

Church of England bids to open school on major new housing development

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The Church of England is bidding to run the first primary school which will be built on a major new housing development in Kettering.

It is proposed that 5000 new homes will be built on the East Kettering development where it is anticipated that at least three new primary schools will be required.

The Church of England is preparing a bid to run the first primary school, which is scheduled to open within the next couple of years.

The Diocese of Peterborough, in partnership with local churches, is proposing that this school should be a Church of England Voluntary Aided (VA) School.

Voluntary Aided church schools are their own admissions authority and are allowed to select or discriminate against prospective pupils on religious grounds if oversubscribed. In addition, the governing body employs the staff and can apply a religious test when recruiting teachers. Voluntary Aided faith schools are also free to devise their own religious education syllabus rather than follow the locally agreed syllabus.

The Diocese of Peterborough say the proposed school would be open to all pupils living on the estate, regardless of whether their family had a church or faith background or not. It insists the schools will be inclusive and teach the locally agreed syllabus for RE.

The Diocese says the schools will be founded on values, such as respect, compassion, service, friendship and justice, which it describes as "Christian values".

Stephen Evans, campaigns manager at the National Secular Society, commented: "Schools intended to serve the whole community should not have a distinctive religious ethos. However 'inclusive' church schools claim to be, the fact remains that an education provided in a Christian context will not be appropriate for many within the community.

"With dwindling congregations, the Church knows that its involvement in schools is the only way for it to appear relevant to children and their families. The local authority should bear in mind that schools are there to serve the local community, not vested interests."

The Diocese anticipates making a formal application to Northamptonshire County Council in late April. It is seeking the views of all interested parties via an [online survey](#). Public meetings to discuss the proposal will be held on Tuesday 1 April.

Meanwhile, the Bishop of Ely, Rt Revd Stephen Conway, is reported to have been so upset that the Church was not selected to take control of a new primary school located on another major housing development in Ely, that he telephoned education minister, Lord Nash, to complain.

According to [local reports](#), the bishop said he told the minister that "he ought to be supporting us in our ambition to make a difference". As a result of his call, the bishop was invited to London to meet

the minister and Theodore Agnew, a Government advisor on academies.

The Bishop said: "I believe passionately that we should rejoice in the church's engagement in education as we know it since the early nineteenth century and in other patterns like the monastery schools for fifteen hundred years."

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