



Rt.Hon.Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State for Education
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On behalf of **Richmond Inclusive Schools Campaign**
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Dear Mr Gove,

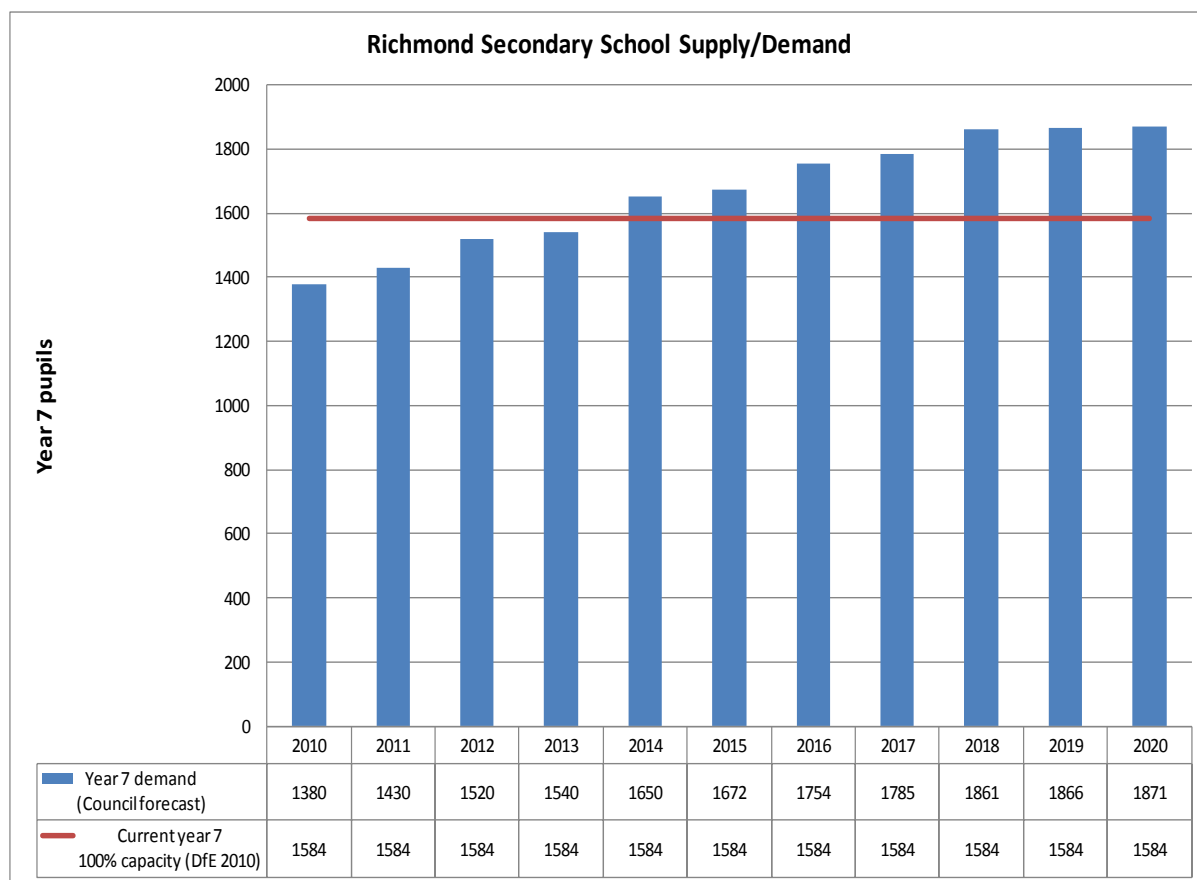
I am writing to ask you to take into account the points made in this communication if and when you are asked to give consent to the Catholic Diocese of Westminster and/or Southwark to publish proposals to establish a new Voluntary Aided secondary school in the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames outside of a competition. This is expected to take place following Richmond Council's recent announcement of the purchase of a site for a new secondary school, and its stated intention to offer it to the Catholic Church for a VA school.

I appreciate that you do not make the decision about whether such a school will in fact be set up, but in considering the application for consent, we take it that you will look at the desirability of a new VA school, assuming that the funding can be found and the correct procedures are followed. We suggest that the establishment of a VA school at this stage cannot be a reasonable way of providing the school places that Richmond needs, and that you should therefore not grant consent.

Failing to address the need for places

Everyone locally agrees about the urgent need for additional secondary school capacity in the borough. The provision of a new, restrictive-entry faith school, and especially its priority over inclusive provision, is therefore highly controversial.

