

Members of the Education & Children's Services
Overview & Scrutiny Committee,
Gillian Norton – Chief Executive,
Nick Whitfield – Director of Education
London Borough of Richmond upon Thames
York House
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Jeremy Rodell
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4th October 2011

Dear

CLIFDEN ROAD SITE FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL

I am writing on behalf of the Richmond Inclusive Schools Campaign about the procedure the Council is adopting in taking important decisions relating to the Clifden Road site and the position it is adopting for the use of the site for secondary education.

The key issue

The Council's education strategy was set out in the Education White Paper "Provision of High Quality Places in Education", which was approved at the Cabinet meeting on 6th December 2010.

Section 5 of the White Paper (Appendix A policy document "Choice & Diversity"): "**Providing sufficient numbers of high quality secondary places**" states:

"It has been anticipated that the equivalent of two secondary schools (including one Roman Catholic) will be needed by about 2015 to meet the demand for places. We are considering reconfiguration of current resources and provision in order to arrive at solutions to provide additional places, which could involve working in collaboration with schools, colleges and other local providers.

We are committed to the secondary expansion programme and will undertake feasibility for one, possibly two, additional secondary schools (including one Roman Catholic) in the borough." (My emphasis)

Section 6: “Creating sixth form provision on school sites” states:

“Schools will also need to free up class space to take sixth form students. It is proposed to reduce the intake at each school to accommodate this. As the intake numbers decrease at existing secondary schools, additional places required for the incoming Year 7 students will be provided by a proposed increase from four to five forms of entry in an existing Richmond upon Thames secondary school (Christ’s) and new school building projects (including one Roman Catholic) at two other Richmond upon Thames sites.” (My emphasis)

At that stage the policy on the provision of secondary schools was at a preliminary stage of development. However, recent statements by some councillors imply that the Council has gone beyond the policy set out in the White Paper and has reached the position of giving [top] priority to the establishment of a Voluntary Aided Roman Catholic school, without a decision of the Council or the Cabinet and without undertaking meaningful prior consultation as promised and in accordance with the Council’s Constitution and stated practice.

The Council resolutions

The resolution of the Cabinet meeting of 6th December went no further than anticipating that the equivalent of two secondary schools (including one Roman Catholic school) will be needed to meet the demand for places and stating that the Council will undertake feasibility for one, possibly two, additional secondary schools (including one Roman Catholic). The policy on additional secondary schools was therefore at a preliminary stage of development and the resolution did not give a Roman Catholic school priority over any other type of school.

The minutes also record that *“Councillor True advised Jeremy Rodell that he would have an opportunity to participate in future consultations concerning the strategy”*, implying that consultation on the strategy as it develops would in fact take place.

At the Council meeting on 5th April 2011 a petition supporting the establishment of a Catholic secondary school was presented. There was no discussion on the type of Catholic school, its priority compared to the other school referred to in the White Paper, or the inclusivity of its admissions, and there was no vote and no resolution passed or recorded on this item.

At the Cabinet meeting on 21st July 2011 the Council resolved to purchase the RACC premises at Clifden Road for future school provision. The minutes state clearly that *“Decisions regarding the type of school and whether it may provide a Catholic Secondary school for the borough would be a process completed after this initial decision had been taken.”*

The report for the meeting states at paragraph 3.13:

“At its meeting on 5 April 2011, Council received a petition calling for the establishment of a state Catholic Secondary School in the borough. There was cross-party support in favour of the provision for a state Catholic school. It must be stressed however that this Council level of support does not

represent a decision to provide this type of school at the Clifden site. That would be a separate decision from that which is before the Cabinet in this report.”

The Council meeting of 13 September 2011 considered our petition stating: *“We, the undersigned, petition the Council to ensure that every state-funded school opening in the borough from now on is inclusive, so that no child can be denied a place in a good local school because of the religion or belief of their parents.”* None of the three Councillors who spoke in response addressed the petition directly, and contrary to the Petition Scheme documentationⁱ, no response has so far been given.

Statements by councillors

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting of 21 July state that *“Following the agreement of the recommendations Councillor True spoke to those present about the council’s intentions. He said that Cabinet heard and respected the arguments involved and was committed to increasing school places and that this would include the provision of a Catholic Secondary School. It was true that the Diocese must make representation to the Secretary of State to waive competition on the creation of a Faith School and the council would support them in this process. The aim of the administration was to make good on its commitment to provide a Catholic School and he hoped that the cross party support so far received would continue. “*

Between the Cabinet meeting of 21st July and the Council meeting of 13th September it appears that a decision was taken to drop the plan for a new community school in addition to the Catholic school *“for the foreseeable future”*. This is indicated in a written response given by the Council to members of the Finance & Performance Overview & Scrutiny Committee following a request at their meeting on 6th Septemberⁱⁱ. The response confirmed Councillor Hodgins’ speech to the Council on 13th September, which included a plan for secondary school capacity that omitted any reference to a new community schoolⁱⁱⁱ. The Catholic school in Clifden Road appears therefore now the only new school planned for the borough, bringing the total number of secondary schools to nine.

