

## **Consultation Response Form**

### **Proposal to amalgamate Christ Church C of E Infant School and Englefield Green Infant School and Nurseries**

Please give us your views. Please tick the box that best shows what you think of the following questions and also give us any comments you have. You can write on the other side of this sheet if you want more space to write comments:

1. Do you agree with the proposal to open a new school by amalgamating Christ Church C of E Infant School and Englefield Green Infant School and Nurseries?

Agree

Don't know

**Disagree**

Comments:

We strongly disagree with the proposal to open a new Church of England school by amalgamating Christ Church C of E school (which has a designated religious character) and Englefield Green Infant School (which does not). While we recognise that both schools have 'experienced a decline in admissions' which necessitates that action is taken to ensure there is not a financially unsustainable surplus of infant school places in Virginia Water, the consultation document does not adequately explain why the proposed school will take on a Christian character rather than having a community ethos.

The proposal is particularly perplexing given that Englefield Green, which is the larger of the two schools and admits up to 60 places in reception year (otherwise known as two-form entry), is currently operating at 67% of its full capacity (with 121 pupils) when Christ Church, a single-form entry school, has managed to fill just 59% (53) of a total of 90 places. This demonstrates that local demand for community school places is, in fact far higher than the demand for Church school places. Despite this, the proposal would see ownership of the Englefield Green site transferred over to Guildford Diocese by the Council to enable them to run a school which teaches from a Christian perspective. In other words, a public asset will be turned over to the Church to create a school which is likely to be unsuitable for many families in the local area, particularly those who are non-religious.

If the aim of the changes is to create 'one stable school' which is viable in the long term (as the consultation document claims), this is far more likely if the new amalgamated school has a fully inclusive, community ethos than if it has a religious character. Not least because, according to the most recent British Social Attitudes Survey, 61% of the

overall British population are non-Christian and 12% identify as Anglican.<sup>1</sup> Here it is worth pointing out that this represents a trend which is becoming more prevalent in younger demographics; some 78% of young people (aged 18-24) report being non-Christian and just 3% identify as Anglican.<sup>2</sup> If the new school is to maximise its chances of attracting pupils from a variety of different backgrounds, both now and in the future, it seems unlikely that it will be able to do so if Surrey Council approves a plan to create a divisive faith school over an inclusive school with a community ethos.

We are also concerned that the consultation document and associated documents gloss over the differences between voluntary aided (VA) Church schools and community schools in a manner which is potentially misleading to parents and other stakeholders. For example, the section on admissions states that the admissions policy will remain 'the same as the current admissions criteria for Englefield Green Infant School and Nurseries for September 2021' and that 'changes would be subject to the requirements of the DfE's Admissions Code'. However, it fails to mention that this could mean that, in the future, the school would be permitted to exercise a legal right to select pupils by faith background. A practice which there is a great deal of robust evidence to demonstrate leads to segregation not only by religion, but also by ethnicity and socioeconomic background.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, the document implies that staff pay and conditions from the existing schools will transfer to the new school, but says nothing of the fact that, as a VA school with a religious character, the proposed new school will be legally able to recruit and promote new staff according to their religious backgrounds.

Finally, in the questions and answers document provided alongside the consultation document, the difference between the RE curriculum in mainstream schools without religious character and RE in church schools is minimised. It claims that 'church school do not seek to convert children to Christianity' and that 'pupils are taught what people of different religions and beliefs believe' but does not make it clear that, according to the Guildford Diocesan Guidelines for RE, the latter will only comprise 20% of the RE curriculum in Key Stage 1<sup>4</sup> and is barely mentioned at all in the compulsory units for the Foundation Stage.<sup>5</sup> In other words, the subject will be taught predominantly from a Christian perspective in a manner which largely assumes religious belief and many parents will not regard as 'objective, critical and pluralistic'.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://humanism.org.uk/2019/07/11/latest-british-social-attitudes-survey-shows-continuing-rise-of-the-non-religious/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://humanism.org.uk/2017/09/04/latest-british-social-attitudes-reveals-71-of-young-adults-are-non-religious-just-3-are-church-of-england/>

