

Response to Archbishop's Statement

The Vaughan Parents' Action Group has read with dismay the statement Archbishop Nichols has issued in advance of the Candlelit Vigil to be held outside the School tonight.

The VPAG notes that, in his 85 word statement, the Archbishop does not even mention the word "parents"; this seems particularly regrettable in view of the fact that the marginalisation of parents in the governance of the School is one of the major issues in the current legal proceedings taken by the elected Parent Governors against the Diocese. Equally worrying is the Archbishop's decision to respond to the scores of letters he has received from concerned parents, not by addressing the specific issues they have raised, but by this reiteration of his previously stated position.

The Church teaches that parents are "the primary and principal educators" (Gravissimum Educationis, 3) of their children, not the Diocese, and not the Bishop. It is their role to support parents in that task, but parents are at a loss to understand how the Archbishop and the Diocese can provide that support, when they will not even respond to parents' concerns.

The 'Notes to Editors' accompanying the Archbishop's statement contain a number of tendentious statements. Foundation governors (like Trustees) have a fiduciary duty to prioritise the best interests of the school to which they are appointed; no mention is made of this. It is claimed that the Bishop Chairman of the Diocesan Schools Commission takes into account the range of skills and experience already represented on the GB when considering new appointments, and seeks to match their skills and experience to the needs of the Governing Body. In that case, it seems inexplicable that the Bishop should have left the Governing Body with only two governors who had as much as two years' experience in the School.

The statement about the referral to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator is not wholly true. The School never "did not recognise the authority of its Diocesan Bishop in determining who is and is not a practising Catholic"; the School simply argued that the Bishop's determination of who is and is not a practising Catholic was an insufficient criterion when some 300-400 applicants for 120 places met that determination. The Diocese obviously agrees with this assessment, since the only other criteria it can suggest are geographic, based on applicants' place of residence; there is no canonical basis for insistence on such a criterion.

Hundreds more parents apply every year to the Vaughan for their children than can be offered places; the right of parents to "enjoy true liberty in their choice of schools" (Gravissimum Educationis, 6) surely enjoins on the Diocese a duty to provide more schools like the Vaughan in response to parental demand. If the Diocese were serious about nurturing the Vaughan's Catholic ethos, academic, musical and sporting excellence, it would surely encourage its other schools to emulate the Vaughan, rather than seeking to make the Vaughan more like its other schools.