

COPY OF DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL SUBMISSION

Cover Note

DP No.	213 (Belfast)	
School(s)	St Gemma's High School (123-0173)	
Proposal	Closure – with effect from 31 August 2013 or as soon as possible thereafter.	
Minister's Decision	Approve	
Date of Decision	7 January 2013	
Minister's Comments	-	
Additional notes	-	
Information redacted	Some information and personal data may have been removed in line with the principles of the Freedom of Information and Data Protection Act.	
	Key	Details
	■	redaction
	*	refers to less than five cases where data is considered sensitive
	#	means figure has been suppressed to prevent disclosure of sensitive information under rules of disclosure

**From: Lorraine Finlay
APPT**

Date: 20 December 2012

**To: JOHN O'DOWD MLA
Minister for Education**

Copy distribution below

**DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL NO 213: CLOSURE OF ST GEMMA'S HIGH SCHOOL,
BELFAST**

Issue: The proposed closure of St Gemma's High School (HS), Belfast, with effect from 31 August 2013 or as soon as possible thereafter.

Timescale: Urgent – so that the position in respect of August 2013 is clarified as early as possible.

Financial/Resource Implications: There are significant financial costs associated with the closure of St Gemma's HS. Costs are dependant on the type of teaching staff redundancy/redeployment arrangements, the detail of which cannot yet be determined.

- Basic teaching staff redeployment/redundancy estimates range between £180,000 - £339,000 (exclusive of severance payments). Redundancy costs for non-teaching staff are not yet available.
- The school is currently in receipt of around £141,000 Small Schools' Support funding.
- The School's 2012/13 Year End budget position is estimated in the region of around +£99,000. These resources would transfer to BELB's Contingency Fund at the date of closure.

FOI Implications: This submission is likely to be fully disclosable.

Presentational/Contentious Issues: A decision to close the school is unlikely to be well received by those connected to the school and the local community generally. A draft press release for your consideration is attached at appendix E and the Communications Team will monitor any media coverage. (This has been

agreed with the Communications Team).

Recommendation:

That you:

- Approve the closure of St Gemma's HS with effect from 31 August 2013 or as soon as possible thereafter; and
- Agree the draft press release (Appendix E refers).

Background

1. On 13 September 2012, the BELB published Development Proposal (DP) No 213, proposing that St Gemma's High School (HS) will close on 31 August 2013, or as soon as possible thereafter. A copy of the DP is attached at **Appendix A**. The proposal has been brought forward by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, on behalf of the Parish Trustees, on the grounds that the school is no longer considered to be sustainable.
2. St Gemma's opened in 1967 and is situated off the Oldpark Road in the Ardoyne area of North Belfast. It is a Catholic maintained school for girls between Years 8 – 14 in the Legoniel 3 Super Output Area (SOA) which ranks 290 out of 890 SOAs (1 being the most deprived and 890 the least). In 2012/13, 70% of pupils at St Gemma's were entitled to Free School Meals.
3. The school was built to accommodate 420 pupils, but enrolments have declined over recent years. At September 2012 there were a total of 110 pupils enrolled at the school between Years 9 - 14. No Year 8 pupils enrolled at the school in September 2012.

Policy Context

4. The Department's Sustainable Schools Policy sets out a number of quantitative and qualitative criteria and indicators which inform consideration of a school's longer-term sustainability and therefore all development proposals for closure. The key criteria are:
 - Quality Educational Experience
 - Stable Enrolment Trends
 - Sound Financial Position
 - Strong Leadership and Management
 - Accessibility
 - Strong Links with the Community

Development Proposal – Summary of Key Considerations

5. An assessment of St Gemma's HS against the Sustainability Criteria and Indicators is attached at **Appendix B**.
6. Details of a meeting with a parent delegation and others and details of objections lodged with the Department during the 2-month statutory consultation period are attached at **Appendix C**.

