



Councillor _____
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Richmond Inclusive Schools Campaign
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Dear Councillor _____,

You will recently have received a letter from the Chief Executive of the Catholic Education Service, Dr Oona Stannard, supporting the proposal for a Catholic school on the “Clifton” *[sic]* site in Twickenham.

Her letter contains a number of misleading arguments and factual inaccuracies. I would therefore ask you to read and consider this response from the Richmond Inclusive Schools Campaign, which represents a large number of people from across the community, with beliefs ranging from the non-religious to Anglicans, Muslims, Hindus, Jews and Catholics, including parents and senior figures from borough schools.

*Direct quotes from her letter are shown below in **bold italics**.*

Capacity, Quality & Priority

Perhaps the most important practical point is her claim that “***....by any calculation it would be fair to expect that, with 8 secondary schools in the Borough...one of them should be Catholic.***” Apart from the fact that the 8 existing community schools/academies aim to cater for everyone in the borough, including Catholics, this ignores the reality of the issues facing the borough.

As Cllr Hodgins explained in the recent Council debate, while the borough has excellent primary schools of all types, of the 8 existing secondaries, 3 are academies with surplus places because parents choose not to send their children there, apparently due to quality concerns. One of the others is a Church of England school which exercises faith-based selection and has had its own quality struggles. At the same time, the Council’s data indicate borough secondary school entry year rolls increasing by 375 from 2010/11 to 2016/17. And the only application for a Free School in the borough this year was turned down. The borough therefore faces significant problems of quality and capacity at secondary level - not to speak of finance.

There might be a case for providing a Catholic secondary school - an inclusive one - after these major capacity and quality issues have been addressed. But to do so as the top priority, before these issues have been fully resolved, and especially in the form of a non-inclusive Voluntary Aided school, can only damage the interests of the rest of the borough’s children. The implication is that Catholic children will be given a new high quality school while some other children will be expected to take surplus places at academies as part of the drive to improve their quality.

Choice & Diversity

“...incorrect arguments have been put forward to suggest that the new school would not contribute to greater choice and diversity. Greater choice and diversity is exactly what it would achieve.”

It is extremely disingenuous to suggest that the proposed Catholic voluntary Aided school would increase “choice” when the “choice” of school would be not be available to 90% of the borough’s population, who would in fact lose an opportunity of an additional school. And without real choice, diversity is meaningless.

Dr Stannard says that Catholic schools’ admissions policies “*typically*” give preference to Catholic children. In fact Diocesan guidelines are clear that Catholic VA schools must **always** give priority to Catholic families. They only admit non-Catholic children because they have insufficient Catholic applicants and need to fill the places, which is very unlikely in this case. The proposed school will effectively exclude everyone other than families of Catholics living inside or outside the borough.

Quality

“The argument for Catholic schools is strong in terms of...their high achievement.”

There is no doubt that many Catholic schools are good schools. But they have no monopoly on that. 6 of the 40 borough primaries are Catholic, yet there is excellence across all types: Catholic, CofE and Community. And, while the average number of children eligible for free school meals across borough primaries is 10% - a key indicator of the number of children from disadvantaged backgrounds - in Catholic primaries it is only 3%, indicating a significant difference in the challenge facing these schools.

At secondary level we have two Ofsted outstanding schools – both community schools. A new Catholic secondary might indeed be very good, and, in this area at least, social selection may contribute to that. But it would be a major failure if any new school in the area is not excellent in quality, whoever runs it. This is therefore not an argument about quality.

On the other hand, the claim to quality in Catholic VA schools throws into sharper focus the injustice of exclusive admissions. What Dr Stannard is advocating is an excellent school, funded by the state, but only open to the 10% minority who have Catholic parents.

Community cohesion

“The argument for Catholic schools is strong in terms of...contribution to community cohesion.”

The UN’s Convention on the Right of the Child states that children in education have the right to be prepared for ‘*responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups...*’.

Residents with personal experience in Northern Ireland and parts of Scotland have particularly strong views on this point; and the desire for community cohesion is one of the key points in favour of inclusive admissions.

To claim that segregating children on the basis of their parents’ religion contributes to community cohesion is simply not credible.

Releasing places at other schools

“...this will then release places in some of the Community secondary schools”

The main argument put forward for a Catholic school in the borough is that 200 children from borough Catholic primaries currently travel to out-of-borough Catholic secondaries. There will be 150 places at the new

school. By the church's own argument, therefore, it is in these out-of-borough Catholic schools that most places would be released by a Catholic school in Twickenham. The number released from borough Community schools will be minimal, especially as we know from our own supporters that some Catholic parents prefer non-segregated schools.

