

RICHMOND INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS CAMPAIGN BRIEFING

SECONDARY SCHOOL CAPACITY & DEMAND



WHY IS RISC PROVIDING THIS BRIEFING?

Over 3360 local people signed our petition asking the 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.”* But the Council wants to use its only current secondary school site (Clifden Road, Twickenham) for a state-funded Voluntary Aided (VA) Catholic school.

Catholic VA schools are bound by a church rule always to give priority to children from Catholic families. And in this case both sides in the debate agree that the school would fill completely with children of Catholics, mainly from within the borough. That means the other 90% or so of borough children would be excluded because of their parents’ religion or belief. We believe that’s simply wrong.

We also think that increasing religious segregation is not the way to build social cohesion. And it’s unfair on teachers for a major new school to be set up in the borough that can discriminate on the basis of religion when recruiting and promoting staff, especially in the current economic environment.

The Council is trying to convince everyone that they have a plan that will ensure plenty of places available at good quality secondary schools, and that a Catholic VA school is the only viable option for the Clifden Road site. They’re wrong on both counts. But it means that, as well as the principle of inclusive schools, it’s important to understand the real issues around secondary school provision in the borough. This briefing, prepared with input from a range of knowledgeable supporters, is intended to help clarify the facts¹.

¹ Primary data sources: LA cross border matrix & School Census issued June 2011:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001012/index.shtml>; Council data issued to the Education & Children’s Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee 21 Nov 11 (see Appendix 2 for main table)

<http://cabnet.richmond.gov.uk/documents/s29248/21NovemberOandSAppendices.pdf>

BRIEFING

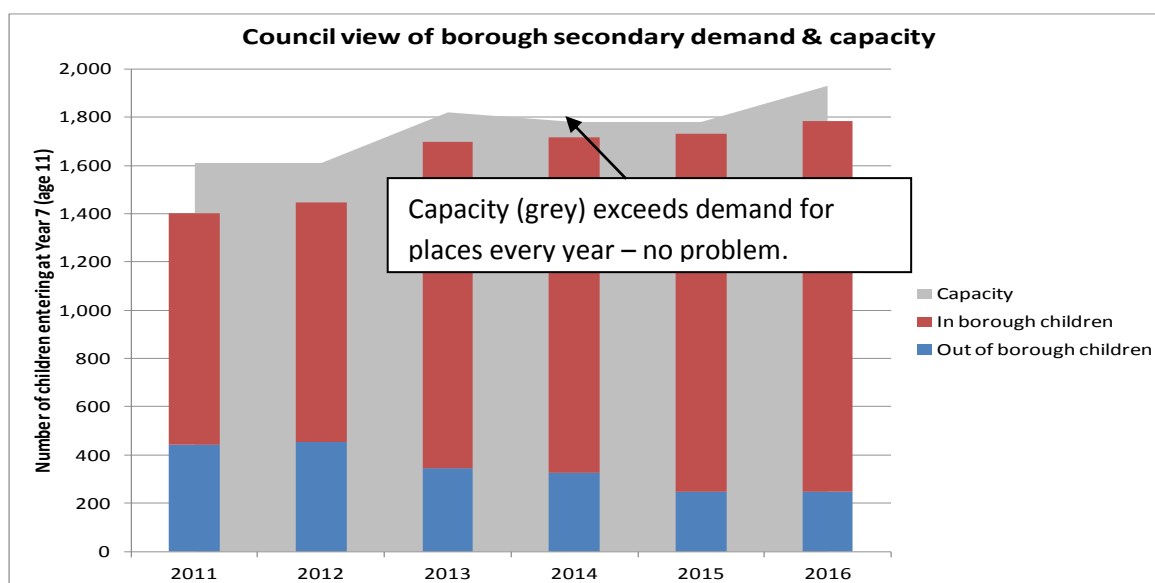
Richmond Council’s secondary school planning is dominated by three issues:

1. They need to justify offering the Clifden Road school site and buildings to the church for a Catholic VA school, in line with a Conservative’s election pledge to “*encourage a Roman Catholic secondary school*”.
2. They plan for all borough secondary schools to add 6th forms.
3. They want to reduce the 200 unused secondary places at the three existing academies (of which about half are at Richmond Park Academy). The unused capacity is not due to lack of demand for places at good quality state secondaries, which are over-subscribed. Instead it’s because parents are worried about quality. All the academies are working hard on that.

