

STATEMENT

Cllr Sarah Bevan

1 I would like to declare a pecuniary, non-prejudicial interest as my son attends St Gregory's and uses the home to school transport.

2 My annual income as being low, about £12.5k before tax credits, but not low enough to qualify for free transport. As a member of the squeezed middle, I am in the same situation as the majority of parents. With the subsidy, we already pay £300 a year to get our children to school and home again. Without the subsidy, this is likely to rise to £900, which is a huge proportion of our income.

3 The original research leading to the cabinet's decision was based on the Local Education Authority boundaries. Neither St Gregory's nor St Mark's were set up as LEA schools. They were established as Diocesan schools. The process was thus flawed from the outset.

4 St Gregory's was set up to serve a minority - the Catholic minority. As you know, the Catholic faith is a global faith, and as such, the school welcomes and is also set up to accommodate educationally and spiritually members of that faith from outside the UK such as the Polish, Kerala Indian and Philippino Catholics, for whom their faith is not just a matter of theology and once a week attendance at Holy Mass, but a way of life and culture, with their school a central supportive hub. Removing the subsidy would represent a disadvantage for these minorities and thus could be construed as discriminatory.

5 Catholics and Anglicans are already at a known disadvantage, since there is only one Catholic and one Church of England secondary school in the authority, meaning that children of the Christian faith have to travel far further to school than other children. Removal of the transport subsidy therefore constitutes a double disadvantage, and again, discrimination could be claimed.

6 There is no point in having a designated Catholic secondary school which not only delivers the National Curriculum but imbues the wider educational offering with a strongly Catholic ethos if there are no Catholic pupils in it.

7 (If time) Catholic parents support their clergy financially, who unlike Anglican clergy, do not receive a stipend to live on, both through weekly collections at Mass or through planned committed giving. To remove the home to school transport subsidy would therefore mean a second unavoidable strain on low to middle income parents.