



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

26 August 2011

Dear Michael

I am writing to ask if you will give personal attention to the issues raised in the letter to you from Jeremy Rodell of Richmond Inclusive Schools Campaign (2 August).

Richmond Council proposes to establish a voluntary aided Catholic secondary school on an educational site shortly to become available. The idea of a Catholic secondary in the borough is supported by both parties represented on Richmond Council (yours and mine), and by me personally, and there has been a long standing campaign for one by Catholic parents 200 of whom emigrate at 11 to schools in surrounding boroughs.

The reason why the school proposal has recently become controversial is because there is a predicted overall scarcity of secondary places after 2015, in addition to the existing shortage of primary school places. There is therefore now a demand that priority should be given to a non-denominational school rather than a faith school (there are some who are opposed to faith schools in principle but that does not apply to me or the council). There is no obvious site for a second, new, secondary school, unless capital is made available to rebuild the local Richmond upon Thames College. There is a possible compromise which is to welcome a Catholic school but with a commitment to keep open a good proportion of places on a non-denominational basis.

The compromise happens to chime with the Coalition Agreement and government policy to create new faith based academies with, as a first option, 50% faith based admission, as I believe is incorporated in the Education Bill. Academies have been embraced by both parties in the borough and the Coalition's policy would therefore be well received locally.



The tricky issue – for you – is timing: whether to allow proposals for a Catholic VA school to proceed (assuming that the church authorities now request them) before the Education Bill comes into effect, or to apply the new provisions of the Bill. The issue is a highly sensitive one both for the Catholic community and for the borough more generally and that is why I am encouraging you to give the matter your personal attention.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to be "Vincent Cable", is written above the typed name.

The Rt Hon Dr Vincent Cable MP