7. The key issues associated with this proposal are summarised below.

- The proposal is in line with the Commission for Catholic Education's (NICCE) post-primary plans for the North Belfast and Glengormley area, which aim to reduce and re-shape provision there from 7 to either 4 or 5 schools.
- NICCE's proposals have been included by CCMS in BELB's published draft area plan for post-primary provision.
- Enrolments at St Gemma's HS have steadily declined year on year. In 2012/13 there are a total of 110 pupils (63 pupils in Years 8 to 11 and 47 pupils in post-16). There were no Year 8 pupils enrolled at St Gemma's HS in September 2012.
- There are significant redundancy/redeployment costs associated with this proposal. Basic estimates range from between £180,000 to £339,000 but this excludes severance payments and costs relating to non-teaching staff.
- St Gemma's HS entered the Department's Formal Intervention Programme in April 2011. A further follow-up inspection of the school in October 2012 confirmed that standards achieved by pupils in GCSE English and Mathematics remain 'inadequate' and also that the overall quality of education provision in the school remains 'inadequate'.
- St Gemma's is meeting the Entitlement Framework KS4 requirement of 18 courses for 2012/13, but it is the Department's view that the school could potentially not meet 21 subjects in 2013/14 or 24 for 2014/15.
- The school is not meeting the terms for a EF's post16 curricular offer of 21 courses in 2012/13. It is the Department's view that the school is unlikely to meet 24 subjects in 2013/14 or 27 for 2014/15.
- The Department's view is that the school is financially viable at present.
- Alternative provision for the pupils at St Gemma's HS can be provided at the nearby Our Lady of Mercy Girls School* or St Rose's Dominican College, the quality of education at which have been assessed as 'good' and 'very good' respectively.
- Staff, pupils and parents associated with St Gemma's HS strongly object to closure and have expressed concerns about the impact this would have on the local community.
- Staff, pupils and parents are disappointed that the development of community proposals to address post-primary education provision in the area were supported by the Bishop but not by CCMS.

**CCMS has recently advised DE that Our Lady of Mercy Girls' School will change its name to 'Mercy College' from 1 January 2013.*

CCMS Comment

8. Supporting evidence from CCMS highlights the following issues in support of this proposal:
 - Falling enrolment numbers below the recommended thresholds.
 - Education Provision – poor performance at KS4, particularly in comparison with other schools in the same FSM band. (i.e., in 2010, the highest performing school in this band achieved 68.8% as compared to 17.95% at St Gemma's HS).
 - ETI inspection concerns about the quality of education provision and the school's subsequent Formal Intervention Process involvement.
 - Budget projections – CCMS predict a deficit position by 2012/13 & 2013/14.
 - Current accommodation issues and significant capital cost implications.
9. CCMS conclude that St Gemma's HS is no longer sustainable and recommend that education provision there should cease at the end of the 2012/13 school year or as soon as possible thereafter.
10. This recommendation is in line with NICCE's post-primary plans for the North Belfast and Glengormley area, which aim to reduce and re-shape provision there from 7 to either 4 or 5 schools. NICCE's proposals have been included by CCMS in BELB's published draft area plan for post-primary provision. The plans have been consulted on but the outworkings of the consultation have yet to be determined and agreed.

BELB Comment

11. BELB has confirmed that it supports this proposal and that this development proposal was approved by the BELB Board at their meeting in July 2012.

Consultation

12. The Belfast Eastern Education and Library Board has confirmed that it has fulfilled its statutory duty in relation to consultation. Proof of publication has been supplied.
13. The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) has also confirmed that it has fulfilled its statutory duty in relation to consultation.

Objections/Support

14. During the 2-month statutory consultation period, the Department received submissions from the senior staff, Governors, parents and pupils of St Gemma's HS objecting to the proposed closure.
15. Details of Objections lodged and a meeting held with the Minister on 5 November 2012 regarding this proposal are attached at **Appendix C**. In summary:
 - Staff, pupils, Governors and parents associated with St Gemma's HS strongly object to closure and have expressed concerns about the impact this would have on the local community.
 - Staff, pupils, Governors and parents are disappointed that the development of community proposals to address post-primary education provision in the area were

supported by the Bishop but not by CCMS and are seeking DE support to the establishment of 'Mercy College' (ie a working partnership between St Gemma's HS and Our Lady of Mercy Girls' School) and the provision of a 'Crumlin Road' educational campus with associated primary and nursery provision.

