

12 July 2016

Dear Lord True,

I am writing to you and other interested parties in response to your recent press release concerning the Schools Adjudicator's judgment on the admissions arrangements at Turing House School.

We are very pleased and proud that, having been open for only one year in a temporary site, demand for places at our school is extremely high. It is for this reason, of course, that our oversubscription policy is receiving close scrutiny locally.

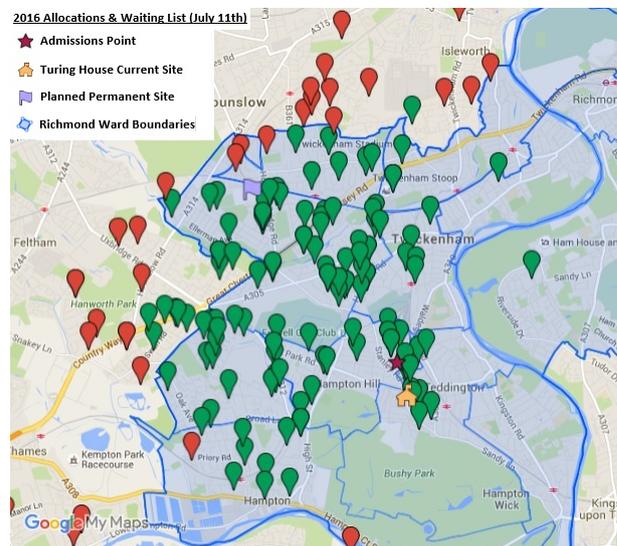
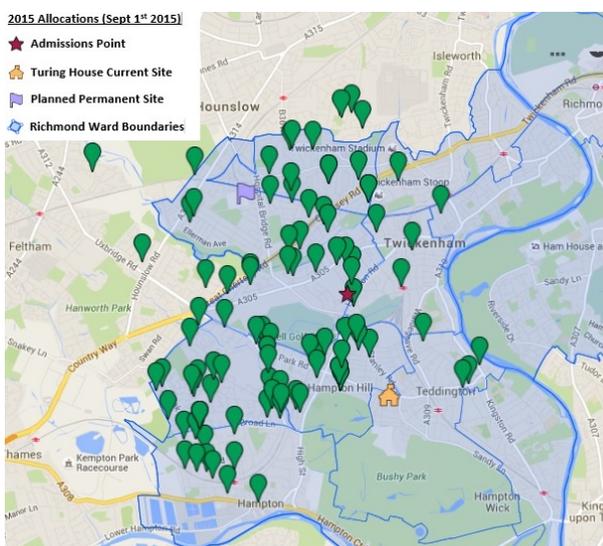
We were disappointed not to be consulted or informed before your views were published. Had we been contacted, we would have been able to correct some of the inaccuracies contained within your statement.

Turing House was proposed to serve the Middlesex side of Richmond Borough, where the Local Authority and many families identified a growing local need for good co-educational mainstream secondary places. This identified need was a key factor in the Department for Education's decision to allow us to open a free school.

We are committed to continuing to provide high quality school places in the area of the borough which we were set up to serve, even though no site has been made available for us in that area. As a free school in a densely populated area, we are not unusual in being sited away from our defined area of need. The Adjudicator acknowledged the issue in his report: 'It appears reasonable to me that a school established to serve a particular geographic community should be able to set oversubscription criteria that prioritise children living in that community even if the school is not located in that geographic area.'

Our admissions policy has been devised to strike the balance between supporting that community and making provision for families who live in the Heathfield area, where the school will be sited.

All distance applications for the first two year groups have been based around an admissions point in Fulwell. This policy was designed to ensure that priority is given to students who live furthest from the other mixed comprehensive secondary schools, but it certainly does not, and has not, prevented successful applications from right across the Middlesex side of the borough. The maps below show that we are neither 'cherry picking' nor operating a 'postcode lottery', but in fact are serving both our original target area and the area around the planned permanent site.



For September 2015 entry we offered places to every applicant from the Whitton and Heathfield wards. For September 2016, other than 6 applicants that remain on our waiting list (red markers), all applications from those wards have been offered places. We are admitting reduced numbers at present, due to the restrictions of our temporary site. Had we been admitting our full intake of 150, all would have had a place. Future demand for our school from these wards is difficult to predict as it will be affected by their proximity to an outstanding secondary just across the border in Hounslow, the opening of the new Richmond-upon-Thames School, and improvements being made at Twickenham Academy. Relative to families in our original area of demand, parents in these wards have high priority for other nearby options.

It is important to note that, whilst we are meeting our commitment to both communities already, our policy of reserving 20% of places for students living closest to our permanent site will not come into operation until September 2017. In 2017 families close to the permanent site will have higher priority in securing places. Based on the application information we have, the 20% policy will be more than adequate to meet all the demand from Heathfield and Whitton. Our school will not be a 'gated community'.

We have said that we will be keeping our admissions policy under review, and we will consult again in the Autumn to take into account new factors, including a predicted increase in applications for Turing House and the finalisation of our permanent site, as well as the changes to other schools referred to above.

All of the difficulties currently under discussion result from the lack of a site in the Fulwell area. We know (but do not fully understand) that it is the Council's view that it will be easier to build a school on Metropolitan Open Land (MOL) in Heathfield, than it would be to build it on the Council-owned MOL site adjacent to Fulwell Golf Course.

However, it has been suggested to us that the need for school places is such that the Fulwell site will have to be used sooner or later. If that did happen we would be among many who would find it difficult to understand the siting of another school there within a short period of Turing House having been located some distance from its clearly defined area of need. We would be grateful for any light that you can shed on this issue.

Yours sincerely,



Janet Hilton  
Chair of Local Governing Body

Cc Richmond Councillors  
Richmond and Twickenham Times