Councillor Eady made clear at the full Council meeting on 13th September that the *“cross-party support”* referred to in the minutes of Cabinet meeting of 21 July extended only to the principle of a Catholic school for the borough, and not to the use of the Clifden Road site for this purpose: *“...the priority should be to utilise the Clifden Road site for a community secondary school and make alternative arrangements for a Catholic secondary school.”*

Councillor True stated in an email^{iv} to a borough resident dated 16th September: *“We have said that we are prepared to respond positively to any proposal from the Diocese to create a new school, although that would have to be made by them and approved by the Secretary of State. So far we have received no proposal.”* This implies that the Council has made up its mind that priority should be given to a Roman Catholic school on the Clifden Road site over other types of school if the diocese brings forward proposals.

Our concerns

We are concerned from the statements made by some councillors that the Council seems to have reached a position where it will give priority to a Roman Catholic school on the Clifden Road site. If that is so, this would have been reached without a decision of the Council and without consultation.

A Key Decision would have been taken in a way that was not in line with the processes laid down for “Key Decisions” in the Council’s Constitution, which include *“To provide for public consultation, where appropriate, before major key decisions”*, which itself is in line with the governing party’s Number One “key commitment” in its election manifesto to “consult first, act afterwards”. In addition, as I said earlier in this letter, the Council expressly stated in its meeting of 6th December 2010 that there would be *“future consultations concerning the strategy”* given in the White Paper.

It is a basic principle that consultation must be undertaken when proposals are still at a formative stage. For the consultation to meet this test, it should be on the issue of the type of school to be provided on the Clifden Road site and whether priority should be given to a Catholic school over other types of school. The consultation would not have been undertaken in a timely fashion if it does not happen until the consultation step included in the five-stage statutory process provided for under section 10 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, which applies if the Secretary of State for Education gives consent to the Church to publish proposals for a new Voluntary Aided school. The five-stage statutory process would not be applicable if, in the light of full, fair and meaningful consultation of all borough residents, the Council were to decide to take a different course.

Our request

Our campaign would be grateful for your assurance that consultation will take place on the question of what type of school should be included on the Clifden Road site and whether priority should be given to a Voluntary Aided Roman Catholic school. That consultation should be undertaken now, and not when or if the Westminster diocese comes forward with proposals for a school on the site. The need for full, fair and meaningful consultation of all borough residents on these key decisions is especially relevant in this case when the issue is known to be controversial among both parents and other residents, and when its effects are likely to last for many generations.

Yours sincerely,

Jeremy Rodell
Richmond Inclusive Schools Campaign

CLIFDEN ROAD SITE FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL

Copies to Lord True; Cllr Paul Hodgins; Cllr Geoffrey Samuel; Cllr Stephen Knight

ⁱ http://www.richmond.gov.uk/part_5_-_petitions_scheme-2.pdf

ⁱⁱ "At the last meeting of Finance and Performance O&S Committee the following request was made: In relation to indicator PR0646, secondary school places, the Committee requested an update on the status of the second secondary school that was needed and who the Council were in discussions with. **Here is the update from the Council:** Although a second new secondary school may be a long-term requirement, it is difficult to say at this point if and when it will definitely be needed. That is because **there is likely to be sufficient capacity within the borough to take account of increased demand for the foreseeable future:**

- There are 200 vacancies in this September's Yr7 intake: 110 at Richmond Park Academy, 40 at Hampton Academy and 50 at Twickenham Academy. If provided in the short- to medium-term, a new community school would undermine those academies' attempts to increase their recruitment and retention. If those academies did get to the point of oversubscription, the first children to miss out could be up to c.110 out-borough residents: probably up to 50 at Richmond Park Academy and up to 30 at each of Hampton Academy and Twickenham Academy.
- The Catholic secondary school could free up some places in community schools in the borough. The proposed new secondary school in Kingston could free up c.100 places at Grey Court. Proposals to create new schools in north Kingston and in other areas of surrounding boroughs could reduce demand for places in our schools from out-borough pupils.
- Proposals for free schools within the borough may well come to fruition."

ⁱⁱⁱ See video recording of the meeting http://www.richmond.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/64416 . (Details of the speech were not captured in the minutes.)

^{iv} Email from Lord True to a supporter dated 16 Sep 2011 (copy available)