

School row back on as pupils return

Sir – It is disappointing to see the lobbying for an exclusive secondary school, not open to all the children in the borough, especially as the funding for this school would be provided in large part by people whose children are not eligible to attend.

Education that is provided by the state should be open to all who have contributed to funding that provision.

This basic premise of fairness ought to be apparent to anyone with a shred of ability to conduct moral reasoning.

The council should aim to provide transparent details of the finances of this project and more importantly, should make sure that what they advocate is in line with the law of the land and responds to the demand for secondary school provision across their borough.

The council should not be spending taxpayers' money to contest the law of the land.

Interestingly, the exchanges following the disputed proposal for the Catholic secondary school rather amply demonstrate how unhelpful sectarian educational provision is to the ethos of inclusiveness that we should presumably be striving for in this country.

PROF ESSI VIDING
Grosvenor Road
Twickenham

Sir – I was disappointed to read the comments by Lord True in your piece (Judgement day, August 31) in last week's paper.

I am a resident with children at primary school and I am in no way involved with the British Humanist Association (BHA), though I am grateful for its assistance in ensuring that adequate secondary schooling is provided for my children in the future.

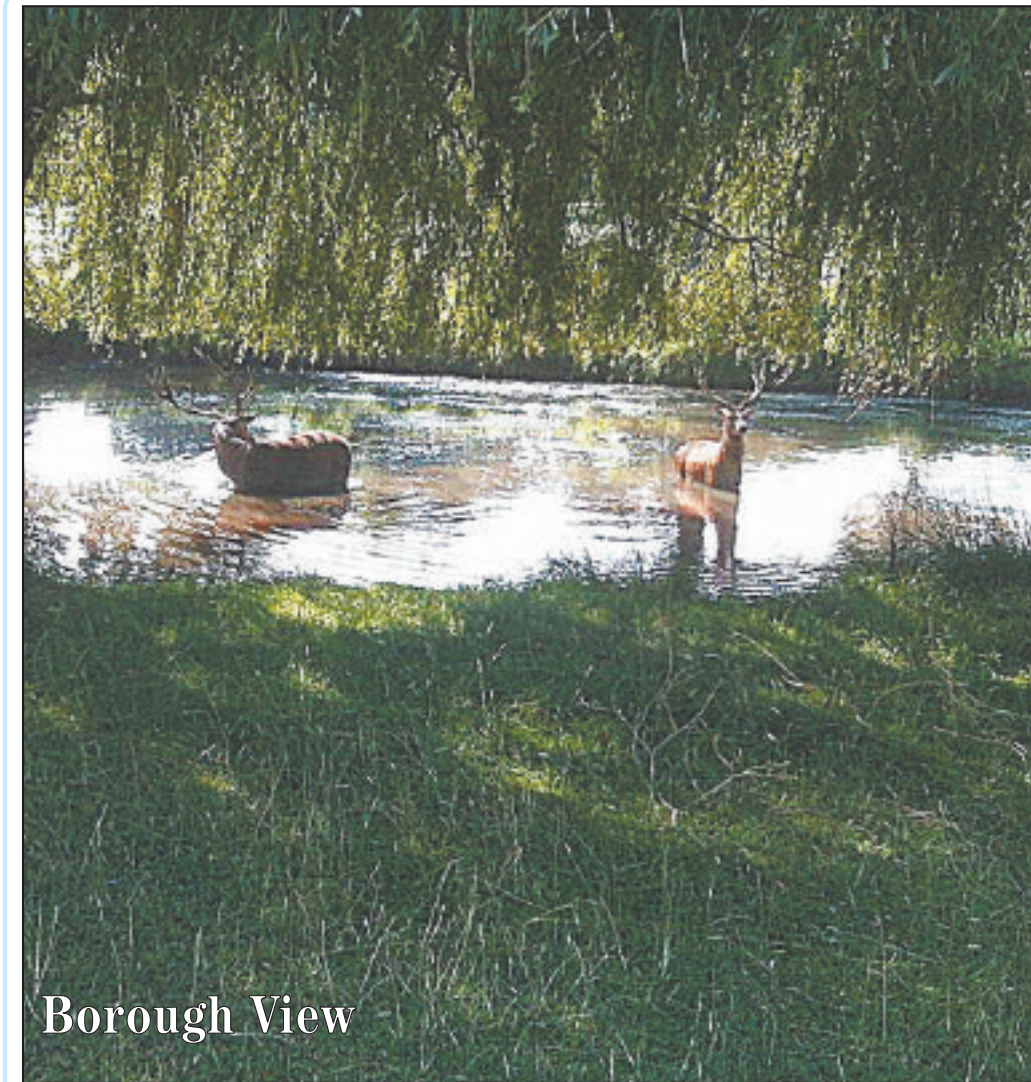
The arguments for and against the use of the Clifden Road site for a school that would seek to exclude my children are well rehearsed in this paper and elsewhere but the court case being brought is one of a simple matter of process.