- Parents were concerned that the nearest Girls' school (Our Lady of Mercy) was situated in a Protestant area and the safety of their children could be compromised, particularly at night.

16. No external letters of support for the proposed closure were received by the Department during this period.

Financial Implications

17. It is the Department's view that St Gemma's HS is financially viable at present. Details are provided in full at Appendix B.

18. There are significant redundancy/redeployment costs associated with this proposal. The exact cost cannot yet be determined, but the basic costs are likely to be in the region of between £180,000 and £339,000 depending on the type of arrangement. These do not include severance payments and costs relating to non-teaching staff.

19. The school is currently in receipt of around £141,000 Small Schools' Support funding. The School's 2012/13 Year End budget position is estimated in the region of around +£99,000. These resources would transfer to BELB's Contingency Fund at the date of closure.

20. The St Gemma's building has been assessed as needing over £960,000 to address accommodation issues, including replacement of water and heating pipes, electrical items and windows.

Conclusion and Recommendation

21. The Department recognises the wishes of parents in the education of their children and appreciates that the closure of this school will be difficult for the community to accept, particularly in view of local support for the establishment of 'Mercy College' and proposals for the future provision of a co-education school in the area.

22. The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, however, is the body with the statutory authority for the planning of the Catholic Maintained schools' estate. The proposal to close St Gemma's was the only solution brought forward to address the future of the school and this had the support of the Parish Trustees and was included in BELB's published draft area plan for post-primary provision.

23. You have made it clear that the Area Planning process must not be used to delay necessary decisions. The Sustainable Schools Policy is clear that the core issue for a school's sustainability must be the continuing provision of a high quality education for the children. As numbers in a post-primary school decline, the numbers of challenges it must overcome in order to provide a high quality education rise.

24. In the case of St Gemma's HS, although the Department considers the school financially viable at present, there are serious issues regarding the 'inadequate' quality of education provision provided both generally and particularly at GCSE English and Mathematics. Further, the declining enrolments are currently well below the recommended threshold and unlikely to recover, the absence of a 2012/13 Year 8 intake, and the inability of the school to meet or likely to fully meet the conditions of the Entitlement Framework policy make the school's future an untenable one.
25. It is recommended that you approve the proposal for the closure of St Gemma's HS from 31 August 2013 or as soon as possible thereafter and agree the wording of the supporting draft press release below. This recommendation is supported by DE, ETI, CCMS and BELB.
26. Attached for your consideration are the following:
- Appendix A: Published Development Proposal
 - Appendix B: Analysis of Sustainability Criteria and Indicators
 - Appendix C: Details of objections and meetings
 - Appendix D: Map showing alternative post-primary provision
 - Appendix E: Draft Press Release



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APPENDIX A

BELFAST EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD

Development Proposal No 213

The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, who act on behalf of the Trustees of the parish of Sacred Heart hereby request the Belfast Education and Library Board to publish a Development Proposal to the effect that:

St Gemma's High School Belfast will close with effect from 31 August 2013 or as soon as possible thereafter.

Notice is hereby given that under Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986 as amended by Article 145 of the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989 this proposal has been submitted to the Department of Education.

Any comments on this proposal, which may be inspected at board headquarters, should be made in writing, within a period of two months from this date, to Mrs Heather Mailey, Development Branch, Department of Education, Rathgael House, Balloo Road, Bangor, Co Down, BT19 7PR. Comments on the development proposal will be subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000, which gives the right of access to information held by all public authorities.

7 September 2012
Gavin Boyd

Board Headquarters
40 Academy Street
BELFAST
BT1 2NQ

APPENDIX B

Analysis of Sustainability Criteria and Indicators

A: Quality Educational Experience

This criterion is an assessment of how broad and balanced an educational experience a school provides to its pupils and what limiting factors are in place at the school which may impact on its ability to provide such an experience.