The figures look like this:

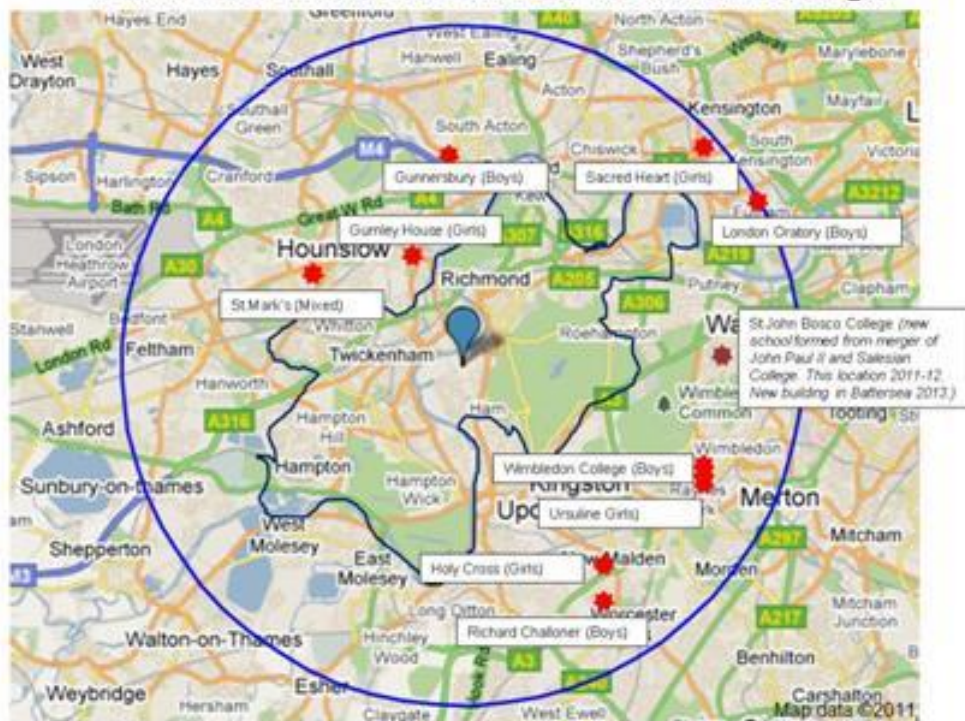


This Council forecast is based on demographic data and the growing number of pupils at borough primaries. Another factor is that the borough is both an “importer” and – to a lesser extent - an “exporter” of secondary school children. Around 200 per year of the latter are children who have attended one of the 8 local Catholic primaries, most of whom then go on to one of the 8 Catholic secondaries within a 5 mile radius of the centre of the borough (see map).

There are two reasons for this: firstly, there is no Catholic secondary within the borough boundary; secondly, the Council’s system of feeder primaries for specified Community secondaries and Academies (the “Linked School system”) excludes all but one of the Catholic primaries. Catholic parents seeking a place at a good local Community school or Academy school are forced to go outside and, understandably, think this is unfair. The local Catholic community is therefore seeking a local Catholic secondary.

However, as these data make clear, a new Catholic VA school (intake 150 per year) would fill almost entirely with children who would otherwise have gone to out-of-borough Catholic schools. It would not free-up significant capacity in the other borough secondaries and would be effectively closed to children of non-Catholics (90% of the population) living nearby. It would therefore do little or nothing to alleviate the borough’s overall supply/demand problem. A second inclusive school would be urgently required, and probably a third by 2017 or 2018.

Catholic secondary schools within 5 mile radius of centre of Richmond borough



Inconsistency with Academies & Inclusivity policies

Three of the borough's secondary schools are already Academies, and Richmond Council's policy is *"to support all Richmond upon Thames schools to become academies over a three year period"*. This is, of course, in line with government policy.

We also note that the Catholic Church itself has no in-principle objection to the conversion of existing VA schools to Academies.

The government has stated that it wants to ensure "all new Academies follow an inclusive admissions policy", and has established a maximum of 50% faith-based selection for new faith Free Schools/Academies. It would therefore be inconsistent with this policy to grant consent for a VA school when it is clear from both the demand data, and the admissions policies applied by Catholic VA schools, that only Catholics would in practice be able to gain places at the new school— that is, 100% faith-based admissions.

There are other options available that, unlike a Catholic VA school, would be consistent with government policy on Academies and inclusiveness. Indeed the opportunity should be taken to enhance inclusiveness by removing discrimination against Catholics seeking places at existing Community schools and Academies as a result of the Linked Schools system.

Richmond Inclusive Schools Campaign

I am a local resident and the coordinator of this campaign. It started earlier this year, after the Council adopted its education policy, including promotion of the Catholic secondary. The Council's recent announcement that it will purchase the site – which already contains a viable school building – and to offer it to the Catholic Church, when at the same time there is concern over the availability of places for the non-Catholic 90% of the community, has led to a rapid growth in support. Although we have not yet held a meeting or raised a petition, we have already gathered several hundred supporters from a variety of backgrounds, many/most of them local parents and including a number of school governors. We are not anti-religious, or party-political and count Catholics, Anglicans, Jews, humanists and others among our supporters.

The intention of the campaign is to ensure that new schools in the borough are fully inclusive - especially in terms of admissions - whether or not they are faith-based. We would like to see a combination of sufficient high quality inclusive capacity and a reform of the Linked School system such that no borough child is denied access to a secondary school because of the religion or beliefs of their parents.

We firmly believe that any objective assessment of the position in Richmond will lead to the conclusion that a new Catholic VA school cannot meet the urgent need for secondary school places, nor conform to government policy on Academies or inclusiveness, and therefore that consent for publication of proposals should not be granted.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeremy Rodell', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Jeremy Rodell

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