



### WHY AN INCLUSIVE SECONDARY SCHOOL WOULD BE BETTER FOR THE BOROUGH THAN A CATHOLIC SCHOOL

The Cabinet's adoption of a policy to give one of two new proposed secondary schools to the Catholic Church has triggered a vigorous public debate. It seems that the desire to meet the sincerely-based demands of a minority, supported by a powerful Church, has resulted in a policy that is both ill-founded and fails to consider the interests of the Borough as a whole. The alternative of two **excellent inclusive schools** has not been adequately considered.

### WHY INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS ARE PREFERRED

- An excellent inclusive school would be open to all children in the Borough - including children of Catholics. It would apply the same type of admissions criteria as existing Borough community secondaries, which take no account of the beliefs of parents in selecting children, and do not favour applicants from outside the Borough over local children.
- Teachers would be selected solely on their ability to provide the best teaching for their pupils, not on whether they belong to a particular religion.
- It would teach a fair and balanced syllabus for education about religious and non-religious beliefs.
- It could be run by a provider selected by proper competition to offer the best education for the Borough's children in this and future generations.

This is not an issue about quality: two of the Borough's existing community secondaries provide an "outstanding" quality of education according to Ofsted. Neither is a faith school.

### WHY THE CURRENT POLICY IS ILL-FOUNDED

- **It conflicts with the Council's duty to act in the best interests of the Borough as a whole**, which is underlined by the Education Policy<sup>i</sup> "*guarantee of a place at a high performing secondary school for every Richmond upon Thames 11 year old*".  
The Catholic school policy assumes instead that the Council has a duty to provide Catholic education. Catholic Church documentation<sup>ii</sup> is clear on the purpose of Catholic schools: "**Catholic schools exist to assist parents in handing on the Catholic faith to their children**". This is reflected in their admissions, employment and curriculum policies.  
Catholic parents, children and taxpayers have the same rights as non-Catholics, but not more. And the Council has no duty to meet demands from one group, however strongly supported or sincerely motivated, if that will disadvantage the other 85% to 90% of the Borough's residents.
- **The data behind the Catholic schools policy is absent or misleading:**
  - The policy implies that a disproportionate number of children are forced to go to out-of-Borough secondaries through lack of Borough capacity, when in fact **the Borough is a "net importer" of secondary pupils. A Catholic secondary would make this worse by giving priority to out-of-Borough Catholics over other local children.** And it ignores out-of-Borough children at local Catholic primaries whose home Borough already has a Catholic secondary.
  - It claims that Catholic baptisms in the area are increasing, when there is no evidence of an upward trend (see chart below).
- **The policy takes no account of the priority Catholics enjoy in admissions to the Borough's existing Christian faith school (Christ's) or the impact of the Linked School scheme.** Catholics are already given priority over children from non-Christian backgrounds in

admissions to Christ's in Richmond. On the other hand, the current Linked School system is unfairly biased against children from local Catholic primaries seeking places at the community secondaries (see below).

- **There other major policy conflicts.** The wider Education policy is based on the belief that academies offer the best potential structure for the Borough's schools. And it pledges "*that every Richmond upon Thames resident will have a say in the education offer in their local area*". But:
  - There is **no requirement for a Catholic school to be an academy.**
  - A Catholic secondary would **reduce choice** for the Borough's children as a whole compared to inclusive schooling due to its admissions criteria.
  - The aim for a range of school types implies action to encourage competition to select the best solutions, including innovations such as the Council/University/FE College joint venture in North Kingston. But **the Catholic Church has been promised a school without any competition.**
  - There has been **no meaningful consultation** on whether residents want two inclusive schools or for one to be Catholic.
- **It fails to promote community cohesion.** By definition, children at a Catholic school would not routinely mix with local children from other belief backgrounds. And there is evidence that Catholic school admission policies result in some social selection.

## INFORMATION YOU NEED TO KNOW

### How many local children come from practising Catholic families?

There is a distinction between practising and baptised Catholics. According to the Church Census (2005), only around 3% of the Richmond population attends Catholic church on a typical Sunday<sup>iii</sup>. Nationally, Catholic mass attendance between 2000 and 2007 dropped by over 8%, from 1.0 million in 2000 to 0.92 million in 2007<sup>iv</sup>, stabilising at 918,000 in 2008. Polish immigration has had a significant effect. According to the government's British Social Attitudes Survey 2008<sup>v</sup>, nationally 9.3% of the British population replied "Catholic" to the question: "*Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular religion; which?*" while 13.4% said "Catholic" when asked: "*In what religion, if any, were you brought up: what was your family's religion?*" Typically then, about 13.4% of the British population are baptised Catholics while about 9.3% are either practicing or are lapsed but still consider themselves Catholic.