St Gemma's HS had a standard inspection in March 2009 which found the quality of education to be 'satisfactory'. However, while a follow-up inspection of the school in March 2011 found that some improvements had been made in the interim, the pace of change was considered to be too slow to make significant improvement in the quality of education and the outcomes for pupils at Key Stage 4. The report also highlighted that in the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the school was assessed as 'inadequate'. On foot of this report the school entered the Formal Intervention Process (FIP) in April 2011.

The areas for improvement highlighted in the 2011 follow-up inspection of St Gemma's reported the need to:

- raise the standards achieved in public examinations, from the current position where:
 - 17% of the pupils obtain grades A* to C in five or more subjects at GCSE (a position which is 42% below the NI average); and
 - 10% of pupils obtain grades A* to C in five or more subjects including English and mathematics (a position which is 25% below the NI average); and
- continue to build upon the learning and teaching strategies which engage the pupils in their learning and improve the standards which they achieve.

A further follow-up inspection visit took place on 22 October 2012. Improvements noted since the March 2011 inspection included:

- the broadening of the curriculum to include a range vocational pathways which better suit the needs of the pupils.
 - teachers making more effective use of data to set individual targets and intervene effectively to support the pupils in their learning, in particular in the vocational subject areas.
 - teachers making effective use of on-line learning to engage and motivate the pupils; and
 - the percentage of pupils achieving grades A*-C in the General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE), in any five or more subjects, has risen from 17% in 2010 to 54% in 2012.
- However, there has been no improvement in the percentage of pupils achieving grades A*-C in five or more subjects (including English and mathematics). The standards in English and mathematics were assessed as remaining 'inadequate' and the overall quality of education provision in the school also remains 'inadequate'. On foot of the above, ETI support the proposed closure of St Gemma's HS.

Entitlement Framework

St Gemma's HS is a member of the West Belfast Area Learning Community which comprises 9 schools: 5 Maintained Secondary, 1 Controlled Special, 1 Maintained Special, and 2 Voluntary Grammar Schools.

The overarching policy objective of the Entitlement Framework is to guarantee all post primary pupils aged 14 and above greater choice and flexibility by providing them with access to a wide range of learning opportunities suited to their needs, aptitudes and interests, irrespective of where they live or the school they attend.

Curricular Offer 2011/12

St Gemma's KS 4 and KS5/post-16 Offer

2011	Key Stage 4 (Year 11)	Post-16 (Year 13)
General courses	13	8
Applied courses	6	7
Total	19	15

At KS4 (yr11) St Gemma's does not collaborate with another school or FE Facility. At Post-16 (yr13) St Gemma's provides access to 2 general courses and 3 applied courses through collaboration with another school or FE Facility.

Draft Curricular Offer 2012/13

St Gemma's draft KS 4 and KS5/post -16 Offer

2012	Key Stage 4 (Year 11)	Post-16 (Year 13)
General courses	10	7
Applied courses	9	13
Total	19	20

Summary

KS4

St Gemma's is meeting the EF requirement of 18 courses at KS4 for 2012/13. The school could potentially not meet 21 subjects in 2013/14 or 24 for 2014/15. In their 2011/12 curricular offer they offered no courses in collaboration with another school or FE facility, which would help to provide an increased offer. The school may have started collaborating at KS4 for 2012/13, but this will be confirmed after the validation process.

KS5/post-16

Since 2011/12 St Gemma's offer at KS5 has increased from a total of 15 to 20 courses. The school is not meeting the terms for a KS5 curricular offer for EF in 2013, which is 21 courses. It is likely the school could not meet 24 subjects in 2014 or 27 for 2015. The school does collaborate at KS5 with another school or FE facility.

B: Stable Enrolment Trends

The Sustainable Schools Policy recommends a minimum enrolment level of 500 pupils in Years 8-12, equivalent to a minimum annual intake of 100 plus a total of 100 pupils at post-16.

