

Consultation on new school branded as 'unfair'

Sir – If Michael Gove is right, and councils can accept voluntary aided (VA) school proposals whether they need a new school or not, then councils need to act fairly when consulting on those proposals. Our council's consultation was unfair in several respects.

1. The council made it clear it wanted the VA school upfront, and did everything it could to discredit anyone who publicly disagreed, mislabelling them from the outset as anti-Catholic.

2. They allowed the Catholic primaries to

distribute information to parents about the consultation while advising the non-Catholic school leaders to remain neutral.

As a result, many non-Catholic parents did not even know the consultation was taking place.

3. The consultation did not mention that a free school was interested in the Clifden Road site.

Also the council advised local schools not to distribute information about free schools, so parents were not fully aware of alternative options.

4. The consultation document argued that because Catholic families had not chosen community schools in the past they were unlikely to do so in the future.

That was disingenuous because under the Linked School Policy (which has thankfully now been lifted) Catholic families had no chance of getting into most of the community schools so were unlikely to waste preferences on them.

5. The council supplied large batches of the consultation forms to be handed out to Catholic church

congregations, without making sure that an equivalent number of forms were handed out to the rest of the population. It is also unclear as to whether those paper forms were returned as a batch or individually.

In summary, this was no referendum, and the results cannot be claimed to be representative of the Richmond population.

The council has failed to listen openly and fairly to people's views.

NAME SUPPLIED
Twickenham