



Mr. Colin Sambrook  
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Copy to Ms Helen Frostick

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Dear Mr Sambrook,

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 Vince Cable's words, "more community minded" without challenging their status or ethos, in fact Vince Cable has always defended faith schools. We hope the governing body at St. Mary Magdalen'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 the fact that the new St. Richard Reynold's primary school sets aside a third of its places on a community basis, and Trinity Academy, a Catholic secondary Free School in Lambeth opening in 2014, will have a minimum of 50% non-faith-based places. These cases demonstrate that governing bodies of Catholic schools can decide to adopt more inclusive policies while still having regard to general Diocesan guidelines. Policies that enable community accessibility are 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 St. Mary Magdalen's, after accommodating siblings, 100% of places this year were offered on the basis of faith. The school's over-subscription policy inevitably favours Catholic children from further afield over non-Catholic children living nearby. Those children travelling to St. Mary's have been given the benefit of a choice in schools. However, the majority of our local community schools were also oversubscribed, and we know there are children in the borough that, having failed to get into any of their 6 preferred schools, have been assigned community places at schools up to 5km away. They have had no choice at all, and inevitably feel discriminated against in comparison to their church-going neighbours. St. Mary's could make a contribution to fairness across the wider community by creating a proportion of open places.

We are 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.

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. And it falls well short of the approach at the new St. Mary's Church of England primary in Hampton, which is fully inclusive. But we believe it is a readily achievable way in which your governing body could make the school's admissions policy more community-minded.

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