October 2012 Enrolment by Year Group

Y 8	Y 9	Y 10	Y 11	Y 12	Y 13	Y 14	Total
0	9	9	13	32	24	23	110

Historic Year 8 Intakes

2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
30	27	18	16	15	0

Historic Enrolments

2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
241	239	227	200	160	110

- Enrolments at the school have been declining year on year to the point where the 2012/13 enrolment of 110 pupils is far below the recommended minimum enrolment threshold for a sustainable post-primary school.
- The school's 2012/13 approved enrolment is 420 pupils.
- Of the 110 pupils currently enrolled at the school, 63 are in Years 9 to 12 with a further 47 pupils enrolled at post-16.
- No Year 8 pupils enrolled at the school in September 2012. (There were 4 applicants for St Gemma's, however, they actually enrolled at Our Lady of Mercy Girls' School in September 2012).
- Arrangements are already in place to base St Gemma's Year 11 class at Our Lady of Mercy Girls' School to minimise disruption to their GCSE preparations. Teachers from St Gemma's travel to Our Lady of Mercy to contribute to the delivery of the KS4 curriculum.

C: Financial Position

It is the Department's view that St Gemma's HS is financially viable at present. (Note: financial information provided by CCMS in support of this proposal gave a more negative view of the school's financial position but has not been included in this submission as the Department cannot verify the information provided).

In the 2012 Workbook regarding St Gemma's, BELB has reported:

- an outturn at 31st March 2012 of £187,828 (ie 13.73% of available delegated resources).
- an 2012/13 Year End projected surplus position of +£98,692.

In accordance with the Common Funding Scheme, any part of a schools' unspent budget at the date of closure will be transferred to the Contingency Fund.

The school's 2012/13 per capita cost is £5,550 which is £1,255 higher than BELB's 2012/13 average for a Secondary School of £4,295. The school's 2012/13 Small Schools' Support Funding was £141,248.

Other Financial Considerations

Staffing Costs

There are currently 16 members of teaching staff in St Gemma's, including the Principal. All staff would be declared redundant as a result of the school closure. The direct costs of redundancy for these 16 staff would amount to **£179,213** based on the contractual and statutory payment. (Severance details are not currently available, but the figure above would be subject to adjustment dependant on the type of severance applicable).

All staff will be offered the opportunity of redeployment. If these staff are successfully redeployed then the cost of redundancy will be greater as the actual teachers taking voluntary redundancy will have longer service. It is not possible to accurately predict these costs, but based on an average figure of £21,157 per teacher the cost of 16 redundancies would be **£338,512**. Again this would be adjusted according to any additional severance awarded.

The Belfast Eastern Education and Library Board (BELB) is not able to provide details on non-teaching staff redundancy/redeployment plans and any associated costs at this stage of the DP process.

Accommodation Issues

A Condition Survey carried out by the Belfast Eastern Education and Library Board (BELB) in October 2009 at St Gemma's HS, identified the need for heating and water pipe replacement, window replacement, electrical wiring replacement, concrete structural repair and other general repairs, with a total estimated cost of £965,287.

D: Strong Leadership and Management

A follow-up inspection undertaken at St Gemma's HS in March 2011 acknowledged that the school had demonstrated some improvement in self-evaluation processes but considered the pace of change too slow to make significant improvement. The inspection identified the need for improvement in the standards achieved in public examinations and in learning and teaching strategies.

A further follow-up inspection of the school was carried out in October 2012 and although there were a number of improvements since the previous inspection, there has been no improvement in the percentage of pupils achieving grades A*-C in five or more subjects including English and Maths. ETI considered that the standards in English and Maths remain 'inadequate' and also that the overall quality of education provision in the school remains 'inadequate'.

E: Accessibility

Alternative maintained post-primary provision is represented by the following schools. Of these, Our Lady of Mercy Girls' School and St Rose's Dominican College have enough

unfilled places to cater for the pupils of St Gemma's HS in the event of closure. Little Flower Girls' School, however, is over-subscribed.

