

Church takeover of community school blocked by local authority

Posted: Mon, 23rd Dec 2013

Plans to convert a Suffolk community school to a Church of England voluntary aided school have been blocked by Suffolk County Council after a consultation process failed to demonstrate sufficient demand for a school with a religious character.

Suffolk County Council had intended to close Dell Primary community school on 31 December 2013 and reopen it as a new Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School on 1 January 2014.

However, just 12 days before the planned closure, Suffolk County Council withdrew its support and announced it had decided to refuse the proposal.

The move follows an intervention from the National Secular Society, which, in a formal submission to the council, argued that rather than increasing the denominational provision in the area, there was a need for the local authority to maintain existing community school provision.

The NSS submission also argued that the consultation process had failed to properly inform parents of a number of significant implications of converting the status of the school – in clear contravention of official guidance on school closures.

Suffolk launched a consultation in June in order to facilitate the school's governors wish to change the status of the school. The school governor at Dell Primary, appointed by the local authority, is also the local vicar, and the consultation process was organised by the Diocese of Norwich Board of Education.

In its rationale for wishing to convert the school, the Diocese said creating a school with a religious character would "enhance pupils' awareness and understanding of contemporary issues of faith, creed, culture and religion, and associate attitudes to tolerance, respect and commonly-shared values."

Stephen Evans, campaigns manager at the National Secular Society, welcomed the decision to block the plans. He said: "This self-serving proposal appeared to be motivated by the Church's desire to influence and inculcate children, rather than meeting the needs of local pupils, parents or the wider community.

"The overwhelmingly majority of parents don't want religious schools, they simply want good local schools with high academic standards. Where faith schools are proposed it is vital that the local community is properly informed about the implications, particularly the key aspects of ethos, admissions and employment. In this case the local authority failed to ensure this."

A spokesman for Suffolk County Council said: "Whilst there is no objection in principle to the school changing status from community to voluntary aided, in this case the demand from the community for voluntary aided schools places has not been demonstrated. Therefore the decision is to refuse the proposed conversion at this time.

"Should the governors and diocese wish to bring forward proposals again after showing there is demand for voluntary aided school places in the community, we will of course consider the proposal again."

- [Share on What's App](#)
- [Share on Facebook](#)
- [Share on Twitter](#)
- [Share on Email](#)
- [Subscribe to RSS Feed](#)

Tags: [Faith schools](#)

Related Campaigns

-

[**No more faith schools**](#)

We need inclusive schools free from religious discrimination, privilege or control.

[Read More](#)

Related Articles

[**Faith school takeover proceeds despite overwhelming opposition**](#)

NSS: Governors 'concealing' strength of feeling against Church of England ethos. [Read More »](#)

[**NSS announces major conference on protecting liberal values**](#)

Kenan Malik, Joan Smith and more speaking at NSS Secularism 2024 conference in London. [Read More »](#)

[**Allowing more religious selection in schools would be a big mistake**](#)

Abandoning the 50% admission cap would exacerbate the discrimination, disadvantage and division inherent with faith schools, argues Stephen Evans. [Read More »](#)

NSS joins open letter against faith school discrimination

Education experts, politicians, religious leaders and public figures unite to call on Education Secretary to keep the faith school admissions cap. [Read More »](#)

Faith school found inadequate for ten years fails inspection again

Jewish school where teachers slapped children criticised for poor secular education in latest inspection. [Read More »](#)