In Richmond, on the basis of the most recent two years where reliable data is available on both live births and Catholic baptisms (2002 and 2005) Catholic infant baptisms are approximately 15% of live births. Many non-practising Catholics have their children baptised for cultural reasons. (It also gives them a wider choice of schooling.) The data therefore suggests that Richmond has marginally more Catholics than the average (comparing 15% and 13.4%), and that a reasonable estimate of the share of the Borough's population who are either practising Catholics, or lapsed but still consider themselves Catholic, is around 10%, and certainly no more than 15%. **We can safely say that at least 85% of the Borough's children are not from practising Catholic families, and in reality the number is probably nearer 90%.**

### Sources of pressure on school places in local secondaries

According to the School Census 2010<sup>vi</sup>:

- The number of children at the Borough's secondary schools (6657) is significantly larger than the number of secondary school pupils living in the borough (5743).
- 36% of pupils at Richmond secondary schools (2380) are from outside the Borough

- 25% of Richmond pupils (1466) go to schools in other Local Authority areas.

Looking to future demographics, the Council indicates that there will be a need for additional capacity, and a move to include 6<sup>th</sup> forms in secondaries would have a major impact. But **the current data suggests the difficulty in securing places at local secondaries is largely due to competition from pupils coming in from other Boroughs.** (Ironically, further improving the quality of Richmond's schools may have the unfortunate side-effect of making this problem worse.)

Any difficulty local Catholic parents experience in securing a place locally is not because there is insufficient provision in the Borough's schools. It is a combination of bias in the Linked School system (see below), competition from out-of-Borough children, and their personal choice.

In practice, a Catholic school would attract more applicants from outside the Borough than an inclusive school as it would favour children of Catholics, regardless of where they live.

### Effects of the Linked School system

Catholic primaries account for roughly 15% of places in the Borough. With one exception they are currently excluded from the Linked School system, which links primary schools with a specific secondary. A link is only established and maintained if 25% and/or a minimum of 15 Year 6 primary pupils transfer to a particular secondary school, or if the primary is within the same electoral ward as their nearest community mixed secondary school (this criterion was introduced after a 2007 complaint from the Catholic Sacred Heart School in Teddington, which is now linked to the nearby Teddington secondary). Christ's school and Waldegrave School for Girls are outside the system.

The effect is to disadvantage children at all but one of the six Catholic primaries who would otherwise seek places at a local mixed community secondary, as they will be given a lower priority than children from the linked primaries. **The Linked School system provides a significant incentive for Catholic parents to seek places at secondaries outside the Borough.** But the Council's education policy documents make no mention of whether the Linked School system should be retained and, if so, how it could be made fair to local children at Catholic primaries. This is a major omission.

