



Archbishop Vincent Nichols
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Richmond Inclusive Schools Campaign
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15 October 2013

Dear Archbishop Nichols,

Thank you for your reply of 8th October, and for enclosing the full text of your homily marking the opening of St. Richard Reynold's Catholic College. My main point in writing again is to correct one point in your letter.

RISC has never argued against diversity in the state education system – assuming it is accompanied by meaningful choice - nor have we argued against faith schools, including Catholic schools. Our focus has always been on one issue: fair admissions to state-funded schools.

This is reflected both in our 2011 petition to the local Council *"to ensure that every state-funded school opening in the borough from now on is inclusive, so that no child can be denied a place in a good local school because of the religion or belief of their parents"* and in our lack of concern or comment about the new St. Mary's CoFE primary in Hampton, which opened at the same time as St. Richard Reynold's, but which has fully inclusive admissions.

It is also reflected in our more recent work on existing primary schools¹, where we have proposed simple practical steps local Catholic and Anglican schools could take to become more inclusive in their admissions, without changing their status or ethos. In this respect the one-third of places available to the wider community (including Catholics) at St. Richard Reynold's Catholic Primary is a welcome step, and we see little reason why it should not be emulated – preferably with half rather than a third of places - at the other Catholic primaries. Such changes would not fully address our in-principle concern. But they would begin to meet Vince Cable's recent call for church schools to be more "community minded" in their admissions.

"Our difference" is therefore not about educational diversity, but about educational exclusivity.

On the question of Protocol 1 of Article 2 of the European Convention of Human Rights, perhaps I can point out that the Church's interpretation is contrary to that of both the European Court of Human Rights and the English courts.

Yours sincerely,

Jeremy Rodell – Richmond Inclusive Schools Campaign

¹ [http://www.richmondinclusiveschools.org.uk/files/view/useful-data/primary-offer-analysis-2013/Richmond primaries 2013 - faith-based discrimination & what to do about it.pdf](http://www.richmondinclusiveschools.org.uk/files/view/useful-data/primary-offer-analysis-2013/Richmond_primaries_2013_faith-based_discrimination_&_what_to_do_about_it.pdf)

ARCHBISHOP'S HOUSE,
WESTMINSTER, LONDON, SW1P 1QJ

Mr Jeremy Rodell
Richmond Inclusive Schools Campaign
8 Morley Road
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8 October 2013

Dear Mr Rodell

Thank you for your letter of 24 September concerning the words I spoke at the Mass to mark the opening of St Richard Reynolds Catholic College in Twickenham. I enclose an extract from that homily so that you can see exactly what I said.

As you know the UK Government has signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights. So Protocol 1 of Article 2 are not empty words but have to be translated into practice.

In general terms the context of that practice is the patterns of partnership between the Catholic Church and local and central government that have been built up for 70 or more years now. Within this framework I do indeed believe that Catholic parents can have a legitimate and proper expectation that the state will help them to educate their children in their faith and way of life.

The working out of this process has always been one of partnership between local communities, the local authority and central government. Please do not misunderstand my comments: I had no objection to people expressing their views and seeking through the process of consultation to influence the working out of that process in Richmond. These partnerships are long established and help to provide high levels of education. Through these achievements the whole of society benefits.

You will also note that, in my view, the maintaining of educational diversity is a proper aim. I rather think this lies at the heart of our difference.

Thank you again for writing to me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vincent Nichols". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

✠ Vincent Nichols
Archbishop of Westminster

Enc

St Richard Reynolds College has come into existence because of effective partnerships, through a united effort. It has not been easy. Some have wished to use this effort as an occasion to sow division. But this morning I thank all who have played a part to hold together and progress this project. I thank our partners in the Borough of Richmond upon Thames, especially Lord True, leader of Richmond Council, and his Lady wife, for his many years of support and effort. I thank Geoffrey Samuel, the deputy leader for his untiring effort and I thank Councillor Meena Bond, the Mayor of Richmond for her presence with us this morning. I also express sincere gratitude to Nick Whitfield, the Director of Education, to Matthew Paul, Head of Place Commissioning and to their staff. Partnership with public authorities, both local and national, is an important part of the mission of the Church, as a sign of the unity we wish to serve.

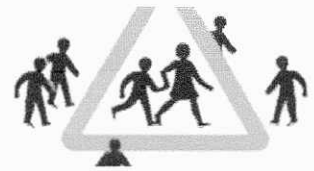
I also thank the officials of our two Catholic dioceses, of Southwark and Westminster, especially Mr Paul Barber. There are so many historical ties between us and this new school creates a new and demanding bond which we will nurture and bring to fulfilment together.

