we have available.

**Following these answers, questions posed by the guests whilst on the Zoom meeting were addressed:**

**Stakeholder Question:** What is the timeline?

**KB** Governors will consider the responses to the consultation at its close. They will then decide whether or not to move forward to a statutory consultation.

**Stakeholder Question:** How will the governors decide?

**KB** The governors, taking into account the thoughts and suggestions put forward through the consultation, will make a decision on whether to continue to the statutory phase with the proposal. They will seek to determine if the identified need for Catholic coed places is valid and if GCS should seek to meet this parental need.

**Stakeholder Question:** What will happen if the proposal doesn't go ahead?

**KB** If we do not become a coed school we will carry on doing what we've always sought to do – enabling our pupils to have the best possible education

**Stakeholder Question:** Is it financial?

**KB** It is clear to us that there is an unmet need for Catholic coed places in West London and we wish be part of addressing the requirements of these families.

**Stakeholder Question:** How do staff feel about the proposal?

**KB** All staff who have so far expressed their thoughts on the proposed change have been very positive.

**Stakeholder Question:** How will we balance the numbers of girls and boys?

**KB** The number of boys and girls who potentially apply and receive a place isn't controlled – the admissions system doesn't differentiate between a girl and a boys application to a mixed school. Gaining a place at a mixed school is determined by factors within the admissions policy beyond gender e.g. distance.

**Stakeholder Question:** Considering the success that has been had teaching boys, how can we ensure that isn't affected by the addition of girls?

**KB** We'll continue to know how boys learn whilst combining that expertise with effectively providing for the learning of girls. Our outcomes reflect our expertise as educators, furthermore the success of our boys and girls in the Sixth Form reflect our capability to secure the very best achievement within a mixed setting. As I've observed as an Ofsted inspector: successful schools, whether single-sex or mixed, have a calm, respectful and ambitious environment: the admission of girls to Y7 will not alter this approach.

The meeting ended after all stakeholder questions had been responded respond to.

## **Meetings with students**

Following the Headteacher's/Chair of Governor's sharing of the prestatutory proposal and their associated letter with pupils, pupils of every year group were addressed at their assemblies by the Deputy Headteacher (Mr Finnegan). Mr Finnegan explained the proposal to the students and encouraged for them to ask of him any questions on the matter. Furthermore, Mr Finnegan reminded students that, and should they wish, they could share their views on the proposal through the 'consultation response form' and/or by email to the consultation email address.

In their informal conversations with the Deputy Headteacher, students were mostly very positive about the changes. Those students who expressed concern to Mr Finnegan were mostly worried that the academic standards of the school would fall through the transition. Mr Finnegan assured these students that our current ethos and academic success would remain were Gunnersbury to become a mixed school. Furthermore, he reminded pupils that the classes for current pupils would remain single-sex until the Sixth Form.

### **Meeting with SEND Pupils**

As part of the consultation process on Gunnersbury Catholic School becoming a mixed school the SENDCO engaged with a range of learners identified on the schools SEND register. All conversations were voluntary and were initiated by the SENDCO as he engaged individuals, or groups of students, in conversations. The SENDCO established that all of these pupils were willing for their views and comments to be included within the consultation.

The SENDCO found that the students were intrigued by the idea of Gunnersbury becoming a mixed school and that, at least in the context of chatting with a teacher, it had captured their imagination – they were eager to imagine how Gunnersbury would be different as a mixed school. Overwhelmingly the responses received were positive and reflective of the exciting potential that these young people believed Gunnersbury had in becoming a mixed school.

Comments shared with the SENDCO included:

‘This is the best school in the country, why shouldn’t girls be able to benefit from it’ (Year 8 SEN Support)

‘It will make high school just like primary school with girls and boys learning together’ (Year 11 EHCP student)

‘More chance to make friends’ (Year 7 EHCP student)

‘My sisters will be able to go to the same school as me – we will all go to Gunnersbury’ (Year 11 EHCP student)

‘This will make Gunnersbury ‘normal ‘with boys and girls being together’ (Year 9 SEN Support)

‘Good idea’ (Year 7 SEN Support)

‘Sixth form works really well with boys and girls learning together, why not lower down the school’ (Year 12 SEN Support)

‘Gunnersbury is a great, this will make it even better!’ (Year 10 SEN Support)

## **Pre-statutory Consultation Online Response Form Submissions and Emailed Responses**

### **Online Response Form**

A total of 147 stakeholders submitted their views on the proposal via the Online Response Form. 92 respondents approved of the proposal for coeducation, 47 respondents objected and 8 respondents neither approved nor objected to the proposal. On analysis, the majority (62.6%) of these respondents were in favour of Gunnersbury Catholic School transitioning to coeducation in September 2025.

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Approve</b>	<b>Object</b>	<b>Neither</b>
<b>Member of staff at Gunnersbury – prospective parent/guardian</b>	2	0	0
<b>Member of staff at Gunnersbury</b>	14	0	0
<b>Other</b>	2	5	0
<b>Current Parent/Guardian</b>	49	28	3
<b>Prospective Parent/Guardian</b>	7	0	1
<b>Student</b>	18	14	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>62.6%</b>	<b>32.0%</b>	<b>5.4%</b>

In addition to being able to indicate their response to the proposal – for/against/neither – stakeholders were enabled to submit their written views and thoughts on the matter. Every such response was considered by the governing body.

#### **Email Responses**

There were a total of 6 emailed responses. 2 responses were in favour of coeducation at Gunnersbury. 4 emailed responses objected – one of the 4 objecting emailers also submitted an objection via the Response Form – this stakeholder’s response is thereby included in the totals for both the online response form and the email responses.

Each emailed response was considered by the Governing Body.

## **Governing Body Meeting Considering Prestatutory Consultation Outcomes And Decision**

At their extraordinary meeting on Tuesday 19 December 2023 governors met to consider the outcomes of the prestatutory consultation. All stakeholders’ responses were individually considered by the governing body. It was recognised that the majority of responses received through the pre-statutory consultation were in favour of Gunnersbury Catholic School becoming coeducational. On considering all of the information and responses gathered through the prestatutory consultation, it was decided by the governors that transition to coeducation in September 2025 was the appropriate course of action for Gunnersbury Catholic School to seek. As such, the governing body took the decision to progress to submitting, in January 2024, a Statutory Proposal for Gunnersbury Catholic School to admit both girls and boys to Year 7 in September 2025.

To best address the apprehensions of stakeholders who were not in favour of the transition, governors determined for a set of Frequently Asked Questions/Themes with governing body answers to be created and shared alongside the Statutory Proposal.