

ENQUIRE WITHIN

Question: *Twyford School in Acton is celebrating 25 years since it changed from being a County school and opened as a Church of England High school in 1981. There was a lot of controversy about it at the time. Do you think that it was right for this school to have become a Church school?*

Answer: It was before my time in Greenford, but I remember that when I arrived in 1982 there was still a lot of strong feeling, on both sides. My predecessor Malcolm Smart was a leader of the group opposed to the change.

I think we have to examine the matters which gave cause for concern and created opposition to the change of status in the first place.

The main cause for concern was the impact of the school becoming selective on the grounds of religion. The opponents feared that the change would tend to exclude students from homes which were not religious and in fact become a would-be grammar school, an enclave of middle-class and predominantly white families. This would have been a bad way of promoting the Christian faith in the community – by excluding from school the very people which the Church was reaching out to in the very multi-cultural parishes of Acton and the whole of the Borough of Ealing.

Well, 25 years on, and 5 Head Teachers down the line, anyone who visits Twyford High will be able to see at a glance that the school has become an

international and multi-cultural success story. Far from being a refuge of a panicky white middle-class, it has become a school with a great reputation for dealing well with children from all over the world and having a particularly good record with children who experience special educational needs.



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In addition to this, the school has proved itself exemplary in many other ways. Just look at the quality marks which the school has received and which are posted down the centre of this article!

In addition to this, the school's examination results have also proved to be spectacularly good, so all in

all, the past 25 years have been years of excellence and the school has not slipped into the dangers of being exclusively Christian or white.

That leaves us with the deeper issues concerning so-called Faith schools. It is my view that Church of England schools are not really faith schools in the sense which that term is mostly used. Other faith schools tend to exist predominantly to promote their religious tenets and practise. Church of England schools tend not to be like that. They tend to be more like Community schools in the pupil intake and how they manage religion within the school day. It is quite possible to practise another faith or none and to be very happy at most Church of England schools I have visited. In a way this could be regarded as criticism because it may represent a lost opportunity, but I prefer it that way. Christian values are seen in more than the religious observance or the content of religious Education.

Neil Richardson