

High Court bid to block Catholic schools fails



The future of faith schools was safeguarded today after a bid to block two new Catholic schools was dismissed by the High Court.

Local parents and the British Humanist Association have lost their High Court bid to block the opening of two new faith schools.

A judge rejected attempts by local parents and secular campaigners to seek a judicial review of the decision to open a primary and secondary in Richmond, west London.

The move had been seen as an attempt to set a “dangerous” precedent which would have blocked the opening of other faith-based schools elsewhere.

Today, the decision to reject the application was welcomed by Richmond Council which claimed children’s education had been “threatened by this hostile legal maneuvering”.

Speaking after the hearing, Lord True, the council leader, accused the British Humanist Association – which supported the court action – of “elbowing” its way into the borough “with their clear national agenda of hostility to faith schools”.

“Their action has been uncaring and unsympathetic to the many people within the Richmond Catholic community who have worked hard to bring their dream of a dedicated secondary school to fruition,” he said.

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Richmond had offered a new £8.4 million site to the Catholic Diocese of Westminster to be used for a primary and secondary school.

But parents claimed the move breached national rules on school admissions. They claimed any new school should be set up as an academy – reserving large numbers of places for non-religious families.

But Mr Justice Sales rejected their application for judicial review and said he would give his full reasons at a later date.

The judge upheld Richmond Council's argument that it did not misdirect itself or act unlawfully over the faith schools.

Speaking later, Andrew Copson, chief executive of the BHA, said: "We are disappointed, but once we see the full reasons for this judgment we will appeal if we possibly can.

"Today's case hinged on very technical issues but it raises wider questions relating to religious schools."

Graeme Paton - The Telegraph