

To the Parish Priests and Parish Communities of St. Cadoc's, Newton Mearns; and St. Joseph's Clarkston

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

St. Ninian's High School Consultation Process Response from the Diocese of Paisley

In its official response to the Consultation Process initiated by East Renfrewshire Council regarding the Delineated Area of St. Ninian's High School, Giffnock, the Diocese of Paisley has made the following four points.

1. The Diocese of Paisley is pleased that pupils of St. Joseph's PS Clarkston, St. Cadoc's PS Newton Mearns, and Our Lady of the Missions PS, Giffnock, will continue to have first priority places at St. Ninian's HS.

2. Secondly, the Diocese of Paisley is also of the view that the removal of a first priority right of admission from the pupils of St. Angela's, Darnley, and of St. Vincent's, Thornliebank, is unsatisfactory and unfair. It is unsatisfactory because the Catholic children of Darnley and Thornliebank were always part of the St. Ninian's catchment area and arguably there would never have been a St. Ninian's High School without these children; and also because these same children have contributed and continue to contribute hugely to the excellent school that St. Ninian's presently is. And it is unfair because it injures the rights of those Catholic parents who have committed to St. Angela's and St. Vincent's in the expectation that their children will benefit from that first priority right. At the same time, the Diocese of Paisley recognises that this problem has occurred because St. Ninian's is a full and successful Catholic school. We have sympathised with the Local Authority's dilemma, in that it is clear that the school cannot forever go on increasing its roll. However we have clearly recommended to the Authority that there should be a delay in implementing proposals to limit priority admissions to St. Ninian's HS and that all the children already in St. Angela's and St. Vincent's who currently have a priority right of admission, should retain that right.

3. Thirdly, it appears too that there is an issue over the precise terms in which the delineated area for admission to St. Ninian's is defined, whether this area is constituted by certain streets and thoroughfares or whether it is in fact a larger area. The Diocese of Paisley has recommended in its submission that East Renfrewshire Council should seek a legal ruling from the appropriate authority on the definition of the catchment area of St. Ninian's High School so that all interested parties will at least have a common starting point for the resolution of this issue.

4. Fourthly and finally, this matter raises an important matter of principle regarding admissions to schools in the denominational sector. Part of the success story of the denominational sector is that, when there are enough places, Catholic schools happily and successfully admit, teach and appropriately support pupils of other faith traditions and none, and we would all wish to continue this service to the wider community. At the same time, we must be able to maintain as a guiding principle that Catholic schools were established in law primarily for the education of Catholic children. It seems reasonable therefore to expect that this principle should inform admissions policy to Catholic schools. This is particularly important when a Catholic school is over-subscribed, such as is the case with St. Ninian's.

Consequently, the Diocese of Paisley has asked East Renfrewshire Council to review its admissions policy to its Catholic schools, making religious affiliation through the presentation of a child's baptismal

certificate, and not simply a commitment to the denominational sector, the principal criterion of admission. The Diocese of Paisley believes that an admissions policy revised in this way would considerably improve the management of admissions to Catholic schools here and elsewhere.

I thank you for your support for Catholic education.

Yours devotedly in Christ our Lord and King,

Philip Tartaglia  
Bishop of Paisley