No-one is questioning the fact that some of the 200 children who go to out of borough secondaries have difficult journeys to school, even after excluding those who are actually residents of other boroughs, or who live relatively close to their out of borough schools, or distant from Clifden Road. This is one of the many challenges borough education faces.

The best solution would be increased capacity at good quality inclusive schools in the borough, coupled with reform of the Linked School system, which currently discriminates against children from most Catholic primaries. Catholic parents who chose not to take advantage of good local schools would still have the option of sending their children to one of the many nearby out-of-borough Catholic schools - an option unavailable to anyone else.

Numbers & capacity

Catholics "make up 14% of our local population..."

There is no evidence for this claim. According to the British Social Attitudes Survey, 8.6% of the national population is Catholic. The most recent published figures for the two local Archdioceses - Westminster and Southwark - are 10.1% and 9.5% respectively (if their Suffragan Dioceses are also included, the figures drop to 7% and 6%). National Census data gives no breakdown of Christians by denomination. Both Lord True and the Inclusive Schools campaign have consistently regarded 10% as the best estimate of the number of Catholics in the borough.

The fact that the borough has an over-supply of Catholic primary schools places (nearly 14%) is a separate issue. The extra places may be filled by some of the 12% of primary children who come into Richmond from other boroughs, and/or non-Catholics.

There is a similar over-supply at secondary level in the area covered by Richmond and surrounding local authorities, with Catholic secondary schools accounting for 14% of places. As the Diocese of Westminster's website states: "There are sufficient places in Catholic secondary schools in this diocese to accommodate every Catholic child." And there are 8 Catholic secondaries within 5 miles of the centre of the borough.

Council policy, plans & decisions

"The local Catholic community understood that the debate and decision in Council earlier this year in support of a Catholic secondary school was inviolate"

As a Councillor you will be aware that this is a misperception. Prior to the debate in April to which Dr Stannard refers, the Cabinet already had a policy to include a Catholic school in their plans for secondary expansion – it was included in the "Choice & Diversity" White Paper adopted in December 2010. The pro-Catholic school petition presented in April 2011 in effect requested the Council to support an existing policy. Only three Councillors spoke in the debate: Lord True, Cllr Elliott (a governor of a Catholic school) and Cllr Eady, Shadow Cabinet Member for Education. All three were in favour of the principle of a Catholic school. But, as Cllr Eady has made clear on several occasions, that did not mean that it should be given a higher priority than a new community school. There was no vote at the April meeting, and no discussion about priority, timing, location, type of school or admissions.

It was therefore a surprise to many when, prior to the July Cabinet meeting at which the decision to purchase the Clifden Road site was made, the Council Leader announced that the site would be offered to the church for a Catholic Voluntary Aided school at a time when the Council was aiming to turn all its other secondaries into

Academies. (The reason for the inconsistency was apparently that new Free Schools and Academies cannot apply more than 50% faith-based selection.)

“Right” to state-funded Catholic schools

“For too long Catholics have lacked their rightful [sic] secondary school...”

No piece of domestic or international law, including the European Convention on Human Rights, places an obligation on the state to provide or fund a particular type of school that parents might want. Unlike France, or the US, we have state-funded faith schools in this country. But no group has a “right” to state-funded schools intended exclusively for children of its adherents at both primary and secondary level. Even the Church of England, which has many primary schools but relatively few secondaries, is more inclusive in terms of admissions, and getting even more so. It is the fundamental injustice of this claim for exclusivity that local people are now waking up to.

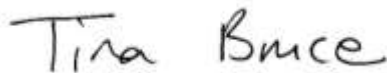
In conclusion...

Dr Stannard’s views on the principle of inclusive schools were made clear in a report in The Times on 23 April 2011. Responding to Church of England moves towards increasing inclusivity she ‘...dismissed calls by the Church of England’s board of education to end the bias towards religious children as “nonsense”. *“I don’t foresee a time where our bishops would want to turn away Catholic children in favour of other children because that isn’t at the heart of what our schools are about,”* Dr Stannard told The Times.” ‘.

On the other hand, the Inclusive Schools campaign has made clear that its petition for *“...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”* does not preclude Catholic schools.

Dr Stannard is, of course, perfectly entitled to her view. But it is one that is opposed by a large number of fair-minded voters from right across the community, including Catholics and senior figures in borough education.

Yours sincerely



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