

Conflict at The Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School

Questions and Answers

Many people know about the long-running disagreement between the School and the Diocese of Westminster. But some may not know about the background to the dispute, or about the people involved in it.

People who support the Vaughan **must** know the facts, because there is a great deal at stake. So here are some questions and answers.

Please read through them. If you want the School to carry on providing unambiguously Catholic education to young people of all abilities, from all backgrounds and from all over London, please join us in taking direct action to save the Vaughan.

QUESTION	ANSWER
Who is in charge of the Diocese of Westminster?	The Roman Catholic Diocese of Westminster is led by Archbishop Vincent Nichols. He has said that it is important for Catholic schools to “clarify their distinctiveness” in a period of change in the education system.
What is the Diocesan Education Commission?	This Commission is appointed by the Archbishop, and acts in his name. It is responsible to the Archbishop in all areas relating to education. The Chairman of the Diocesan Education Commission is Bishop George Stack. The Director of Education for the Diocese is Paul Barber.
What authority does the Diocesan Education Commission have?	Acting in the Archbishop’s name, the Commission can appoint up to eleven of the School’s twenty Governors. These are called Foundation Governors.
What is a Foundation Governor?	Foundation Governors form the majority on any Catholic school’s Governing Body. Their role is to assist the Archbishop by sustaining and developing the Catholic ethos and distinctive Catholic nature of the school in which they serve. They also have a fiduciary duty to act in the best interests of the school to which they are appointed.
Who is now the Vaughan’s Chairman of Governors?	The Archbishop’s appointees have recently elected Mr John O’Donnell to this post. Mr O’Donnell is already Chairman of Governors at neighbouring Sion Manning School and Vice-Chairman of Governors of St Charles’ Primary School.
Why are supporters of the Vaughan worried?	Many people think that the Diocese wants to change the way the School operates. They think the Diocese wants to make the Vaughan more like some other schools by diluting its Catholic ethos and

	<p>undermining the high standards it has always upheld. Supporters of the Vaughan want to ensure the School can continue to offer top-quality Catholic education to children from all over London.</p>
<p>What does the Diocesan Education Commission object to?</p>	<p>The Diocese disapproves of the Vaughan’s tried-and-tested admissions criteria. These are based fairly on a family’s commitment to the Catholic Church. The Vaughan was founded to provide high-quality education for the children of devout, practising Catholics, and its admissions policy has shaped the School’s fundamental character over its long history.</p> <p>If the Diocese had its way the Vaughan would no longer be the Vaughan. It would be just another local school with no distinctive ethos and with no required personal standards from the families who send their children to it.</p> <p>There is a good summary in the Telegraph online here.</p>
<p>Isn’t it a good thing to open up admissions to a wider group of pupils?</p>	<p>Yes, and the Vaughan has always subscribed to this view. But which criteria should be changed? Which should be kept as a minimum requirement?</p> <p>The School is always oversubscribed by about six-to-one. Those who are admitted are very likely to reach their full potential in whatever direction their skills and interests take them. This is why so many parents want to place their children at the Vaughan.</p> <p>But, for entry at 11+, the School has to limit applicants to a number it can manage – 120 places. Since the school can admit only one-sixth of those who apply, it has to apply certain criteria for entry. Unlike some schools, which choose only the brightest pupils, the Vaughan uses academic banding to ensure that the intake is balanced across the comprehensive range of ability: 25% come from the top band of above-average ability, 50% from the middle band of average ability and 25% from the band of below-average ability.</p>
<p>How does the School decide who should be admitted?</p>	<p>Having defined the range of applicants’ academic abilities, the School looks at those families who most closely fit its ethos and expectations.</p> <p>In the first place, the School selects Catholic boys who are in public authority care. For the remaining places it applies this criterion:</p> <p><i>Catholic boys from practising Catholic families ...on the basis of the degree to which the boy and at least one parent fulfil the requirements of the Catholic Church in respect of Mass attendance, Baptism and Catholic education.</i></p>

