

RISC response to the Council's press release of 3 Oct 2012

Quote from Jeremy Rodell:

“People can draw their own conclusions from the aggressive tone of Lord True’s statement. Unfortunately, much of what he says is simply untrue or misleading. The impression is that he does not really care whether the Council has acted unlawfully or not, provided he gets his own way.

Firstly, even if we win the legal case, it will not “stop church schools”. It will only stop a Catholic Voluntary Aided school with an admissions policy designed to ensure 100% of the places are closed to children of non-Catholics.

The compromise of a new Catholic academy/free school with up to 50% of faith-based places will remain available if we win. It was originally put forward by Vince Cable, and even Michael Gove said he thought it would be sensible for 50% of the places to be available to the wider community. The compromise would not be ideal for RISC - we want fully inclusive schools - but it would be a lot better than the current plan. But Lord True and the Diocese rejected it out of hand.

And RISC made no objection to the Church of England primary free school that has been approved for Hampton, because it will have fully inclusive admissions. He knows that.

Secondly, a High Court judge gave consent for a Judicial Review of the Council’s decision to go ahead with the exclusive Catholic schools because there was a legitimate case. The intervention by the Department for Education (DfE) makes little difference to that. In fact the Council had already referred to the DfE’s position in their evidence. And as we have seen in other recent cases, government departments do not always get things right.

Thirdly, he seems to find it difficult to accept that RISC is a major local campaign supported by a large number of people from all sorts of backgrounds and beliefs, ranging from atheists to Catholics. It is not anti-religious or party-political. Over 3300 people signed our petition asking for inclusive schools. Yes, I lead the campaign and I am a humanist, with a strong belief in dialogue between people with differing beliefs. But the great majority of supporters, including many of the people Lord True has himself heard making statements at Cabinet and other meetings in support of inclusive schools, are not humanists, and he knows that too. His attempt to personalise the issue is an insult to the genuine concerns of RISC supporters.

He also knows that RISC was, and remains, a local initiative, and the implication that we are taking orders from “national leaders” in the British Humanist Association – itself an organisation of free-thinkers - is frankly ludicrous.

Then there’s the statement about costs. On one hand he is saying that we should give up as the Council will definitely win the case, and he has previously emphasised that they will seek to recover all their costs from our side. On the other he is complaining that “every penny spent on lawyers is money lost to the education of all the young people in the borough”. He cannot have it both ways. And he knows that the amounts in question are insignificant compared to the amounts spent on schools.

No-one wants prolonged uncertainty for parents. But it was the Council who said that a legal challenge was premature when we first raised it in many months ago and forced us to delay until after their meeting on 24 May. And it was RISC that then asked the court to expedite the case because of the uncertainty.

We have no plans to abandon the case. It is the Council that has failed to compromise.