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# Peer urges archbishop to make Vaughan concessions

BY ED WEST

THE ARCHDIOCESE of Westminster has come under renewed pressure over the Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School after a peer and a leading academic wrote to Archbishop Vincent Nichols calling on him to make concessions to parents.

In a letter sent last week Conservative peer Lord Lexden told the archbishop that although he was Anglican he had "long admired" the "remarkable achievements" of the Vaughan, one of the top two comprehensives in inner London for GCSE results.

The peer, formerly Alistair Cooke, and a former political

researcher and lecturer at Queen's University, Belfast, said: "The diocese now has a great opportunity to heal the wounds inflicted during the protracted dispute. It could do this by anticipating what is to come and nominating two current parents as foundation governors immediately.

"Even more effective in the healing process would be a declaration by the diocese that, during the forthcoming selection procedures to find a new head, its nominees will work to find a consensus that unites the governing body as a whole, ending this sad period of division and bitterness unworthy of a Christian institution."

Lord Lexden told the archbishop that he felt compelled to give his support to the Vaughan Parents' Action Group, set-up by parents at the school to oppose the diocese's planned changes. In June the peer spoke in the House of Lords about the need to protect the interests of parents at schools, after which the Government said it intended to change the law to require schools to appoint foundation governors from among parents with children at the same school.

One of the Vaughan parents' complaints is that the diocese has failed to reappoint parent-governors with children at the Vaughan, rather than children at other

schools. Lord Lexden said: "I hope you will be able to respond positively to these proposals which I intend to raise in Parliament in due course." He also sent a copy of the letter to Education Secretary Michael Gove.

Prof Luke Gormally, a bio-ethicist and a member of the Pontifical Academy for Life, also wrote to the archbishop criticising the diocese for not re-appointing parents at the school to be foundation governors and for appointing its own director of education, Paul Barber, as a school governor.

In the letter he said that "Catholic parents who are serious about encouraging their children's growth

in the knowledge of the truths of the faith and in its practice have few Catholic schools to which they can send their children with confidence.

"The Vaughan School has proved to be exemplary in meeting their need. I contrasted my own local Catholic comprehensive school in which the present head of RE is a non-Catholic, and her immediate predecessor was an atheist. It is that kind of school that requires the close attention of Mr Paul Barber if the WDES [diocesan education service] is to be regarded as serious about providing an authentic Catholic education for the children of the diocese and not

just accumulating accolades from Ofsted." He said the exclusion of parents from the governing body "bids fair to destroy what was hitherto a key element in the success of the school: its close collaboration with parents which inspired great confidence in them and consequently in their children. The Vaughan Parents' Action Group is not an unrepresentative body - it has very substantial support among parents. The recently reported refusal of the current chairman of the governing body to meet them, allegedly on the orders of Bishop [George] Stack, merely reinforces the message that parents are to be marginalised."

He also argued that parents had canon law on their side, quoting canon, 793, §1: "Catholic parents have also the duty and the right to choose those means and institutes which, in their local circumstances, can best promote the Catholic education of their children."

"Catholic parents who take that duty seriously are now excluded by diocesan policy from exercising the right to at least seek admission to the Vaughan for their children," he wrote.

A spokeswoman for Archbishop Nichols, who is out of the country, said that the archbishop was aware of the letters and would respond in full upon his return.

# Bishop: Christ will be my top priority

BY DAVID V BARRETT

THE NEW Bishop of Aberdeen "could not have had a better preparation than to have been the Abbot of Pluscarden Abbey", according to Cardinal Keith O'Brien.

Dom Hugh Gilbert was ordained Bishop of Aberdeen in the cathedral of St Mary of the Assumption on Monday. He is the first abbot to join the Scottish Catholic hierarchy since its restoration.

Dom Hugh Gilbert was abbot of Pluscarden Abbey near Elgin for 19 years, and has been a contemplative monk for 37 years.

Born Edward Gilbert in 1952 in Emsworth, near Chichester, he was baptised in the Anglican Church.

him from the monastery into the outside world a profound awareness of Christ.

"The rule of St Benedict says 'prefer nothing to the love of Christ,'" he said. "I would like to think I take a firm sense of that with me, a sense of Christ and a certainty of Christ."

He is not unprepared for his new role. "I do know the diocese, having lived here for 37 years," he said. "I know nearly all the priests and religious and many of the laity so I will not be among strangers. Though of course you have different relationships as a bishop than you do as an abbot. But everyone has been very welcoming."

In his homily at the ordination

