

Fundamentalist Catholic group moves into education

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The secretive and ultra conservative Catholic organisation Opus Dei is thought to be behind the opening of a new private school in Croydon.

The Cedars School is the first senior school in the country to be based on the ethos of Opus Dei. The group says it is not funding the school, which has been founded by a group of parents, many of whom are members. The headteacher, Robert Teague, is a member of Opus Dei as is the school's chaplain.

The £3,900-a-term school will be based on the educational theories of the founder of Opus Dei [Josemaría Escrivá](#).

Mr Teague told the *Croydon Advertiser*: "The school is not run by Opus Dei but Josemaría Escrivá's ideas on family, formation and freedom are a key influence on the founders," he said. "These ideas do not impact the curriculum but do alter the 'tone' of the school... we're not a school offering its own offbeat curriculum."

The Cedars has been founded by the [PACT Educational Trust](#), which describes itself as providing "independent education with a Catholic ethos". It already runs Oakwood, a primary school in Purley which also has an Opus Dei priest.

Opus Dei claims about 85,000 followers worldwide, with a growing number in the UK. Its critics accuse it of gross misogyny, elitism, cult-like practices (including deceptive recruitment techniques) and supporting right-wing political regimes such as Franco and Pinochet.

The organisation has also been accused of controlling members and recruiting only influential people who can press forward its agenda. The former Labour politician Ruth Kelly was "outed" as a member when she was part of Tony Blair's government. The former Minister stepped down from the government following criticism for putting her religion before loyalty to party policy.

PACT had initially intended to open The Cedars as a free rather than independent school, but was put off by the "very restrictive" admissions policy that would have stopped them reserving all their places for Catholics.

"It's not so much a faith thing as trying to find families who want the same thing as we do," Mr Teague told the *Advertiser*. "Parents will be subject to a selection interview to ensure they understand the hands-on role they would be taking in their son's education."

Terry Sanderson, President of the National Secular Society, said: "So long as they are financing this themselves, there is little that can be done. But it is interesting that they had considered applying for free school status. I wonder how long it will be before an application finds its way on to Mr Gove's desk?"

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