	<p><i>Until the Diocese referred the School to the School’s Adjudicator, the admission criteria also required that parents had presented their children for the receipt of the sacraments of First Confession and First Holy Communion at the time required by Canon Law; they gave additional credit to applications to the extent that they demonstrated involvement of children and parents in the life of their parish or the wider church.</i></p>
<p>Why did the Archbishop and his Commission object to these criteria?</p>	<p>Those who act in the Archbishop’s name are vehemently opposed to giving credit for involvement in the life of the Church and they have made it plain that they wanted the School to change its policy. The Archbishop supported the decision to eliminate experienced Governors – and two successive Chairmen – who cared deeply about the School. Acting through Paul Barber, he replaced them with his own representatives. Incredibly, the Archbishop agreed to make Paul Barber himself a Governor of the Vaughan, ignoring the obvious conflict of interest in this appointment. <u>Paul Barber is a Governor of no other Catholic school in the Diocese.</u></p>
<p>Can a Catholic Diocese REALLY want to force a Catholic school to dilute its Catholic ethos ?</p>	<p>Regrettably, yes. In 2009 Bishop George Stack, the Chairman of the Diocesan Education Commission and Paul Barber stated that they regarded some of the admission criteria used by the Vaughan as unacceptable. They objected to these:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children who have made their First Confession and First Holy Communion • Families who are actively involved in their parishes or in the wider life of the Church <p>On the second point, the Bishop took the view that “it is not for schools to impose a higher requirement of practice than the Church itself imposes.”</p> <p>But on the question of receipt of the Sacraments, the School does not impose a higher requirement of practice. It is the Diocese that does not insist on the requirements of Canon Law. Furthermore the Vaughan does not judge Catholic practice. It simply looks at the degree of INVOLVEMENT of applicants and their families. A person may be a practising Catholic yet not involved in the visible life of the Church.</p> <p>Bishop Stack also stated that the rules permitted another Vaughan criterion which gives credit to parents who have shown their commitment to a Catholic education for their children (i.e. by sending them to a Catholic primary school). But he added this curious qualifying</p>

	<p>comment which immediately made the criterion completely meaningless:</p> <p>“Schools that give priority to those who have attended a Catholic primary school must ensure that this does not disadvantage those who have not been able to get in to a Catholic primary school through no fault of their own.” The Vaughan’s arrangements have always made allowance for such cases.</p>
<p>What has the School done in the face of Diocesan opposition?</p>	<p>The proposed changes have been consistently resisted. In late 2010 the situation was inflamed by the Archbishop’s decision to appoint (quite out of the blue, and once again ignoring his own policy on consultation) four Foundation Governors who would ensure that compliance with the wishes of the Diocese would take precedence over the considerations of the best interests of the School. In addition to the controversial appointment of Mr Barber, none of these newly appointed governors was a parent of a child in the School.</p> <p>This prompted a High Court action by the School’s elected Parent Governors to have the appointment of these people overturned. However, in November 2010 the Court found in favour of the Diocese.</p>
<p>Why does it matter that no current parents have been appointed as Foundation Governors?</p>	<p>The 2007 Statutory Instrument that gives legal substance to the composition of school governing bodies requires that, in all voluntary aided schools, one third of the governors must be parents of children on the school roll at the time of their appointment/election. In the case of a school of the Vaughan’s size, this proportion is to be made up by five governors elected by the parents and two appointed by the Foundation. The Statutory Instrument makes it clear that ONLY if there are insufficient parents of current pupils may parents of former pupils be elected or appointed, and ONLY if there are still insufficient parents may parents of pupils at other schools be elected or appointed to make up the required one third.</p> <p>The failure to appoint ANY current Vaughan parent to the Governing Body, despite the availability and willingness of suitable parents to be appointed, offers no realistic prospect that the wishes of parents in regard to their children’s education at the Vaughan will be respected. It is a curious interpretation of the Church’s teaching that parents are the “primary and principal educators” of their children.</p>
<p>What has happened since the High Court case of November 2010?</p>	<p>Supporters of the Vaughan have not given up in their campaign to protect the School from the unreasonable and damaging demands of the Archbishop and the Diocese. The Vaughan’s recently-retired Headmaster, Michael Gormally, has been closely involved with the struggle to protect the Vaughan. In December 2010 he wrote a letter to the Archbishop in which he cited the following examples of the</p>