I am grateful, too, to St Mary's University College in Twickenham which is acting in partnership with this new venture.

I thank the Governing Body of the College and Mr Andrew Cole for all its hard work. You've only just begun!

Then, of course, I thank the Catholic people of this area and all those who, with them, supported this campaign for a new school. I think particularly of the ten parishes of the Borough and their priests, so many of whom are here today. Every Catholic school is a partnership between home, school and parish, here including the six Catholic primary schools in the Borough which have been behind this venture from its inception. They are represented this morning, which a pupil from each school shortly to bring forward the statue their school is donating to the College. A real gathering of the saints!

So a Catholic school is a response to the proper and legitimate expectations that parents can look to the state to help them to educate their children in the faith and way of life which is precious to them. In this way a Catholic school contributes to social cohesion by respecting the rights of parents and by maintaining educational diversity. This parental right is enshrined in European Conventions and to be honoured wherever possible. We are so grateful that it is now proving possible here in Richmond.



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25 September 2013

Dear Archbishop Nichols,

I am writing about two points from the speech you were reported¹ to have made to mark the opening of the new St. Richard Reynolds schools in Twickenham.

Human Rights

The Telegraph's headline in its print edition of 19th Sep was "Grants for faith schools are a human right, says archbishop". It is not clear from the report whether you actually said that, but that was the clear implication of your reported remarks about parental rights "enshrined in European Conventions". Oona Stannard did the same in a letter sent to Richmond Councillors in September 2011.

The European Convention on Human Rights. Protocol 1 Article 2 is the Right to Education. It states: "No person shall be denied the right to education. In the exercise of any functions which it assumes in relation to education and to teaching, the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions."

This ensures that the state cannot prevent parents from seeking to educate their children in line with their convictions (balanced by the need to protect the rights of children). The government cannot, for example, prevent anyone setting up a Muslim school teaching Creationism (there are quite a few), or a school using the Accelerated Christian Education method, where God has the views of the US Religious Right and, until very recently, the Loch Ness monster was cited as evidence against evolution (there are also a several of these schools in this country).

But it does not require the state itself to provide and/or finance such schools, or indeed to provide for any and every other "religious and philosophical conviction" held by parents – that would be impossible. And it certainly does not give anyone a right to require the state to fund schools that can discriminate between children in admissions on the basis of their parents' beliefs – the core issue in the Richmond case. If it did, then almost all the other countries in Europe would be in violation: according to the OECD², England (and Wales) is exceptional in having faith-based selection at state-funded schools - the only other OECD countries where it identifies this as happening are Estonia, Israel and Ireland. In our case it is only possible because of an exemption in equalities legislation.

¹ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/10318950/State-backed-faith-schools-a-precious-right-says-Archbishop.html>

² http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/school-choice-and-equity_5k9fq23507vc-en

There are, of course, sincerely held views for and against both state-funded faith schools in general - on which RISC is neutral³ - and faith-based selection, which is the key concern for RISC and now the national Fair Admissions Campaign. But it is misleading to claim, or imply, that there is a "human right" of access to state-funded Catholic schools with exclusive over-subscription criteria.

Sowing division

You were also reported as accusing those who opposed the establishment of the new schools in Twickenham of trying to "sow division" in the community. Of course, from our viewpoint, any division was caused by those who wanted to use a scarce site to establish a state-funded secondary school that will be effectively closed to 85-90% of the local community. But, setting that aside, it implies that anyone who stands up for what they see as right, whether it is about school inclusivity, a third runway at Heathrow, gay marriage, gender equality or freedom of worship under Communism, is "sowing division" and, presumably, that they should simply give up.

In my view, while it is important not to shy away from genuine differences, it is equally important – but sometimes not easy - for those involved to see each other as fellow human beings and to do their best to be fair in their arguments and methods. RISC certainly tried to do that in the campaign over the new schools, and continues to do so in its current work. With a few notable exceptions, that was largely reciprocated.

We live in a dynamic, plural society which is probably the most secular in Europe in a practical - as opposed to constitutional - sense. That does not mean a society in which faith has no role. But it does mean that faith-based privilege, of which state-funded schools that are closed to many children on religious grounds are a prime example, will become more and more unacceptable.

This may be a naïve hope, but perhaps the Church, with its new leadership, could surprise us by taking the lead in changing to a fairer arrangement at its schools, fit for 21st century Britain, rather than waiting for change to be forced upon it.

Yours sincerely,

Jeremy Rodell – Richmond Inclusive Schools Campaign

³ This is why RISC did not oppose the new St.Mary's Hampton Anglican primary school, which opened at the same time a St.Richard Reynold's, as it has fully inclusive admissions.