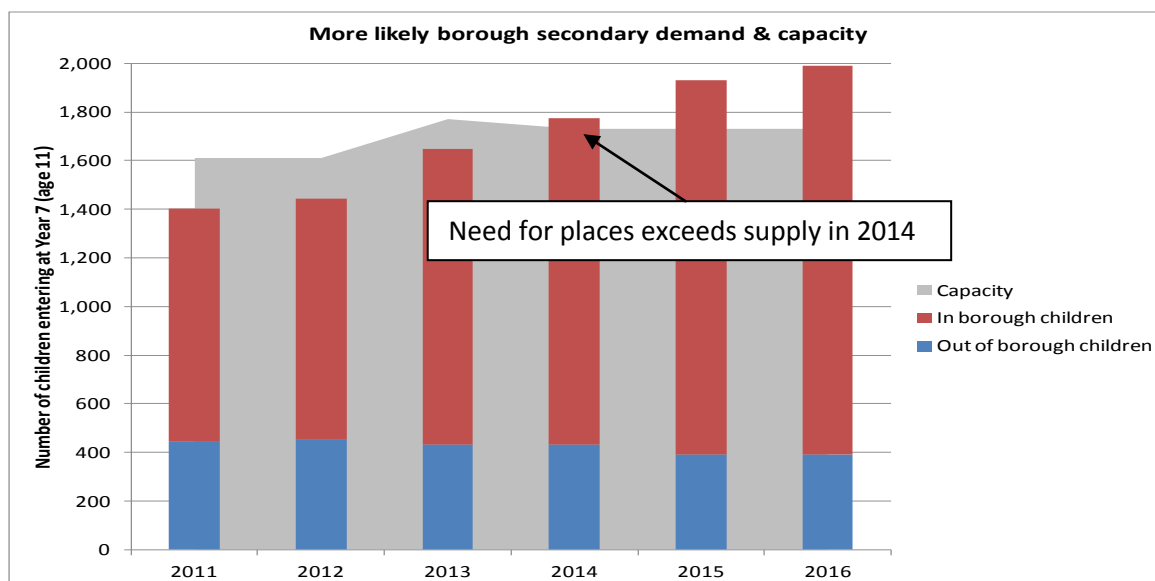
School capacity versus demand for places

There’s a lot of uncertainty about future demand for places at borough secondary schools. There’s also uncertainty about how much secondary school capacity will be available overall, as well as about the quality at the academies. But everyone agrees that demand is going up.

The Council’s plan relies on a forecast where demand is relatively low, capacity is relatively high and quality is no longer an issue. In this rose-tinted future, no-one will suffer as a result of giving the Clifden Road site for a Catholic VA school, and there will be no need for a new community school until “2016 at the earliest, if at all”.



But, as explained below, it's just as likely that a new community school will be needed by 2014, with more capacity needed a couple of year later (*Appendix 1 gives the detail behind this picture*):



No one knows what will actually happen, especially in these tough economic times. With this level of uncertainty, the worst thing the Council can do is lock themselves into a plan with no room for manoeuvre. The opportunity to acquire the Clifden Road site was a piece of luck. Instead of using it for a community school² for everyone's benefit, the Council plans to give it to the Catholic Church on a 125 year lease for a school that will be effectively close to around 90% of local children. **They are taking a huge risk.**

To help you make up your own mind about whether the Council's forecast is sensible, here are the key points. See *Appendix for the full analysis*³. The map at the end of this briefing shows the location of all the schools referred to.

- Everyone agrees that there has been a big **growth in the number of children at borough primaries** and these increases will feed through. The number of children "graduating" from borough primaries (versus 2011) will rise by 175 in 2014, 380 in 2015 and over 480 in 2016.
- The Council plans **no net increase in secondary entry level (Year 7) capacity across the 5 maintained secondaries** (Grey Court, Orleans Park, Teddington, Waldegrave Girls, and Christ's), despite their claim that the plan includes "*expansion within the Council's five*

² Under the new Education Act 2011 there will be few if any new "community" schools, which are strictly speaking school set up and run by Local Authorities. But the term is being used to mean inclusive schools run by academy providers – which will become the norm for new schools - as opposed to faith schools.

