

NSS urges council not to replace community school with faith school

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The National Secular Society has warned Surrey County Council that its plan to turn a community school into a faith school would disadvantage non-Anglican families.

Surrey County Council, in partnership with the Diocese of Guildford, is [proposing](#) to open a new school by amalgamating two schools. Christ Church C of E Infant School and Englefield Green Infant School would be amalgamated into a single voluntary aided Church of England school on the Englefield Green site.

Englefield Green is the larger and more modern of the two schools.

Christ Church C of E Infant School and Englefield Green Infant School have experienced a decline in admissions in recent years. The council argues that keeping both schools open with surplus places is financially unsustainable.

In [response](#) to a public consultation the NSS has argued that "the most logical and equitable solution" would be to close Christ Church C of E Infant School and re-locate its pupils to Englefield Green Infant School without re-opening it as a voluntary aided faith school.

The NSS said the plan would unfairly disadvantage non-religious families and those of other faiths other than Anglican. It would leave parents who are not Anglican with little or no option than to send their child to an Anglican school, it said.

It also said the diocese's assertion that church schools are "not faith schools" was "misleading" and an "attempt to avoid association with the unpopularity of faith-based schooling".

The NSS argued that Surrey's school reorganisation plans should take into account the long-established demographic shift away from Church of England affiliation and respond accordingly. Just seven families chose Christ Church C of E Infant School for the 2019/2020 intake, suggesting few parents in the area specifically want a Church of England school.

NSS chief executive Stephen Evans said: "Clearly the council should reconsider this proposal and seek ways to reorganise education in the area without expanding faith-based provision.

"The council hasn't demonstrated any specific demand for Anglican faith school places and has provided no convincing rationale for wanting to expand them. The proposal serves the Church of England but fails Surrey residents.

"Given the dramatic shift away from Christianity, particularly amongst young people and those of parental age, it is utterly misguided to expand church school provision at the expense of community schools. The council should think again."

Notes:

- Only 12% of British people identify as Anglican – including just 1% of people aged 18-24. The population of Englefield Green area is significantly younger than the average for England and Wales and southeastern England, with 42% of residents being aged 18-29.
- The proposal says the new faith school will have the same admissions criteria as Englefield Green Infant School for September 2021. But as a VA faith school, in the future it could choose to select 100% of its pupils based on the religion of their parents, prioritising Anglican church-goers above other pupils when oversubscribed.
- Both Christ Church C of E Infant School and St Jude's C of E Junior School (which the proposal says would "work closely" with the new faith school) both operate discriminatory admission policies.

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