



Richmond Inclusive Schools Campaign

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Ms Bonney Venning
The Queen's CE Primary School
Cumberland Road
Kew
Surrey, TW9 3HJ
Copy of letter to Miss Katie Bentham

17 September 2013

Dear Ms Venning,

The enclosed report from Richmond Inclusive Schools Campaign (RISC) - *Faith-based discrimination in Richmond primary school offers 2013* - is intended to provide governing bodies with a new, evidence-based perspective on the impact of their admissions policies. It includes constructive suggestions for simple changes church schools can make to become, in the words of Vince Cable (a defender of faith schools) "more community minded", without challenging their status or ethos. We hope the governing body at Queen's will consider the impact that the school's policy is having on the wider local community and give serious consideration to the suggested changes.

In preparing the report, we were encouraged by clear indications from the Diocese of London that its schools "should be there to serve the community, so we're really encouraging schools to move towards [open admissions]" and by the fully inclusive admissions policy adopted by St.Mary's primary in Hampton. 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 the case of Queen's, according to data provided by the school, after accommodating siblings, 96% of places this year were offered on the basis of faith – only one open offer was made – the highest level of exclusivity of any CofE primary in the borough. As the table on page 5 shows, Queen's admissions policy is relatively unusual among local CofE primaries in having no upper limit on the degree to which faith-based priority applies. In the current environment, this inevitably favours some children from further afield over those living nearby, who are disadvantaged simply because of their parents' beliefs or religious practices.

Apart from the principle of fairness in accessing a state-funded school, the effect is also that Queen's is socially and ethnically selective. The average % of pupils eligible for free school meals in the borough is 9% (7% for CofE schools); Kew Riverside is 16%, Darrell 21%, Holy Trinity 14%, Marshgate 8%, but Queen's only 2.3%. Similarly, the % of pupils of white British origin at borough schools is 50% (52% at CofE schools), Kew Riverside 45%; Darrell 48%; Holy Trinity 50%; Marshgate 51%, but Queen's 60%.

While some parents may find this type of exclusivity attractive, it runs counter to the official reason given by the Church¹ for its involvement in education "to enable people of any background to receive a proper education based on a commitment to fulfil human potential, meet the needs of society and transmit knowledge and culture".

We are calling for Church of England primaries that currently apply a faith-based admissions test to move to a model which would put a clear % cap – maximum 50%, but ideally below - on faith-based admissions for the remaining places after siblings have been accommodated. This type of model, albeit with an excessive %, is already in place at Archbishop Cambridge's Primary in Twickenham. There seems therefore no obstacle to its adoption by the Admissions Code deadline of 15 April 2014 in time for September 2015 entry.

¹ <http://www.churchofengland.org/education/faqs-about-church-schools.aspx>

This suggestion does not fully address our in-principle concern that *no* local children 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 your governing body could make the school's admissions policy more community-minded without impacting the school's status or ethos.

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