³ Borough secondary schools take 150-240 Year 7 (age 11) children per year. A secondary at Clifden Road would have 150 per year (5 forms of entry).

maintained schools on top of the addition of sixth forms". On the basis of their own numbers (see Appendix 2) that's simply untrue.

- Their plan rightly assumes Year 7 **capacity at Twickenham, Hampton and Richmond Park Academies will go down by 60 places by 2013 to make space for 6th forms.**
- Currently around 1/3rd of children at Richmond secondaries are from other boroughs. The Council are assuming that the number will nearly halve - the equivalent of a complete school - by 2015 (200 children). But that's not credible. Demand is increasing in all the neighbouring boroughs: half the out-of-borough children at Richmond schools are from Hounslow, where the annual birth rate has gone up by 40% since 2001. Most borough secondaries are near borders, and the Council isn't allowed to discriminate against out-of-borough children. It's true that a new secondary is planned for north Kingston in 2015 which is likely to have an effect on Grey Court school in Ham, but there are questions over its financing and its size – and Kingston Council say they need the places for their own children. Overall, the **assumption that a whole school's worth of places will become available to borough children at the expense of out-of-borough children just isn't believable.**
- **If the drive to increase quality at the three academies to similar levels to other borough schools is successful – as everyone hopes it will be - then demand will go up**, particularly from parents who realise they can avoid school fees, and especially as the borough currently has the lowest ratio of resident children at state secondaries (in and out of borough) compared to those at state primaries of any London borough. Our estimate, which the Council has accepted, is that it could add 250 children/year to demand – more than our largest secondary school.
- **A new Catholic VA school won't free-up many (or any) places at other borough schools.** The main argument for the Catholic school is that children from Catholic primaries currently go to Catholic secondaries outside the borough's borders. The Council's estimate is that only 30 places will be freed-up as a result of Catholic parents sending their children to the new Catholic school rather than other borough schools. In fact the proposed removal of the Linked School System may mean more children from Catholic primaries apply for places at community secondaries, even with a Catholic secondary.
- **New "Free Schools" also won't make much difference** - and may not happen at all. Free Schools are outside the Council's control – central government decides whether to support them. Currently there are no Free Schools in the borough. The Council have assumed there will be two Free Schools offering 50 secondary places each, 95% occupied by borough children (the current average for secondaries is 68%). We've assumed an extra 50 secondary places for borough children at new Free Schools, such as the proposed Maharishi School. But even that may be too optimistic.
- Even if the Council decided now that they wanted **a new community secondary school in 2016 it may not be possible** to arrange the finance, buy a site, select a provider, get

planning permission, build a new school and recruit staff in time. There is currently no firm site, and no money budgeted.

No real choice?

The Council's December 2010 education policy document was called "Choice & Diversity".

In reality the only parents who will enjoy more meaningful choice under the Council's plan are the 10% or so who are Catholics. Under the proposals to drop the Linked Schools system – which is no longer working effectively - Catholic parents will (rightly) have the same opportunities to secure places at existing community schools as everyone else, but they will also be eligible for the proposed new Catholic school at Clifden Road, plus the many Catholic secondary schools nearby, none of which are open to non-Catholics. Those in favour of the Catholic VA school argue that they should not have to send their children to out of borough Catholic secondaries, where admissions are becoming increasingly competitive, and they have a right to Catholic schooling for their children. But no special-interest group – religious or otherwise – has a "right" to exclusive taxpayer-funded schools for its followers, especially at the expense of other parents.

This will be felt right across the borough, but particularly in central Twickenham, where the new Catholic school would be located. If you're a non-Catholic parent living there, and especially if your children are boys, the Council's plan is that the only choices available will be Richmond Park Academy (at the far end of the borough, with limited transport links), Twickenham Academy (Kunskapsskolan), or maybe a Free School such as the Maharishi School (where an ethos based on the teachings of Maharishi Yogi may not be to everyone's taste). And if you live near Clifden Road, you will be confronted every day with a new (hopefully high quality) secondary school within walking distance from which your children will be barred.

Hopefully the quality improvement drive at the three academies – especially Richmond Park Academy - will be successful. But if one of them continues to struggle, it would be unacceptable for your children to be effectively forced to apply to it simply because the Council has failed to provide enough alternative community places at good quality schools. Knowing that nearby Catholic parents were exempt from the problem because the Council had arranged for them to have their own exclusive school would add insult to injury.

