

REPRESENTATION TO EDUCATION & CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
7 APRIL 2011

I am making this representation both as a long-standing Richmond resident and on behalf of the Richmond Inclusive Schools campaign.

We know that the Catholic secondary school issue is not on your agenda today. My purpose is to make an input for your discussion on Secondary School Admissions, especially relating to items 22 to 26 of the report.

Clearly the borough must have more school capacity. The current policy is to provide it initially in the form of a new Catholic school. Like all Catholic schools, its admissions priorities will favour Catholics, wherever they live, over local non-Catholics. My first point is therefore that the benefit of the additional capacity will be enjoyed by Catholics in this and other boroughs, while the 85% to 90% of non-Catholic borough residents will be discriminated against. A high quality inclusive school would be a better way to give all borough parents more choice on admissions.

Secondly, it is not true to say, as some imply, that children are "forced out" of the borough through lack of provision. According to the January 2010 School Census, over a third of borough places (36%) were filled by children from other Local Authorities. Imports exceeded exports by over 900. Where children do go out of the borough, that would seem to be mainly due to parental choice – including a preference for a Catholic school - and the operation of the Linked School system, which as you know, is unfair to children from Catholic primaries. Surely there should be a plan to remove this unfairness as part of the efforts to ensure adequate high quality provision and fair admissions for the borough as a whole.

Finally, I would like to read you parts of a posting on the Richmond & Twickenham Times website recently made by a lady calling herself "LocalMumofTwo". I don't know who she is, but this is an opportunity to have her voice heard:

My children go to a faith school. However, I chose it because it was a good school, with lots of good facilities, and very close to my home, not because it was a faith school. Just because our existing faith schools are oversubscribed, doesn't mean people like the admissions policies. I have lost count of the number of conversations I've had with people about how they are "doing their time" at church, attending Alpha courses etc, in order to have more choice of primary school... I know people who attend Catholic and CofE church on alternate weeks, just to maximise their options. I also know genuine church goers who are mortified when other people assume they are only attending church to get their child into a certain school...And I've known parents at school who have taken it upon themselves to "name and shame" people whose church going has lapsed. This is all incredibly divisive, and the council should not pretend that it isn't happening...

Is this really the approach to "fairness and equity of local school admissions arrangements" that the Committee wants to see extended further into the secondary area?

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