



Further statement regarding The John Fisher School in Purley

Through concerns raised, the Archdiocese of Southwark was made aware of Mr Green's book *Noah Cannot Even* (2017) which was the focus for the World Book Day presentation and signing at the John Fisher School. The event was for pupils in years 8 and 9, the vast majority of whom would be aged 12 to 13 years old. The book has a sequel, *Noah Could Never* (2018).

For Christians, the Lord's Prayer (Our Father) is something very precious. We believe it was taught by Jesus Christ to his first disciples as the pattern for all prayer. We would not expect someone who is not a Christian to accept what we believe about this prayer. We would, however, hope that it would be respected as a treasured and intrinsic part of a major world faith, prayed daily by millions of people. The Lord's Prayer forms part an intrinsic part of Catholic worship and devotion. It is taught to children by their family as well as by school staff, being part of the spiritual life of a Catholic school.

In the book *Noah Can't Even*, chapter 13, on pages 124-125, begins:

"Let us pray."

"Our Father, who art the gay boy? Noah be his name..." [...]

"He makes Harry come. He gives him one. On earth as it is in Heaven. ..." [...]

"And lead him straight into temptation. Right into a gay bar. For Noah is a gay boy. Who likes to suck c**k. For ever and ever. He's gay."

"OK, sit yourselves down!" said Mr. Baxter, head of year.

The year elevens all shuffled back into their seats. Noah despondently plopped back down, straight on to a banana that the hilarious occupants of the row behind had placed on his seat during the prayer.

"Awww – right up his a**e!" said one of the lads. (It wasn't.)

"He loves it!" said another. (He didn't.)

"Oh, Harry! Do it to me!" sighed a girl. (Not a phrase he would ever use. He wasn't a porn star with no class.)

Please see appendix I (below) for The Lord's Prayer, as used by the Roman Catholic Church.

Asterisks have been placed in the text above, for the sake of modesty, but are not present in the original.

Mr Green has commented that his book simply has a gay character and some 'kissing.' Looking at the text above, the narrative employs sexual imagery which we believe is not appropriate for school age pupils in a Catholic context. The use of this prayer in this way, and for this to be promoted in a Catholic school, is a source of deep disquiet.

In the book *Noah Could Never*, early in chapter 4, there is the following narrative.

Rumour had it, Connor was seeing a boy in year thirteen – two years his senior! How very edgy. That meant Connor was also probably sexually experienced now, taken under the wing



of this sugar daddy in the sixth form, who would have doubtless shown him exactly what to do and when to do it. ...

The context is Noah's continuing personal journey. The concern is whether the themes raised are appropriate for school age pupils. If the narrative were about a female pupil in Year 11 and a male pupil in Year 13, who was her 'sugar daddy' and had '*doubtless shown [her] exactly what to do and when to do it,*' the concern would remain the same. It is important to record again that sexual orientation is not, and never was, the reason for concern. It is the content of the material. If a passage such as that above had been written from a heterosexual perspective, it would have been equally unacceptable.

Additional concerns arose regarding inappropriate language towards women, specifically the mother figure in the book, who is described as 'A total bitch from Hell' (p.196) and 'Cantankerous Hag' (p.202), whilst a scene in which Noah and Josh give marks out of ten to girls based on sex is disrespectful towards women and promotes this attitude as acceptable (P.223-224).

We hope this information about the content of the material involved helps to explain the genuine matters of concern. Our priority throughout has been, and remains, the flourishing of pupils at the John Fisher School (see Appendix II). We are continuing to work with the entire school community and the local authority, and we are committed to the students' academic, pastoral, and spiritual care.

Appendix I

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
Amen.

Appendix II

Letter to parents and pupils of The John Fisher School, Purley, 18 March 2022

The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark wishes to address a situation that has taken place recently at The John Fisher School in Purley. This relates to an event to mark World Book Day and the cancellation of a visit to the school by the author Mr Simon James Green on March 7th, 2022. This has been a difficult and regrettable experience for everyone involved.

The Archdiocese is committed to promoting all that encourages each person to live in the freedom God desires for us. We strive to foster a vision of what it means to flourish as a human being, living in relationship with a loving God, growing closer to him throughout life's journey. Within this context we also look towards rejecting all that weakens respect for, or diminishes understanding of, the dignity which all human beings possess equally in the eyes of the Lord Jesus.

We are immensely proud of all the young people in our Catholic schools for all they achieve and of our school leaders, staff, and governors. Together we share the responsibility for forming our young



people so that they can not only live and work in the world, but also bring Christ's compassion, forgiveness, healing, and love to our society.

Every human being has a value and dignity which we believe comes from our creation in God's image and likeness. Our communities aim to be places of welcome, where each person is respected and loved, and where everyone receives and shares their unique gifts. We are opposed to all forms of bullying in our schools, including on the basis of sexual orientation or gender. We work to ensure our schools are safe places for all our students and staff. In the context of our Catholic faith and teaching, we uphold the dignity of every person.

Some parents and pupils may have been disappointed by the cancellation of Mr Green's talk and book-signing, and troubled by the Press reports of the reasons for the cancellation. Concerns were raised with the Archdiocese by parents who felt that some of the content of Mr Green's books may be inappropriate for those aged 12 – 13 years and that the content did not align with what would be expected in a Catholic school. Having read some of the material, the Archdiocese recommended that the school cancel Mr Green's visit.

Throughout this situation our duty of care to all our pupils has been our priority, and we encourage our young people to talk with a parent, carer, or trusted member of staff within the school community if they have any concerns.

The Archdiocese of Southwark is reviewing this matter and will be exploring constructive ways to continue to work positively with The John Fisher School community.