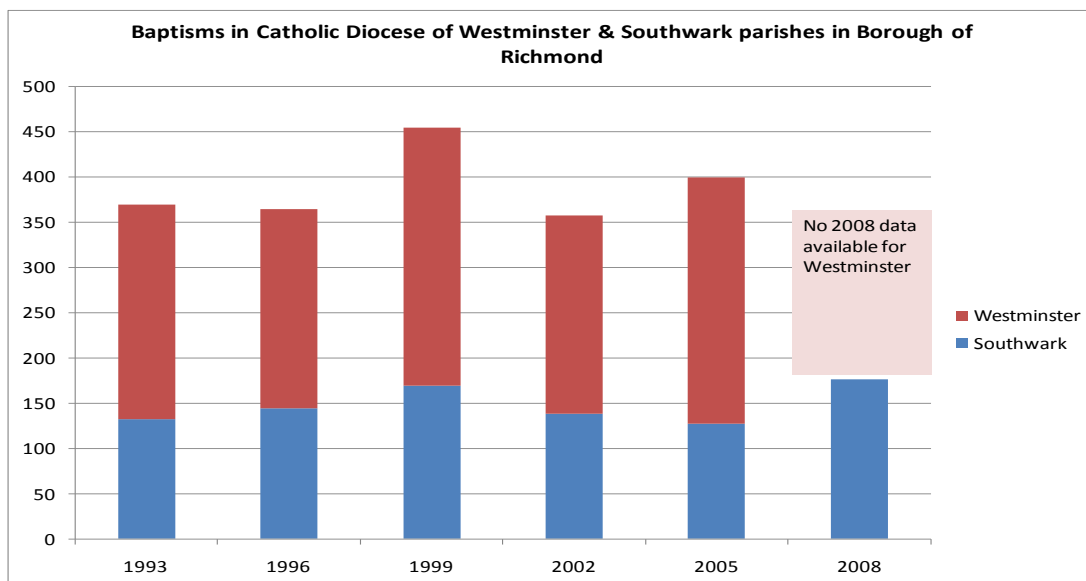
### Baptism data

The Council's Education Policy paper claims that there is an increasing number of children baptised Roman Catholic in the borough, and hence that there is an increasing need for a Catholic secondary. The Borough spans part of two Catholic dioceses: Westminster (north/west of the river) and Southwark (south/east).

In response to a Freedom of Information Request for the data behind this claim, the Council indicated that baptism data was only available for one of the dioceses (Southwark): 2005 – 128 baptisms, 2006 – 135, 2007 – 158, 2008 – 189. In fact:

- The Southwark Diocese website<sup>vii</sup> gives data for every 3 years from 1993 to 2008, confirming the figure for 2005, but giving a lower figure (177) for 2008.
- Contrary to the indication from the Council, Westminster also publishes annual baptism data from 1991 to 2006. The numbers are larger than Southwark's by a margin of 1.5:1 to 2:1.

The chart below combines the two sets of numbers. **There is no clear evidence of a rising trend of Catholic baptisms.**



### Other important factors affecting the data

In assessing the policy, the analysis should also have taken into account that:

- Catholic primaries give priority to Catholics from other areas over non-Catholic local children; over 12% of the Borough's primary school children are from outside the Borough, mainly from Hounslow, where there is already a Catholic secondary. (Only 3% of the Borough's children go to outside primaries).
- Some children in Catholic primaries may not have Catholic parents.
- There is evidence that some Catholic parents would be happy for their children to go to high quality non-Catholic local secondaries.
- There is already one Christian secondary school (Christ's) where the admission policy favours Catholics over non-religious people and other non-Christians.
- No data has been provided to support the claim that "Catholic parents are finding it increasingly difficult to obtain places for their children in out-borough state-maintained Catholic secondary schools".

The policy document states that this is "the only Borough in London which has no Roman Catholic secondary school". This is untrue: Bromley is another. Although not of major importance in itself, this error is indicative of the quality of foundations on which the policy has been built.

### What are Catholic schools? How do they compare with Inclusive schools?

Catholic (and other church) schooling in Britain dates from the time before universal state education, when the churches performed a valuable social function in providing schooling to children whose parents could not afford school fees.

### Admissions, employment and RE

Catholic schools are "Voluntary Aided". In a VA school, the Church puts up 10% of the capital costs. But 100% of the running costs and 90% of the capital costs are covered by the taxpayer. In exchange, the Church has a permanent majority on the governing body, which sets the school's admissions and employment policies and selects the RE curriculum. The viewpoint of the Church is clear from the "Diocese of Westminster Priest's Reference: Guidance for Parents<sup>viii</sup>" which states: "The bishops expect all Catholic schools to give first priority to Catholic applicants. Catholic schools exist to assist parents in handing on the Catholic faith to their children." These are the practical effects:

## *Why an Inclusive Secondary School Would be Better for Richmond than a Catholic School*

- Extracts from the admissions policies of two nearby Catholic secondaries are attached - Richard Challoner School (Southwark Diocese) and Gumley House Convent School (Westminster Diocese) - as an indication of the policies that a Richmond Catholic secondary would be expected to adopt. As soon as the schools are full, admissions are heavily weighted against applicants who are not baptised Catholics. If there is competition among baptised Catholics, church attendance is taken into account.
- Distance is not one of the top level criteria, so **Catholic children from outside the Borough would have priority over other local children living near to the school.**
- Catholic schools, along with other faith schools, are exempt from key elements of employment equalities legislation. For example, they can decide to employ a Catholic teacher in favour of a stronger non-Catholic candidate. And they can dismiss teachers for conduct which is "incompatible with the precepts, or with the upholding of the tenets" of the school's religion, such as the case of the popular Catholic school headmaster in Sheffield who was dismissed for planning to re-marry<sup>ix</sup>.
- The RE curriculum in Catholic schools is set by the Church. The Church, not Ofsted, inspects RE teaching.