<sup>3</sup> For an overview see <http://accordcoalition.org.uk/research/> and <http://fairadmissions.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/2017-08-29-FINAL-Religious-Selection-Research-Survey.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cofeguildford.org.uk/DownloadHelper.aspx?resourceID=9154624c-9004-6456-ad78-ff0000437928&docID=8d54624c-9004-6456-ad78-ff0000437928>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cofeguildford.org.uk/DownloadHelper.aspx?resourceID=7654624c-9004-6456-ad78-ff0000437928&docID=7154624c-9004-6456-ad78-ff0000437928>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/r-fox-v-ssfe.pdf>

The fact that Englefield Green is currently 'affiliated with the Diocese and has a strong relationship with the local voluntary aided Junior School, St Jude's C of E Junior School' should not be treated as a reason why the amalgamation should result in the creation of a new VA church school. Affiliation is an informal arrangement that, according to the Diocese of Guildford's own guidelines is not supposed to enable the Church to exert additional powers over schools that do not have a religious character.

When closures are required, it is important that the schools that remain are able to meet the needs of all pupils equally. For this reason, we would strongly urge Surrey County Council to rethink this proposal and commit instead to supporting a new school that is open, inclusive, and suitable for all children regardless of their parents' background or beliefs.

Please tick all the boxes that apply to you:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| A parent/carer of a child at Christ Church C of E School                    |  |
| A parent/carer of a child at Englefield Green Infant School and Nurseries   |  |
| A parent/carer of a child in an Early Years setting                         |  |
| A parent/carer of a child who may in future attend the school/s             |  |
| A parent/carer of a child at another local school                           |  |
| Someone who works at Christ Church C of E School                            |  |
| Someone who works at Englefield Green Infant School and Nurseries           |  |
| A Governor of Christ Church C of E Infant School                            |  |
| A Governor of Englefield Green Infant School and Nurseries                  |  |
| Other link to Christ Church C of E Infant School (Please specify)           |  |
| Other link to Englefield Green Infant School and Nurseries (Please specify) |  |

Someone else with an interest – please give details:

## ABOUT HUMANISTS UK

At Humanists UK, we want a tolerant world where rational thinking and kindness prevail. We work to support lasting change for a better society, championing ideas for the one life we have. Our work helps people be happier and more fulfilled, and by bringing non-religious people together we help them develop their own views and an understanding of the world around them. Founded in 1896, we are trusted to promote humanism by over 85,000 members and supporters and over 100 members of the All Party Parliamentary Humanist Group. Through our ceremonies, pastoral support,

education services, and campaigning work, we advance free thinking and freedom of choice so everyone can live in a fair and equal society.

We have a long history of work in education, children's rights and equality, with expertise in the 'religion or belief' strand. We have been involved in policy development around the school and the curriculum for over 60 years. We also provide materials and advice to parents, governors, students, teachers and academics, for example through our Understanding Humanism website (<https://understandinghumanism.org.uk/>) and our school speakers programme. We have made detailed responses to all recent Government consultations on education and reviews of the school curriculum, and submit memoranda of evidence to MPs, civil servants, and parliamentary select committees on a range of education issues.

We are an active member of many organisations working in education in the UK, including the Religious Education Council for England and Wales (REC), of which we are a founding member, and our Chief Executive is the Treasurer, the Sex Education Forum (which for many recent years our Education Campaigns Manager was on the steering group of), the PSHE Association, and the Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE). We have been on all UK government steering groups that have reviewed RE in recent years.

Our primary interests in education relate to issues surrounding the curriculum (in particular RE, PSE/RSE, citizenship, and science), collective worship/school assemblies, and state-funded religious schools.

It would also be helpful if you could give your postcode: EC1V 8BB

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