Alternative Provision

Ref No	School	Distance* in miles from St Gemma's	Enrolment October 2012	Physical Capacity	Unfilled Places
123-0104	Our Lady of Mercy Girls' School	1.37	367	650	283
123-0089	Little Flower Girls' School	1.67	692	650	-42
123-0130	St Rose's Dominican College	2.16	388	575	187
			1447	1875	428

*Distance as per Multimaps

Historic Enrolment in Alternative Provision

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	Capacity
Our Lady of Mercy Girls's School	421	438	429	384	367	650
Little Flower Girls' School	673	691	687	690	692	650
St Rose's Dominican College	501	468	440	406	388	575
	1595	1597	1556	1480	1447	1875

Admissions in Alternative Provision

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	Approved Admission
Our Lady of Mercy	62	57	50	32	45	110
Little Flower	110	108	107	106	111	107
St Rose's	77	52	55	51	47	108
	249	217	212	189	203	325

Educational Quality in Alternative provision

In Our Lady of Mercy Girls School, the quality of education has been assessed as 'good' although improvements required to the quality of mathematics provision were noted (Inspection Report published January 2012 refers). At St Rose's Dominican College, the quality has been assessed as 'very good' (Inspection Report published April 2012 refers).

F: Strong Links with the Community

St Gemma's HS opened in 1967 to provide education for girls from the surrounding parishes of Holy Cross, Sacred Heart and St Vincent de Paul. The proposed closure of the school is not likely to be well received by those associated with the school and in the local communities.

APPENDIX C

OBJECTIONS & MEETINGS

Objections

Objections to the proposal in the form of submissions were submitted to DE by the Principal on behalf of the senior prefects (and pupils), staff and Governors of St Gemma's HS and a parents' group. The Senior Prefects also sent their submission directly to the Minister with a covering letter dated 7 November 2012.

The senior prefects/pupils' main concerns about the proposed closure of St Gemma's HS include:

- The loss of support provided to pupils outside normal school hours (eg breakfast & after school clubs/classes).
- The lack of community facilities in the area will be exacerbated by the closure of the school.
- The achievement and career outcomes for the pupils of St Gemma's will be compromised as a result of closure. The pupils feel that the support currently provided by St Gemma's in relation to exams etc is not provided at the same level in other schools.
- Community proposals for the provision of a co-educational school in the area have been ignored by CCMS.
- It is the view of the prefects that St Gemma's HS should remain open until a new co-educational school in the area has been provided.

Staff concerns include:

- The impact of closure on staff, pupils, parents, families and local parishes. Staff highlight the detrimental effect the school closure would have on pupils particularly, and emphasise the need for a continued customised model of education in this area, which suffers from a range of social and political issues.
- The lack of support from CCMS and others regarding the proposed provision of a co-educational post-primary school for the area. Staff feel that grammar schools in the area are being retained at the expense of secondary schools and fully support the retention of St Gemma's as an interim measure until the provision of a new co-educational school can be achieved.

Governors concerns include:

- The treatment of St Gemma's HS and its community by CCMS, NICCE, ETI and the press.

- The 'leak' in the press in 2011 about the closure of the school by CCMS and their subsequent response was 'hurtful and damaging' to the school community.
- The Viability Audit template could not show the school as anything other than 'inadequate'.
- The staff have worked hard over the years and continue to work hard to support pupils and the community. The Governors highlight the high percentage of pupils entitled to Free School Meals and ask how their pupils can achieve the grades inspected. It is their opinion that the inspection process has been damaging to children.
- The Governors feel strongly that they have recognised the need to provide the best possible curriculum to their pupils and have worked with Our Lady of Mercy Girls' School and put forward the proposition for partnership working under the name of 'Mercy College'.
- The Governors ask that DE accepts the 'Mercy College' proposal as an interim step to the development of a co-educational post-primary school in the area and also to accept the concept for a new Holy Cross Primary and Nursery School with the view to having shared educational provision in the area on a 'Crumlin Road Campus'