The current policy of the Catholic Church is for new schools to be VA schools, not academies or free schools. The reason is not clear, but a significant factor is likely to be the limit of 50% on the number of places at an academy that can be set aside for children from a particular faith background.

An Inclusive school would be open to all children in the Borough on the basis of the same type of admissions criteria that apply to existing Borough community secondaries, it would follow the equalities legislation that applies to all other employers, and it would teach a fair and balanced syllabus for education about religious and non-religious beliefs. It could be an academy.

### *Community cohesion*

The harmony of our plural community relies on people from differing belief and racial backgrounds understanding and respecting each other within the boundaries of shared values. Children at inclusive schools work every day with others from different belief backgrounds - Muslims, Hindus, Jews, Sikhs, Humanists and others, while for children at a Catholic school, those from other backgrounds are "other". This extends to attitudes to sexuality. According to a report from Stonewall<sup>x</sup>, homophobic bullying is worse in faith schools and faith school pupils find it more difficult to tell anyone about it.

There is also evidence that the admissions policies and procedures of Catholic schools in practice disadvantage some types of parents and so the school population does not reflect the social mix of the area as a whole. Local data on eligibility for free school meals may indicate this effect. On average 10% of pupils in Richmond primary schools are eligible for free school meals, but the average in the six Catholic primaries is under 5%, in the nine Church of England primaries 7%, and in the community primaries a range from 3% to 28% with an average of 12% .

**Inclusiveness can only help build mutual understanding and respect across different groups.** It seems no consideration has been given to this important factor.

### *Quality*

There is a widespread belief that faith schools produce better results. While many of them are indeed good schools, there is no evidence that all faith schools are good schools, or vice versa. Both Orleans Park and Waldegrave School for Girls are "outstanding" inclusive Borough secondaries. The only local faith secondary, Christ's in Richmond, is now judged to be "good with outstanding features" but until relatively recently was considered to be failing.

## WHAT DO LOCAL PEOPLE THINK?

So far, no-one has tried to assess the views of the Borough's population as a whole (190,000 people). 1,100 people have signed a petition asking for a Catholic secondary. But these comments from four local people - all unknown to the authors of this paper - on the Richmond & Twickenham Times website<sup>xi</sup> provide an interesting perspective:

- *I've got many friends with children at Catholic primary schools but none of them are so devout that they wouldn't allow their child to go to a decent local secondary school: some of them only sent their children to Catholic primary schools because they couldn't get them into the non-religious schools they originally chose.*
- *I want my children to go to a fully inclusive school in the borough please. And I'm a Christian.*
- *Like a previous commenter, I too have several Catholic friends with children at both Catholic and non-Catholic primaries. None of them would consider only a Catholic choice for Secondary School, but if that was the 'best' option academically, then they'd be happy to ramp up their church attendance to make sure of a place. The system is a farce, and serves only to bribe people into going to church more often than they otherwise would. People will do what they can to gain an advantage in areas where all of the good schools are over-subscribed.*
- *I'm not a member of [Richmond Inclusive Schools campaign], but as a local parent I have a huge interest in this topic - as do most other local parents, whichever side of the argument they are on. My children go to a faith school. However, I chose it because it was a good school, with lots of good facilities, and very close to my home, not because it was a faith school. Just because our existing faith schools are oversubscribed, doesn't mean people like the admissions policies. I have lost count of the number of conversations I've had with people about how they are "doing their time" at church, attending Alpha courses etc, in order to have more choice of primary school. How can the council defend a system where attending one kind of church (Catholic) gives you a choice of 3 local schools (Catholic & CofE), attending another gives you a choice of just two, and attending no church at all, or the 'wrong' church gives you just one choice of school (so, by definition, no choice at all!). The policy doesn't give parents choice over schools, the choice they have is much more fundamental than that - to practice religion or not to practice religion. I know people who attend Catholic and CofE church on alternate weeks, just to maximise their options. I also know genuine church goers who are mortified when other people assume they are only attending church to get their child into a certain school. Other acquaintances have fallen out with friends and neighbours over their decision to temporarily attend church, and I've known parents at school who have taken it upon themselves to "name and shame" people whose church going has lapsed. This is all incredibly divisive, and the council should not pretend that it isn't happening. How about a survey to find out what people really think?*

Any new school that is not inclusive can only exacerbate these difficulties.

## **CONCLUSION**

The overall impression is that it has been taken for granted by both this administration and its predecessor that, if a suitable site can be found, a Catholic secondary school should be provided. No meaningful attempt has been made to consider whether this would be best for the Borough as a whole in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and why it should have priority over inclusive schooling.

