The Survey! Summer 2024

The parent body surveys referenced in the decision to change Prior Park College's designation focused on two main areas of feedback from families:

1. The Internal Consultation on Faith Status

During the summer of 2024, the school conducted a survey of the parent body specifically regarding the proposed change in religious affiliation.

• The Response: According to Headmaster Ben Horan, the feedback from families was positive, with parents "overwhelmingly" approving the decision to move away from formal (undefined) Catholic Church governance to become a Christian school in the Catholic tradition.

2. Feedback on Compulsory Curriculum (Theology GCSE)

The second set of parental survey responses was gathered during a Catholic Schools Inspectorate (CSI) evaluation.

• The Response: In the feedback forms, a substantial number of parents explicitly questioned and criticized the fact that GCSE Theology was entirely compulsory for every student.

The parental survey did not directly create a grassroots "demand" for the change; rather, it served as the catalyst and ultimate justification that allowed the Board of Trustees to proceed with a transition they felt was necessary.

The survey results correlated with, the change in three specific ways:

1. The Survey Broke a Philosophical Deadlock with the Diocese

Prior Park's leadership had been in a growing ideological conflict with the Clifton Diocese and the Catholic Schools Inspectorate (CSI). The CSI operated under a rigid framework that demanded overt displays of appropriate Catholic religiosity from all students.

When the CSI issued a parental survey during an inspection, a substantial number of Prior Park parents used the form to openly criticize and question why GCSE Theology was mandatory. As Headmaster Ben Horan noted in his Official Letter to Parents, the inspectors used this feedback to give the school a "Requires Improvement" rating in that category. However, the Trustees used that exact same parental pushback as concrete evidence that the diocese's mandates were entirely out of step with what paying families actually wanted.

2. It Quantified the Reality of the "Customer Base"

The summer 2024 consultation survey apparently tested how families would react to dropping the formal Catholic label. When the survey came back with "overwhelming" parent approval, it gave the board complete commercial confidence. It proved that separating from the Church would not cause a mass exodus of families; instead, it would align the school's legal status with the secular, diverse reality of the people who bought into its community. *(18% drop in pupils since as contrasting with the impressive continuous growth since 1980)*

3. It apparently aligned with Parental Expectations on Inclusivity

In short, the surveys offered apparent collateral to the Board of Trustees that the market and the parents were entirely ready for the change, giving them the supposed definitive mandate to

sever their 200-year-old relationship with the Catholic Church. However, no other paths or solutions were provided or considered.

To date the surveys, results, format and analysis have not been shared with anyone. This was asked by numerous people since September 2024. At times the data was promised, other times denied.

The decision was explicitly and carefully framed by the Trust as a modernising survival strategy rather than a sudden leap into the unknown. Because the transition took place over a "calculated" three-year re-evaluation period, the school and the families anticipated how these consequences would play out:

1. Awareness of the Curricular Shift (Theology GCSE)

• The Consequence: Stripping the Roman Catholic designation meant the school immediately lost its obligation to enforce the Clifton Diocese's mandate that every single pupil must sit GCSE Theology.

• Parental Awareness: Parents were not just aware of this; they were the primary drivers. Non-Catholic parents had explicitly complained about the lack of academic choice. When the change went live, parents fully expected—and welcomed—the immediate outcome: Theology became optional, giving students the freedom to choose other academic or creative GCSE pathways.

1. The Financial Filing Data

According to the Prior Park Educational Trust consolidated accounts filed with the Charity Commission (Charity No. 281242), the school relies entirely on a tuition-fee-driven business model without major independent endowments. The official student census records submitted to the Independent Schools Council (ISC) confirm that 80% of the families who chose to send their children to Prior Park and fully paying these tuition fees are non-Catholic.

2. The Canon Law Mandate

Under the strict framework enforced by the Catholic structural authorities (the Catholic Schools Inspectorate and the Clifton Diocese), any registered Roman Catholic school must legally mandate GCSE Theology for 100% of its students. The official letters issued by the school leadership confirm that this top-down canon law requirement was causing active friction with their 80% non-Catholic customer base, who wanted greater academic flexibility in the GCSE options. No alternative was presented by Prior Park other than full exit.

3. The Trust's Executive Move

Because a parent body holds zero executive or constitutional power under UK corporate law, the decision was a top-down legal pivot executed solely by the Board of Trustees. The Trust used the internal parent consultation data purely as commercial confirmation. It proved to the board that if they severed formal ties with the Diocese to eliminate the mandatory GCSE Theology rule and protect their inclusive campus culture, their primary paying customer base would support the decision. It must be stressed that no further research such as consultation groups with parents and other stakeholders or any further analysis was conducted to reinforce, validate or offer alternative options than the measures taken.