A Better Way Forward

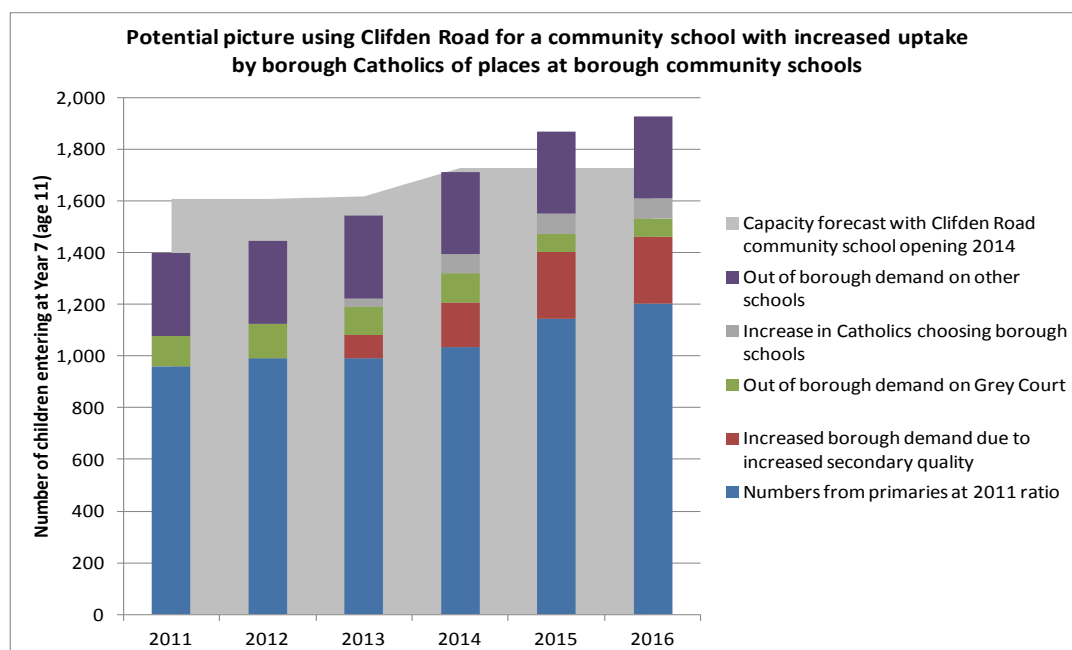
The option providing the greatest flexibility would be an inclusive Academy on the Clifden Road site, opening with a full 150 entry in 2014 (with the option of first opening with 90 places in 2013):

- The new school wouldn't discriminate against children because of their parents' beliefs.
- It wouldn't threaten the development of the existing academies. The Council's own forecast is that, by 2014, there will only be 40 spare places at RPA and 25 at Twickenham Academy.

And the new school would itself take time to establish a positive reputation, giving the academies further breathing space.

- It would provide inclusive places in central Twickenham, which otherwise risks becoming a “black hole”, especially for boys (and non-Catholic children generally).

The chart below assumes that, of the 150 Catholic children who would have filled a Catholic school in Clifden Road, 75 attend borough community schools as a result of the removal of the Linked School Policy, and the remainder continue to choose out-of-borough Catholic schools. Other figures are the same as in the earlier forecast. There is no escape from the need for further capacity in 2015-2016, but it is mitigated by an improved balance between out-of-borough children attending borough schools, especially those close to the borders, and borough children attending out-of-borough schools, especially Catholic schools:



A compromise put forward by Vince Cable is a Catholic Academy. Under government rules, new faith-based academies⁴ are allowed to apply faith-based selection to a maximum of 50% of places. This option has so far been rejected by the Catholic Church, which is holding out for a Voluntary Aided school and with it up to 100% faith-based selection.

Even setting aside arguments about the principle of inclusivity and Catholic Voluntary Aided schools, the responsible course of action for the Council is to prioritise an inclusive community school at Clifden Road.

⁴ Existing faith schools can convert into academies but keep their admissions policies. Many Catholic schools are converting from Voluntary Aided to Academy status. There is therefore the suspicion that the new school will start out as a VA school and then convert to an Academy in order to get around the 50% rule.

Richmond Borough & nearby Catholic Secondaries plus site of proposed new school in Twickenham & Free School