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Richmond Inclusive Schools Campaign

*Set up and backed by local people, religious and non-religious, working together*

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*Supported by the Accord Coalition*



<http://accordcoalition.org.uk/>

## **APPENDIX – CATHOLIC SCHOOL ADMISSIONS POLICIES**

### **Richard Challoner School – Kingston Catholic Secondary for Boys (Southwark Diocese)**



### **ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS FOR SEPTEMBER 2011**

Richard Challoner is a Voluntary Aided school in the trusteeship of the Archdiocese of Southwark. The school is conducted by its Governing Body as part of the Catholic Church in accordance with its Trust Deed and the Instrument of Government, and seeks at all times to be a witness to Jesus Christ. The school exists primarily to serve the local Catholic community. However, the Governing Body welcomes applications, subject to the availability of places, from those of other Christian denominations and other faiths who support the religious ethos of the school. All applicants should complete Supplementary Form A and, where appropriate, Supplementary Form B.

The Governors intend to admit in September 2011, 132 students without reference to ability or aptitude.

Where the number of applicants exceeds 132, the Governors will offer places in the order stated using the following criteria, but subject to 12 places being offered to applicants who qualify under criterion 4:

1. 'Looked after' applicants who are baptised Catholics
2. Applicants who are baptised Catholics
3. Other 'Looked after' children
4. Applicants who are baptised (where infant baptism is practised) and members of other Christian denominations, ie those that are part of Churches Together in England, as well as Eastern Orthodox Churches
5. Applicants who are members of other faiths
6. All other applicants.



## Gumley House Convent School – Hounslow Catholic Secondary School for Girls (Westminster Diocese)



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### Admissions

#### Admissions Policy & Criteria for the Academic Year 2011 - 2012

Gumley House is a Catholic School for girls, with some boys admitted to the Sixth Form. Religious education and worship is at the heart of the school and its curriculum. The approved admission number for Year 7 is 192 pupils. In recent years the school has been heavily over-subscribed by baptised Catholics whose priest has certified in writing that they have attended Holy Mass weekly. We therefore give priority to regularly practising Catholics, by which the Governors mean that a priest has given written confirmation that, for the two years before the application, the child and member(s) of her family have attended weekly Sunday (or Saturday evening) Mass.

Catholic children in public care (within the meaning of s22 of the Children Act 1989) will have top priority for places at the school. If more than 192 such practising Catholic prospective pupils apply, they will each be placed in one of six geographical categories based on the Roman Catholic diocesan area in which they normally reside, i.e. for more than 50% of the week. A proportion of the places will be offered in each category as follows:

Hounslow Deanery 27%  
Ealing Deanery 27%  
Upper Thames Deanery 20 %  
Hammersmith & Fulham and Kensington & Chelsea Deaneries 12%  
Southwark Diocese including Richmond, Mortlake, Putney, Barnes, Kingston and Roehampton 14%

- <sup>i</sup> <http://cabnet.richmond.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=23719>
- <sup>ii</sup> <http://www.rcdow.org.uk/fileupload/upload/PriestsReferenceDoW2010withParentalNotes8102010521824.pdf>
- <sup>iii</sup> <http://www.brin.ac.uk/figures/FindingsfromtheEnglishChurchCensus2005.htm>
- <sup>iv</sup> <http://www.brin.ac.uk/news/?p=624>
- <sup>v</sup> <http://www.brin.ac.uk/figures/#BSA2008>
- <sup>vi</sup> <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000925/index.shtml>
- <sup>vii</sup> [http://www.rcsouthwark.co.uk/stats\\_doc.pdf](http://www.rcsouthwark.co.uk/stats_doc.pdf)
- <sup>viii</sup> <http://www.rcdow.org.uk/fileupload/upload/PriestsReferenceDoW2010withParentalNotes8102010521824.pdf>
- <sup>ix</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2009/jul/22/headteacher-remarry-forced-resignation>
- <sup>x</sup> [http://www.stonewall.org.uk/at\\_school/education\\_resources/4121.asp](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/at_school/education_resources/4121.asp)
- <sup>xi</sup> [http://www.richmondandtewickentimes.co.uk/news/8927906.Catholics\\_hail\\_amazing\\_support\\_for\\_faith\\_school/?ref=mc](http://www.richmondandtewickentimes.co.uk/news/8927906.Catholics_hail_amazing_support_for_faith_school/?ref=mc)