



Vaughan Parents' Action Group

Web: www.savethevaughan.com
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A Letter to Parish Priests from the Vaughan Parents' Action Group

Dear Father,

It is the Year of Catholic Education and there has been a great deal of debate in recent months about the direction that Catholic education is taking. The Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School has found itself at the centre of this debate

Last year the Diocese referred the Vaughan to the Schools' Adjudicator over its admissions criteria and this year Parent Governors at the Vaughan have taken the Diocese to court over its refusal to appoint current parents as Foundation Governors. These events have saddened, confused and divided our Catholic community. Many of your parishioners may have been affected by recent events at the Vaughan, in particular the change in its admissions criteria, imposed by the Diocese, which means it is no longer a pan – London school. We are writing to you to explain why the Vaughan Parents' Action Group feels that the Diocese's actions towards the Vaughan are misguided, damaging and divisive.

Many parents feel that there are a number of ways in which both the Catholic Education Service and the Westminster Diocesan Education Service are failing to listen to the views of parents who, in their role as "primary educators" of their children, have both the right and the responsibility to choose the sort of education they feel is best suited to their child.

In particular, we are concerned about the following:

- The actions of the Catholic Education Service and The Westminster Diocese Education Service suggest a greater desire to promote a political ideology rather than Catholic faith and teaching. There have been feelings of disquiet about Catholic education for some time, but this disquiet began to grow last year when the CES appeared to collude with the last Government over the Sex and Relationships Education provisions of the Children, Schools and Families Bill.
- Early last year parents also discovered that the Diocese had referred the Vaughan to the Schools' Adjudicator over its use of admissions criteria (the same admissions criteria which have subsequently been approved at Coloma Convent, and which are used in many Church of England Schools). The Diocese objected to the Vaughan's use of oversubscription criteria which

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asked for evidence of a family's involvement in the life of the Church. Many practising Catholic parents believe that such criteria should be welcomed, as they encourage practising Catholics to contribute actively to the Church. However, the Diocese did not approve because, as it told the Schools' Adjudicator, it considers that the role of Catholic schools is to encourage the lapsed to return to the faith. Admissions criteria should not therefore give preference to the practising: "...the philosophy of the diocese (and indeed the Catholic Church itself) is actively to encourage the participation of all baptised Catholic children such that the beneficial ethos of its schools can draw the 'lapsed' back into fold" (Adjudicator's Determination, 18.12.09, paragraph 90). Parents are now wondering if they would have a better chance of achieving a Catholic education for their children if they were to lapse from Catholic practice, but ensure that they have the right address.

- The Vaughan is well known for its strong and authentic Catholic ethos. The Adjudicator's comment suggests that the actions of the Diocese are an attempt to dilute the ethos of the Vaughan. As a result of the new criteria imposed by the Diocese, many parishes that have traditionally sent pupils to the Vaughan will no longer have this option. Instead of admitting committed, practising Catholics from all over London, the Vaughan will accept children who live nearest to the school.
- Paul Barber, the Diocesan Education Director, in his article published in the Tablet on 16th October 2010, criticised admissions criteria which prioritised those who are active in the Church, saying that they favoured "Super Catholics" rather than ordinary Catholics. The Diocese seems to take the view that the use of involvement criteria favours middle class families. We take the view that such criteria actually allow disadvantaged families a greater choice than the Diocesan - favoured model which privileges geographical proximity as an admissions criterion. Cardinal Grocholewski's 2009 letter to Presidents of Bishops' Conferences points out that: "Parents who have the primary and inalienable right and duty to educate their children must enjoy true liberty in their choice of schools"(GE 6; cf. DH5; C.797CIC; C627 3CCEO) (Paragraph 19)
- The use of the geographical model clearly disadvantages those who live in areas where there is no Catholic school (Richmond) or who live in more deprived areas. Despite the inferences made by Paul Barber, it is interesting to note that the Vaughan has either the same or a greater percentage of

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children who receive free school meals than have many schools which follow the Diocese's preference on admissions criteria. It is therefore incorrect to say that the Vaughan's admissions criteria result in a more privileged intake. It is also worth noting that those children who do have free school meals do substantially better, in academic terms, at the Vaughan, than elsewhere.

- Parents want to know why Paul Barber has been appointed to the Governing Body of the Vaughan school. The Vaughan is oversubscribed by 7 applications for every place and is routinely positioned at the very top of academic league tables. (In contrast there are a number of Catholic schools in this diocese that are undersubscribed; the nearest girls' Catholic school to the Vaughan has an intake which is only 55% Catholic and cannot fill its year 7 places. (The Chairman of Governors at this school has now been elected Chairman of Governors at the Vaughan.) We would be interested to know what Mr Barber's definition of a highly successful Catholic school is. If he agrees that the Vaughan is highly successful and massively oversubscribed, shouldn't he offer his services to schools that are not so sought - after? Perhaps, however, his definition of success is different from ours; we would be interested to know.
- The Diocese has chosen not to appoint current parents as Foundation Governors at the Vaughan. We are waiting for the judgment from the Court of Appeal to see whether the Diocese is successful in its fight for the right not to appoint current parents as Foundation Governors. If the court finds in favour of the Diocese, this has repercussions for all Voluntary Aided schools; parents will have less involvement in any debate concerning the direction of their child's school. We wonder why the Diocese was prepared to go to court rather than find two current parents of its choice. The Diocese has said that Paul Barber was appointed in order to improve communications between the school and the Diocese. We humbly suggest that a refusal to appoint current parents will not aid communication. As Cardinal Grochowski said in his letter to Presidents of Bishops' Conferences in 2009:

"... it is to be hoped that the school and the family will be in close harmony as regards the process of education and the individual's formation. This will avoid tensions and rifts in the goals of education. Hence close and active participation amongst parents, teachers and school authorities is needed. In this regard it is appropriate to encourage parents' participation in school life (CIC. C 796, C639 CCEO)" ((Paragraph 8)

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Parents have been marginalised and ignored. We are practising, faithful, supportive Catholics and we have been portrayed as self-interested “super Catholics” by the Church we have tried to support and defend. We have been left feeling confused and betrayed. It is time some questions were asked about the motivation and intentions of the WDES and the CES. The future of Catholic education is at stake.

We ask for your prayers for improved understanding and communication within our Catholic community.

Yours faithfully,

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