Parents' concerns include:

- The 'disregard' and 'disrespect' of 'those in charge' regarding the wishes of the families and children of the three parishes in relation to education provision in the area. Parents feel strongly that their wishes for St Gemma's becoming a co-educational school were largely ignored by CCMS.
- A Task Group to look at post-primary provision in the area was initiated by Bishop McKeown. Parents state that the work of the Group was also not supported by CCMS and feel strongly that the local grammar schools are being protected at the expense of secondary provision in the area. Parents request that the Minister approve the work of the Task Force for a new post primary school on the former St Gabriel's site and that in the meantime the needs of the school and community would be met by approving the entry of boys into 'Mercy College' (a proposed all ability co-educational college) from September 2013.
- Note: In June 2012, St Gemma's talked of working with Our Lady of Mercy HS 'via a local agreement under a single operating name of Mercy College to integrate the current offerings of both schools. The Flax Trust backed the idea but it would appear that this idea was overtaken by the current Development Proposal for the closure of St Gemma's HS.

Meeting with School Delegation & Others

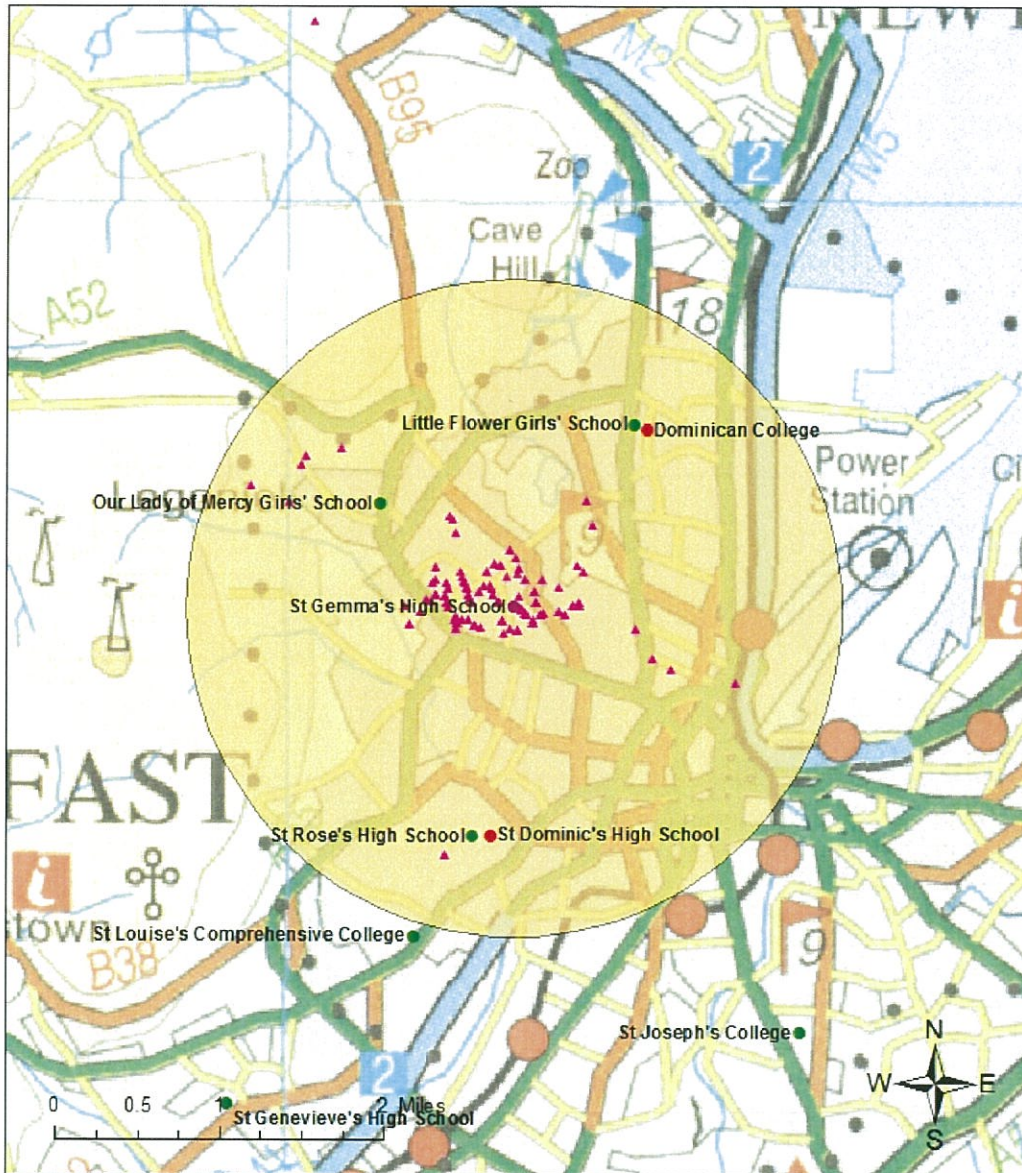
On 5 November 2012, during the statutory 2-month consultation period during which representations about a DP can be made directly to the Department, a delegation of parents of St Gemma's HS together with the parish priest and local councillors met the Minister to express their views and concerns about the proposed closure of the school.

