

Sixth-form college head suspended

Philip Crispin

THE PRINCIPAL of a Catholic sixth-form college has been suspended after critical reports from Ofsted and the local education authority.

Governors at St Luke's College, Sidcup, south-east London, decided that Maria Williams should take paid leave pending an independent investigation into the college's leadership and management.

The action was taken after an Ofsted inspection – not yet published – that is expected to report that standards at the college are “inadequate”.

A second report, commissioned by Bexley Local Education Authority, highlighted poor attendance and punctuality, a lack of clear policies and proper guidance for staff and poor accommodation and equipment.

According to a report in the *Times Edu-*

cational Supplement, staff and students have complained that Mrs Williams has placed too much emphasis on religion at the college at the expense of other academic subjects.

But Fr Tim Finigan, chairman of the college's governors, said in a statement that some recent press coverage had “rather misunderstood the issue surrounding the Catholic ethos of the school” and that nobody considered it “too Catholic”.

“There are many very committed Catholic staff at the college and they support the Catholic life of the college. Non-Catholic staff have also been actively involved in its pastoral and spiritual life,” he said.

Fr Finigan confirmed that the college was recently inspected by Ofsted and while the report had not yet been officially published, the governors were expecting to be given a formal “notice to improve”.

MoD protester loses car to bailiffs

Isabel de Bertodano

A CATHOLIC anti-war protester has had his car seized by bailiffs after he refused to pay a fine for criminal damage.

Chris Cole, director of the anti-war organisation Fellowship of Reconciliation, was one of four demonstrators who dug up the lawn in front of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) in London in protest at the occupa-

tion of Iraq. He was fined £416 at a trial in June last year.

He refused to pay and last Friday bailiffs came to his house with a warrant to confiscate his possessions. Mr Cole, 42, who is married and has three children, refused to allow them entry.

“They clamped and eventually took away our family car,” he said. “The bailiffs assured us that this is not the end of the matter.”

IN BRIEF

School bus protest

Plans by Hertfordshire County Council to end free transport to faith schools have been criticised by the Diocese of Westminster. The plans were approved at a meeting this week, amid demonstrations by 1,500 people, including the retired auxiliary bishop James O'Brien. Paul Barber, director of education at Westminster, said the diocese would continue to oppose the plans and was seeking legal advice.

Middle East appeal

Catholic parishes in England and Wales are being asked to support an appeal to provide emergency supplies for those affected by the conflict in Lebanon and Gaza. The appeal is being launched by the Catholic aid agency Cafod, which has already pledged £100,000 to its local partners in Lebanon and £25,000 to those in Gaza.

Organ prodigy to Westminster

A graduate from Manchester University is to become Westminster Cathedral's organ scholar, beating off international competition for the post. Simon Lloyd, who graduated this week with a first class degree in music, is 21 and taught himself to play the piano when he was four. He started organ lessons at six, and has been playing regularly for church services since he was seven.

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For further information please contact, by letter or email only, Sr Joan Hunter at the Convent of Jesus and Mary, 63 Orwell Road, Felixstowe IP11 7PP; joanhunter@talk21.com

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