

Church academy chain to close only secular school

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A Church of England multi-academy trust is set to close the only non-faith school under its control.

The Diocese of Ely Multi-Academy Trust (DEMAT) has 22 schools in Norfolk, including a single community school, the Ten Mile Bank Riverside Academy.

The trust has proposed closing the Academy, meaning pupils from the community school will have to move to a Church of England VC school which is 2 miles away and would involve a walk along the A10.

The nearest non-religious community school is 6 miles away and parents are said to be "up in arms" about the planned closure.

Campaigners trying to save the school told the [local paper](#) that "Many people believe that Ten Mile Bank is being threatened with closure because it is a non-faith school – it's the only school in DEMAT's history which is not a faith school."

Ryan Coogan, who chairs a group trying to save the academy, said that "In the last Ofsted inspection this was found to be a 'good' school, children are being turned away from the school as their parents have been told it's over-populated, and as far as we know there are no financial issues."

Stephen Evans, campaigns director of the National Secular Society, said of the plans: "People living in rural areas already face some of the biggest difficulties in finding a secular education for their children.

"No local community wants to lose its school, but where schools need to be consolidated or small schools closed preserving the provision of secular schools should be the priority. Secular schools are appropriate for all pupils, irrespective of their faith or non-faith backgrounds, and the provision of these inclusive schools should be protected.

"Where this process is led by religiously motivated academy trusts rather than local communities, there is a real democratic deficit – with local people left out of the decision making. This episode shows that religious academy trusts can be expected to have very little interest in protecting the ethos of non-religious schools which fall under religious control."

A consultation is now being held on the proposals.

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