

Corporate Scrutiny Committee – 6 June 2023

Written question from Jack Jacobs of Ryde to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee

Article 9 of the UN declaration of Human Rights continues to protect our absolute right to practice our religious beliefs without hindrance, whilst Religion and Belief are protected characteristics under Equality Act 2010. The Council is threatening to remove the ability of parents to educate their children within the Roman Catholic faith, by closing St. Mary's Catholic School, Ryde, with no equivalent Roman Catholic schools offered within reasonable distances. Whether intended or not, discriminating solely against Catholic pupils by removing their legal right to follow their belief, when non-discriminatory options were available, represents an intolerable and unlawful interference by the state, particularly when St. Mary's does not meet any of the criteria for closure. What measures is the Council taking to ensure that these rights are not breached for the hundreds of pupils and parents at St. Mary's Catholic School?

Response

Thank you for your recent question submitted to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee about the primary school place planning paper that was due to be discussed at the Isle of Wight Cabinet on Thursday 8 June 2023.

The Isle of Wight Council's Children's Services Management Team were asked to draft this paper following a discussion on forecast pupil numbers at the September 2022 Policy and Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services, Education and Skills.

However, as the Cabinet has decided that the paper will no longer be presented and therefore the recommendations will not be taken forward for public consultation, a response to your questions is no longer appropriate.

It is important to note that the questions submitted are exactly the type of queries we would have been seeking during the consultation, had the decision been made on 8 June for the consultation to begin. It was intended that officers would have attended public meetings to explore these issues in full. After the consultation the views of all those contributing to the debate would have been shared with Cabinet and fully considered before any final proposals were made for further consultation.

It is our experience that such consultations have been meaningful and have often led to better decision making with proposals being refined before further statutory consultation.

Should Cabinet decide to undertake a consultation in the future I would urge you to contribute with queries such as these to the discussions at that time.