



Bishop John Sherrington
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Diocese of Westminster
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24 September 2013

Dear Bishop Sherrington,

The enclosed report from Richmond Inclusive Schools Campaign (RISC) - *Faith-based discrimination in Richmond primary school offers 2013* - is intended to provide dioceses and school governing bodies with a new, evidence-based perspective on the impact of selective admissions policies at church schools in the borough of Richmond. It includes constructive suggestions for simple changes schools can make to become, in the words of Vince Cable (Twickenham MP, and a defender of faith schools) “more community minded”, without challenging their status or ethos. This is especially important at primary level, when parents rightly expect to be able to find a good school, close to home, and especially when there is so much pressure on places overall.

In preparing the report, we were encouraged by the fact that St.Richard Reynold’s primary school sets aside a third of its places on a community basis, and Trinity Academy in Lambeth will presumably have a minimum of 50% non-faith-based places when it opens as a Free School next year.

These developments reflect the importance of separating the wider issue of faith schools in the state system from the issue of discrimination in access to state-funded faith schools. As you know, RISC has never argued against faith schools per se – some of our supporters are against them, others for, and some have children at them. This is why we made no objection to the establishment of a new Church of England school – St.Mary’s Hampton – which has fully inclusive admissions. Our concern is simply that, in a plural society such as ours, it is neither fair nor healthy for the community as a whole for one group of children to have wider access to state-funded schools than others simply because of their parents’ faith.

The practical effect of this is that there are primary age children in the borough of Richmond that, having failed to get into any of their 6 preferred schools, have been assigned community places at schools up to 5km away. Their parents have had no choice at all, and inevitably feel discriminated against in comparison to their church-going neighbours.

We are therefore calling for local Catholic primaries to move to a model similar to St.Richard Reynold’s Primary, but with 50% of places open on a community basis. This change could be made by the Admissions Code deadline of 15 April 2014 in time for September 2015 entry. We urge you to encourage them to give this proposal serious consideration.

This suggestion does not fully address our in-principle concern that no local child should be denied access to state-funded schools because of their parents' beliefs or religious practices. But we believe it is a readily achievable way in which Diocesan schools could make a contribution to more equitable access to primary places for the community as a whole.

We look forward to hearing your views, and would be happy to discuss the matter further.

Yours sincerely,

Jeremy Rodell – for Richmond Inclusive Schools Campaign