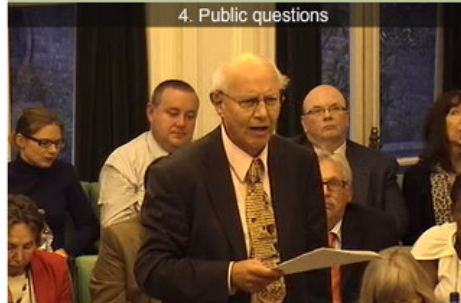


- Postal votes

The Inclusive Schools Petition: the Liberal Democrat response

September 12, 2011 5:11 PM

Council Tuesday, 13 September 2011 7:00 pm 13/09/2011



• [Sept 13] Cllr Malcolm Eady*: MADAM Mayor, I just want to make 5 points.

- The *first*, to congratulate the petitioners for collecting over 1000 signatures. I know how hard it is to organise such a task. I have seen their leaflets, and received their letters and emails. So, well done.

- The *second* is that we are very much in agreement with the conclusion reached in the petition, that is, **the Council needs to think again about its priorities for secondary school provision**. At the end of the debate last April, I clearly laid out the policy of the Liberal Democrat group. I said that the Council should **first provide a site and resources for a new community school** and then set about gathering resources and a site for a Catholic school, so Catholic parents no longer feel they have to send their children to out of borough schools. What follows from this is that **we would not have offered the Clifden road site to the Catholic Church**, until we were satisfied we had the resources to meet the

predicted demand for community school places. We understand the need for a Catholic secondary school and I encouraged the director, when I was the cabinet member, to try and help deliver such a school.

- My *third* point is that we agree with the strategy laid out in the last December's education policy paper. The paper states, that the equivalent of two secondary schools (including one Roman Catholic) will be needed by about 2015 to meet the demand for places. Now, this is easily understood by primary school parents. They already see that children in some linked primary schools are not getting into the school of their choice. What makes them doubly worried is that they see the Council proceeding with a sixth form policy, which will use up the very limited spare space that exists on some secondary school sites and will drain our limited education capital resources.

- My *penultimate* point is that it is the administration's premature decision to offer the site to the Catholic Arch Diocese which has sparked off the current controversy. It has created a totally unnecessary argument about the pros and cons of faith schools in our community. What the argument should be about is, are we are going to create a new secondary school or are we going to expand our existing ones? This then becomes an argument about free schools, academies and space being used for sixth forms. It is also an argument about limited resource allocation.

- My *last* point is about inclusivity. This is a national Liberal Democrat policy, and it is part of the coalition agreement. Now, in Richmond we are very fortunate in that we have a number of outstanding schools, and there is no attainment divide between faith and community schools, plus we have no community divide along faith lines. If we provide enough school places, then parents can send their children to faith schools, if that is the ethos they want from a school, without undermining inclusivity. If we fail to provide those places, then we will have disagreements, - as has been demonstrated over the last few months.

Madam Mayor, It is very important that the parents of this borough clearly understand that the Liberal Democrats are not against a Roman Catholic secondary school, but equally clearly we are saying that:- *"the first priority for a new secondary school is an inclusive school, to meet the growing demand generated by all our very successful and expanding primary schools."*

Thank you.

• **Webcast of Council meeting Sep 13** The RISC petition is the first business.

• **Secondary school places in Richmond borough: links to articles on this website and elsewhere**

• **Richmond Inclusive Schools Campaign [RISC]**

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