

Kremlin Confirms Church Link With Eton Schoolboys' Meeting

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Trenton Bricken / Facebook

A recent meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and a group of Eton schoolboys was organized thanks to a Russian Orthodox priest, the Kremlin announced Thursday.

Students from the prestigious British boarding school met with Russia's head of state on Wednesday in a state room normally reserved for foreign dignitaries.

Photos on social media showed the boys shaking Putin's hand, holding a group discussion, and adopting a controversial "lads on tour" pose in the heart of the Kremlin.

Speaking on Thursday, presidential spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that Putin had found the meeting "interesting," and that "the discussion was completely open, with no agenda."

He also confirmed that the meeting had been facilitated by Russian Orthodox priest, Father Tikhon Shevkunov, who is widely rumored to be Putin's spiritual advisor. The Eton pupils had

approached Shevkunov after he gave a talk at the school, Peskov said.

Peskov would not answer questions on whether Father Tikhon was "Putin's private priest" but confirmed that the pair knew each other and that the priest took part in many of the presidential administration's projects.

Eton student David Wei later wrote on Facebook that the meeting had required him to send "1040 emails over 10 months" and caused "paranoia and countless sleepless nights," British newspaper The Guardian reported.

Wei also said that the arduous organization for the meeting had been worth it and that the boys had "given a genuine impression of themselves" to which Putin had "shown his human face."

Eton College, an institution which charges annual fees of almost \$50,000, has distanced itself from the meeting. "This was a private visit by a small group of boys, organized entirely at their own initiative and independently of the college," a spokesperson said.

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