

PRESS RELEASE – Richmond Inclusive Schools Campaign

For issue 25th May 2012

RISC REACTS TO CABINET DECISION

This has always been an unequal battle. On one side the Council and the Catholic establishment, in the form of Catholic parents seeking a special benefit for their children and taxpayer-funded Catholic schools backed by Catholic churches, all supported from the top by the Dioceses, with their influence at the highest levels of government. On the other side, local parents and other people from all sorts of backgrounds, including some Catholics, with no organisation or resources apart from a campaign that only started in April last year, but all united around the conviction that what the Council is doing is misguided and grossly unfair. Community schools, whose teachers are employed by the Council, felt obliged to remain neutral.

Power, influence and self-interest won the vote, as everyone knew they would.

The Cabinet's decision followed a recommendation from a meeting of the Education Scrutiny committee the previous week. It was split on the issue. There was a majority of one in support of the Catholic schools because the representative of the Catholic Diocese refused to recognise that he had a "prejudicial interest". That is defined by the Council's constitution as *"one which a member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice your judgement of the public interest"*. Instead of absenting himself, as someone with a prejudicial interest is expected to do, he stayed and voted in favour of the proposals from the Diocese. He then re-appeared as a speaker in favour of the Diocesan proposals at the Cabinet meeting.

But this may not be the end. RISC believes the Council is acting unlawfully under the Education Act 2011, which says that a Council that thinks it needs a new school must seek proposals for a Free School, which the Council has failed to do. The British Humanist Association (BHA) is also interested in this case due to its national implications. Now that the Council's decision has been taken, RISC and the BHA will be meeting shortly with their lawyers to consider next steps.

Notes for editors:

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2. The contact at the British Humanist Association is Richy Thompson richy@humanism.org.uk or 020 7462 589636.