I am appalled that the council is threatening to use its financial muscle to try to block the application of the law of the land.

Richmond Inclusive Schools Campaign (Risc) is seeking financial certainty by asking for a cap to legal costs and prudent stewardship of council finances would dictate that Lord True agrees to this.

If he is confident that procedure has been correctly followed then there is nothing to lose by allowing a cap and everything to gain in terms of reduced liabilities on council funds.

While I would be uncomfortable with council funds being



Borough View

Anthony Shorter was enjoying a cycle in Richmond Park earlier this week, and got the deer enjoying a dip. If you have a picture you would like published in our weekly Borough View slot, email it to lettersrtt@london.newsquest.co.uk

used to create a school that excludes the majority of the borough's children, I would deeply resent the use of council money as an obstacle to the due process of the law.

JOHN ROGERS
Address supplied
Via email

Sir – Mr Squire may be a little hasty in castigating Lord True's use of the word acolyte (Letters, August 31). Chambers Dictionary gives the primary definition of this word as "a faithful follower" (derived directly from the original Greek meaning).

JEREMY HAMILTON-MILLER
Belmont Road
Twickenham

Sir – I read with interest your article (Judgement day,

August 31) in last week's edition. In this you stated that the BHA and Risc are to be allowed to challenge the council's plans for the use of the Clifden Road site for a Catholic secondary school.

While I understand that pressure groups do have such redress in law, I am dismayed that this alliance would seek to delay the establishment of a school that has been shown such support by the community in Richmond.

The council held an extensive consultation, externally validated.

Two-thirds of the residents who chose to respond to the consultation said they wanted the school.

Why then is the BHA, a national body interfering in this local matter? I do not believe that residents welcome this interference. The BHA

has a stated aim "Faith schools: just say no" shown on its website.

In our borough we have 48 maintained primary and secondary schools.

One third of these (16) are faith schools. Many of our children attend these excellent schools – we say "Yes" to faith schools in this borough.

The Risc member interviewed seemed to me to be going to great lengths to say that he was not an acolyte of the BHA, but that Risc is a local group.

If this is so, then why is Risc trying to obstruct the local, democratic vote of residents of Richmond? It is just shameful behaviour on their part.

ANTHONY PLUMMER
Address supplied
Via email

It is time that we told the BHA to take its campaign somewhere else and leave us alone to make our own decisions in Richmond.

TRACEY PAYLE
Ham

Sir – I am writing following the news last week that there is to be judicial review of the council's decision to keep its promise of a Catholic school in the borough.

While I am saddened that this will mean further months of uncertainty for parents of year 6 children, I hope, once and for all, that this issue will be resolved.

Despite what Risc may have you believe, no Catholic parent wants the council to do something unlawful.

I pray that the council's legal advice has been sound and that it is able to prove that not only has it acted within the law, but it is doing what the majority of respondents to the recent petitions and consultations have shown that they want.

And then, finally, I pray that Risc and the BHA will accept the will of the people.

B CONNOR
Via email

Sir – Lord True says that he is disappointed by the High Court's decision to grant a judicial review of the council's decision to approve two new Catholic schools.

The case is being brought because the council has failed to comply with the Education Act.

That legislation, passed by Parliament last year, provides that a council must seek proposals for an academy when it thinks a new school needs to be established in its area.

The response of the council is that new schools do not need to be established.

In its view, there are sufficient primary and secondary schools in the borough.

However, if the council thinks new schools are not needed, why did it buy the Clifden Road site for many millions of pounds for use as schools and why is it spending £1.5m on converting the premises?

In the House of Lords debate on the Education Bill Lord True said: "This is an excellent bill... I am also the leader of a London borough that welcomes academies and free schools."

It is disappointing that, in the case of the schools proposed on the Clifden Road site, the council has failed to comply with this legislation. It appears that Lord True is trying to by-pass the legislation he himself supported.

STEPHEN HYETT
Address supplied