

## Responses to Questions about the Situation at the John Fisher School, Purley

*The Archdiocese has received enquiries about the situation at the John Fisher School, Purley. The following material has been shared in response. It was felt important that the clergy of the Archdiocese were made aware of the facts. We apologise for any inappropriate content from external sources.*

---

We write respectfully, and in a spirit of dialogue, but felt it necessary to try and explain our perspective in a little more detail. In no sense whatsoever do we write to try and discredit Mr Green.

Through concerns raised, the Archdiocese was made aware of Mr Green's book *Noah Can't 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, and its sequel, *Noah Could Never* (2018) are published by *Scholastic Children's Books*.

We do not know if you have any religious background, but for Christians, including Catholics, the Lord's Prayer is something very precious. Sometimes also called the 'Our Father,' from its opening words, we believe it was taught by Jesus Christ to his first disciples as the pattern for all prayer. It is found in the New Testament, in the Gospel of St Matthew, chapter 6 verses 9 to 13. We would not expect someone who is not a Christian, or who is an atheist, to accept what Christians 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 upon millions of people. The Lord's Prayer forms part of Catholic worship and devotion. It is taught to children by their parents, godparents, and grandparents, as well as by staff in both Catholic and otherwise maintained schools. It also forms part of the spiritual life of a Catholic school and is something with which pupils would be familiar.

*Noah Can't Even*, chapter 13, on pages 124-125, begins like this:

"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.)

Having read the book, there is a struggle within Noah about his sexual identity and this is reflected in his interaction with others, both positively and negatively. It has been reported in the media that the book simply has a gay character and there is some ‘kissing.’ Looking at the text above, the narrative employs sexual imagery that would not be appropriate for school age pupils. In writing to you, we felt the need to put asterisks into the text. These are not present in the original.

It is hard to understand why such sexualised content and language should be intertwined with the Lord’s Prayer. To use this prayer in this way, and for this to be promoted in a Catholic school, is a source of deep disquiet. It is difficult to see how this could have been thought suitable.

It is important to record again that Mr Green’s 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.

In *Noah Could Never*, early in chapter 4, on page 35, there is the following narrative. The capitalisation is in the original.

Noah nodded and gave a polite smile. He wasn’t massively keen on the fact that Harry and Connor were still so matey with one another. How, when Harry had blatantly dumped Connor for Noah, were they still such good friends, able to exchange conversations and have a laugh? A laugh that felt like it was, quite possibly, at Noah’s expense?

Worse, Connor was positioning himself as some sort of alpha gay within the school. He’d dyed his quaffed hair peroxide blond, his trousers had got tighter, his muscles bigger, and Noah had no doubt his body hair situation would be completely in line with what the gay websites said it should be. 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. If anything did ever happen with Noah and Harry in that department, Noah was going to have to rely on playground banter, dubious websites and his book on puberty (that didn’t mention anything about being gay in it) for guidance. Some people had it so easy.

All the more reason for Harry to see that what Noah might lack in the GAY SEX KNOWLEDGE department, he more than made up for with public speaking skills. And, after all, which was more important?

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 seems clear that many who have commented on this situation have not read the material in question.

We hope there is now a time of calm and reflection. Our recent letter to parents and pupils, issued last week on 18 March, has sought to give reassurance. It is attached as an appendix. We also hope this information helps to explain a genuine matter of concern. Our priority throughout has been, and remains, the flourishing of pupils at the John Fisher School. We are continuing to work with the school moving forward.

#### **Appendix - 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.