

TEXT OF A LETTER FROM SIR EDWARD LEIGH TO THE PRIME MINISTER (JULY 2017)

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing to you urgently regarding a matter of great concern for the Catholic community, Britain's largest religious minority.

I am appalled by the article in yesterday's *Sunday Times* (enclosed) which asserts that the Government is preparing a U-turn on the solemn commitment made to scrap the faith-based admissions cap for free schools.

The Government is right to be concerned about integration of religious and ethnic minorities, but the admissions cap is completely useless in this regard. Nick Timothy did exhaustive research and as an educational expert fully understood that the cap was totally ineffective. And of the schools involved in the "Trojan Horse" scandal in Birmingham, precisely zero of them were faith schools – they were all secular state schools.

You will recall that I raised this in PMQs just last week and you gave me a positive and encouraging response. This was very much noted by the Catholic Bishops Conference and the Catholic Education Service, which have been helping dioceses plan for setting up free schools in anticipation of the Government keeping its word.

I have spoken about this in person with Cardinal Nichols, the Archbishop of Westminster. He hopes this report is just "mischievous journalism" and awaits your reply to his letter anxiously.

Catholic schools are hugely diverse, including the children of many faiths and indeed of none. More than 26,000 Muslim pupils are currently being educated in Catholic schools. One in seven ethnic minority pupils in England & Wales attend a Catholic school, including more than one in five black children. Across the board, Catholic schools educate 21% more pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds compared to other schools, and these pupils in Catholic secondary schools perform better at GCSE than the national average.

We also have a record second to none in looking after the most disadvantaged in our society. 16.5% of pupils in Catholic secondary schools live in the most deprived areas, compared to 11.3% nationally.

Canon law, however, means we cannot be told to reject Catholics from our schools based purely on their being Catholic, which the admissions cap requires. As such, the cap acts as an effective blanket ban on Catholic free schools while totally failing in its actual intention of encouraging diversity and preventing mono-cultural schools.

I am also concerned about our party's future prospects in the potential aftermath. As Cardinal Nichols mentioned to me, "there are six million Catholics in the United Kingdom". Data from the British Election Survey suggests that in England as many as

1 in every 10 Conservative voters is a Catholic. The breaking of this manifesto pledge will be interpreted as a direct attack on Catholics alone, as well as an unapologetic betrayal. I'm sure you will agree that this does not leave us strategically well placed for the future.

I am writing this as President of the Catholic Union of Great Britain, the principal lobbying group for lay people.

I ask that you urgently look into this and I look forward to hearing back from you.