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Richmond Inclusive Schools Campaign
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Dear Zac.

Further to our previous discussion about the inclusive school versus Catholic Voluntary Aided school debate in the borough. We have now had confirmation from DfE that they have received *"two section 10 requests from the Diocese of Westminster for consent to publish proposals outside of a school competition for a secondary and primary school"*. The significant news that a Voluntary Aided Catholic primary is also proposed along with the secondary will, of course, further enflame the situation.

Attached for information is a copy of a letter from Michael Gove dated 1st Oct to Vince Cable in response to his letter of 26th Aug on this subject (previously provided). It is interesting that the Secretary of State will take into account "If any interest has been shown by an Academy or Free School proposer..." when the DfE recently turned down a proposal for a Richmond Free School. And of course, no-one has sought Academy proposals - and a positive response from providers is unlikely - given that the Council is set on the current course.

We have also been advised that church policy is not to consider new Catholic Academies/Free Schools because of the 50% maximum faith based selection rule, hence the focus on Voluntary Aided. Any compromise solution enabling a good proportion of places to be set aside for local children on a non-denominational basis therefore appears to be problematic.

Meanwhile our petition asking 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"* now has well over 2000 signatures, and we recently delivered a further 250 paper signatures that have yet to be added. A glance at the Richmond & Twickenham Times letters pages will underline that the issue has become hugely controversial.

We are therefore requesting a full, fair and meaningful consultation with all borough residents on what to do with the Clifden Road site, to take place before any further moves are made towards a Catholic VA school. It seems the only fair way forward.

I know it will be difficult for the Council. But their Number One manifesto key commitment was "Consult first, act afterwards". They could not have anticipated the strength of feeling the issue would generate when they carried out their pledge to "work for a Catholic secondary school".

A consent from Michael Gove to the request from the Diocese, while not making the final decision, will effectively start a formal process that will pre-empt this wider consultation. **Any action you can take to secure a refusal of consent, or at least a delay to give the opportunity for this wider consultation to take place, would be very much appreciated.**

Yours sincerely,

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Attached for info: Letter to Council Education Scrutiny Committee challenging the Council's decision-taking process.