

Parents critical of plan for Yorkshire super-school

Richard Marsden

PLANS TO merge three Catholic secondary schools in Bradford have been thrown into doubt after nearly 850 parents failed to support the move in a recent consultation.

Education officials from the Diocese of Leeds were due to meet with the three governing bodies this week to discuss the way ahead after only 30 out of around 1,000 people were in favour of the scheme.

The diocese had proposed to close down St Joseph's Catholic College in Manningham, St Bede's Grammar School in Heaton and Yorkshire Martyrs Catholic College in Tong, replacing them with a single super-school by 2008.

The new school would have been initially split across the St Bede's and St Joseph's sites, making it the district's biggest school with around 3,000 pupils.

But after unexpectedly strong opposition from parents, the diocese has been forced to rethink its plans. Sharon Ratnik, a Local

Education Authority governor whose two children attend Yorkshire Martyrs, claimed that the move would leave between 500 and 750 children without a school in the south of the city.

"It's going to take my children at least an hour to get there and back," she said. "And what about after-school activities? For me, it could be £50 a month in bus fares. That's still a lot of money to find. With a school of 3,000 parking is going to be an absolute logistical nightmare and you can imagine the situation with behaviour and bullying."

The protest group is asking parents to write to the Bishop of Leeds, Arthur Roche, to explain their concerns.

"We hope the bishop will take a step back and look again at the situation," Mrs Ratnik said.

No one at the Diocesan Council for Education was available for comment. Amendments to the proposals are expected to be published by the end of January and another consultation will then take place.

■ **THE HEAD TEACHER** of a school that banned a 13-year-old Catholic pupil from wearing a crucifix in the classroom has said she will review the policy.

Samantha Devine, a pupil at Robert Napier School in Gillingham, Kent, refused to remove a silver chain and crucifix after being told it was against school policy. The school's policy bans jewellery for Years Seven to 10, except where it is an "essential

requirement of a particular religion". However, Samantha was told that she would be allowed to display her religious beliefs with a lapel badge.

Oona Stannard from the Catholic Education Service said: "No young person should be embarrassed by their wish to quietly and respectfully make their faith evident and the opportunity for a lapel badge would allow this."

IN BRIEF

New navy chaplain

Mgr Paul Donovan has become the Royal Navy's new Principal Catholic Chaplain. Mgr Donovan, who is 50, joined the Navy Chaplaincy in 1985 and was until recently the chaplain of aircraft carrier HMS *Illustrious*. He saw operations in the Gulf during the Iran-Iraq war, and drug and arms interdictions in the Adriatic and Caribbean. He takes over from Mgr Richard Madders, who held the post for five years and who has now returned to work as a parish priest in the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton. Mgr Madders said that he highly recommended the navy as a way to serve as a priest. "I would recommend any priest to consider a six-year stint in the navy, and then a return to parish ministry – and all the better for the experience."

Regret over slavery

The Archbishops of Canterbury and York are to lead a procession through London to repent for the Church of England's complicity in the slave trade. The event, on 24 March, marks the two hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade by Britain and follows the General Synod's apology last year for its involvement in it. Dr Rowan Williams and Dr John Sentamu will march alongside a group of black and white youths carrying a cross, accompanied by African drums. Meanwhile, the Catholic Bishop of Clifton, Declan Lang, has joined other church leaders in signing a statement of regret about the slave trade in Bristol.



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