



Sanctuary Buildings Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT  
tel: 0870 0012345 dfes.ministers@dfes.gsi.gov.uk

**Rt Hon Alan Johnson MP**

The Right Reverend Archbishop Vincent Nichols  
Archbishop of Birmingham  
Chairman, Catholic Education Service  
Archbishop's House  
8 Shadwell Street  
Birmingham  
B4 6EY

26 October 2006

*Dear Vincent*

I am very grateful to you for coming to see me yesterday to talk about admissions to faith schools.

We share the common aim of supporting the crucial role faith schools have played for so long in the education of our young people. We discussed how we could best ensure that the Education and Inspections Bill enables faith schools to continue to develop and we noted in this context the provisions in the Bill that extend arrangements for transport for less well off families to enable children to attend faith schools and the changes that will allow faith schools to appoint some pastoral staff with regard to their commitment to the faith of the school.

We talked about admissions and your entirely understandable concern that Catholic schools should be able to meet the demand from Catholic families. You re-emphasised your commitment to inclusion and pointed out that 30% of children in your schools currently are not Catholics.

First, I explained that we were determined that there should be no impact on existing Catholic schools or on schools that might replace those schools. The definition of replacement, on which we will consult, should cover cases where schools replace former diocesan schools serving the same community, including those established in a different Local Authority area than the former school(s). Our amendment would make clear in primary legislation that no changes could be made through the Admissions Code to existing faith schools' admission arrangements to require them to give any priority to children not of the faith.

department for

**education and skills**

creating opportunity, releasing potential, achieving excellence



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

We then discussed new schools. You said that you would want to provide new Catholic schools when Catholic demand arose and you would always seek to provide a school big enough to meet that demand. You would not accept a new Catholic school being built to meet a particular level of Catholic demand that then not able to meet that demand in order to admit non Catholic children. That is not our intention. I am happy to confirm that any requirement to provide non faith places, where local circumstances make it appropriate and subject to public consultation, would be in addition to the demand for faith places.

You thought that this approach could work well. We agreed that it would be important when plans were made for a new Catholic school that total demand should be carefully estimated, including through joint strategic planning and joint public consultation with the Local Authority concerned. This would allow you – with Government capital support of course, above and beyond the 10% VA Governors liability in respect of the additional capacity build and the detail of this remains to be worked out and discussed – to seek to provide a school with enough places to meet Catholic demand and to offer further places to families who were not Catholic (our amendment would limit this to a maximum of 25%).

We agreed that our amendment will seek to reflect this position, whilst retaining provision for a promoter to ask the Secretary of State to determine whether any element of priority in admissions should be to non-faith pupils in cases where agreement could not be reached locally. This would of course apply to all new faith schools whatever the religion.

We will also ensure that our guidance to Local Authorities and the Schools Adjudicator who will be considering proposals for new schools will also take account of these principles. This guidance will be subject to consultation.

My thanks to you and Oona for a thoughtful and fruitful discussion. I hope that you can confirm quickly that this letter accurately reflects our discussion and the understanding reached.

*Yours sincerely*  
*Alan*

**ALAN JOHNSON**