The main concern of the delegation was the effect of closure on the local community. The loss of the school would remove an important resource from the area. Parents were also concerned that the nearest Girls' school (Our Lady of Mercy) was situated in a Protestant area and the safety of their children could be compromised, particularly at night.

The delegation said that the decline in the school's enrolment was due to the fall in the birth rate and the grammar schools taking in a wider range of abilities. The delegation gave the Minister a set of papers supporting the Education Task Group's work on the development of a 'Crumlin Road educational campus' together with a response submission from the parents' group to Development Proposal No 213 (BELB).

APPENDIX D

St Gemma's High School, Belfast



Key

- St Gemma's High School
- ▲ Pupils Home Addresses
- Maintained Secondary Alternative Provision
- Catholic Voluntary Grammar
- ◇ 2 Mile Buffer St Gemma's High School



APPENDIX E

Draft Press Release

Draft Press Release

MINISTER ANNOUNCES CLOSURE OF ST GEMMA'S HIGH SCHOOL, BELFAST

Education Minister, John O'Dowd, has approved the closure of St Gemma's High School, Belfast from 31 August 2013.

Commenting on the decision, Mr O'Dowd said: **"A proposal to close St Gemma's High School was included in the NI Commission for Catholic Education (NICCE)'s review of post-primary education for the north Belfast and Glengormley area and also in the Belfast Education and Library Board's post-primary area plan"**.

"I appreciate that St Gemma's High School has forged very close links with the Ardoyne community which it has served over the past 45 years and that its closure will be a disappointment to those who have been closely associated with the school during this time".

"In making my decision, however, the educational interests of the pupils were at the forefront of my considerations. Unfortunately, the sharply declining enrolments at St Gemma's meant that the school was increasingly unable to provide the full range and quality of curricular offer that is required, particularly at the GCSE and post-16 phases. Having considered all of the evidence, I have therefore concluded that St Gemma's is no longer sustainable and that closure is the only option."

The Minister added: **"I know that every effort will be made by those involved to ensure that the transition arrangements for the children go smoothly and I wish the staff and the pupils of St Gemma's well for the future."**

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. On 13 September 2012, the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) published Development Proposal No. 213, which proposed the closure of St Gemma's High School, Belfast from 31 August 2013, or as soon as possible thereafter.
2. St Gemma's HS, in the Ardoyne area, opened in 1967 and is a maintained secondary school for girls. The school's 2012/13 enrolment is 110. There are no pupils currently enrolled in Year 8.

Media queries, contact the Department of Education Press Office on 028 9127 9701. Out of office hours please contact the Duty Press Officer via pager number 07699 715 440 and your call will be returned.