	<p>Diocese's shortcomings in the discharge of its responsibilities to the School:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Diocese's consistent failure, over the past few years, to observe its own policy on consultation before appointing Foundation Governors. • The Diocese's failure to provide a cogent explanation for its refusal to re-appoint as many as seven highly able and dedicated Governors, and two Chairmen in succession. • The Diocese's referral of the School to the Office of the Schools' Adjudicator. • The Diocese's appointment to the Governing Body of its own Director of Education. • The Diocese's failure to appoint current parents as Foundation Governors. <p>Michael Gormally ended his letter like this:</p> <p><i>...I regret that no words of mine can help to improve the standing of the Diocese in the eyes of many concerned with the Vaughan. To regain their trust and their respect will take a long time and much patient work. Your agents will have to convince people that they are more interested in the good of the School than in imposing at all costs an ideologically-driven, one-size-fits-all approach to the organisation of Catholic education. In short...handsome is as handsome does.</i></p>
<p>What are our objectives?</p>	<p>To persuade the Diocese:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to appoint Foundation Governors who are parents of children at the School; • to remove Paul Barber from the Governing Body; • to seek the election of a Chairman other than John O'Donnell: one who will have time to devote to the Vaughan, and who will not be subject to an inevitable conflict of interest.
<p>What's at stake?</p>	<p>Everything.</p> <p>We must never forget just how good the Vaughan really is.</p> <p>Here are some of the facts and statistics published by the Acting</p>

	<p>Headmaster, Charles Eynaud, in his Christmas Report for 2010:</p> <p><i>This extraordinary list of achievements shows just what can be achieved when boys and girls in a comprehensive School are set demanding challenges and are supported by gifted and committed teachers. And it is this comprehensive nature of the School that I want to come back to.</i></p> <p><i>The Vaughan is not an independent school, it is not a grammar school and it certainly is not an elitist institution. Some statistics will illustrate what I mean.</i></p> <p><i>The intake of the School is at the top of the second quintile of social deprivation and therefore our intake is not socially elitist.</i></p> <p><i>49% of our pupils come from minority ethnic groups and this far exceeds the national average of 21%. The pupils in the School speak 44 different languages.</i></p> <p><i>The proportion of children with Statements of Special Educational Needs is rising sharply year on year. It now stands at 3.1%, significantly above the RBKC average of 2.4% and the national average of 2%: ours is not a privileged intake.</i></p> <p><i>28% of our Sixth Form receive the Educational Maintenance Allowance. The proportion of Free School Meals pupils who secured five or more GCSEs including Mathematics and English last summer was 83%. Compare this to the national average of ALL pupils (i.e. FSM or not) of 55%!</i></p> <p><i>Our overall absence levels and the levels for persistent absenteeism fall substantially below the national average for secondary schools and other schools with the same level of FSM eligibility. Pupil mobility is 2%. The Vaughan is a well- ordered and stable community. Teacher mobility is 13% compared to the RBKC average of 22%.</i></p>
<p>Does all this fuss about admissions and Governors really matter?</p>	<p>If you want the Vaughan to carry on doing for others the excellent work it may have done for you or for your son or daughter, and to the same high standard, then yes, it really matters.</p> <p>This is not about academic dinosaurs resisting change. This is not about dyed-in-the-wool traditionalists resisting modern technologies or progressive ideas simply because they are new. All new ideas are examined, tested and used when appropriate and when it is clear they add something. Classrooms where once the squeak of chalk against slate was the only noise now hear the tap-tap of fingers on iPads.</p>

No, change is certainly not the problem. What we are desperately trying to preserve is the core Catholic ethos of the Vaughan School which defines its unique character - if you like, its very soul.

That ethos is already part of a pupil's life before he or she starts at the School. It is firmly rooted in the lives of parents who want to send their children to the Vaughan. We are talking here of families who for generations have been eager to show their commitment to the Church by their good works, charitable acts and donations, financial contributions to the clergy and support of Catholic community projects.

What are people like this supposed to think when they witness the visible hostility of the Diocese to its top-performing school? What are they to conclude about the true intentions of those who seek to alter the School beyond recognition and irrevocably, but who claim not to be its enemies?

We cannot judge the motives of Diocesan decision-makers.

But we are not blind to their actions.

And actions speak louder than words.

What can I do to help?

Pray for our school community.

Donate to the legal appeal fund [here](#) .

Write to Archbishop Nichols to voice your concerns

Join us on a vigil in February 2011 – we will announce the date in a forthcoming email and on our website [here](#).

How can I keep up-to-date with the campaign to save the Vaughan?

Join our mailing list by clicking [here](#).