

Hampton Water

No More Faith Schools local campaign briefing November 2019

Background:

What are the proposals?

- Peterborough City Council is soon to consider a proposed new voluntary aided faith school “[Hampton Water Roman Catholic VA School](#)” on the Hampton Water development in the east of the city.
- The decision is opposed by residents, a variety of inclusive school campaigners and the [Hampton Academies Trust](#), an established local multi-academy trust which wishes to open a non-selective community ethos academy on the site.

Who are we?

- [No More Faith Schools](#) is a national campaign coordinated by the [National Secular Society](#), with supporters from a broad social, political and religious spectrum. We're dedicated to an end to state funded faith schools. We would like all schools to have an inclusive community ethos, free from any religious discrimination, privilege or control.
- We're supporting local residents opposed to the plans who want an inclusive school which will serve the whole of the diverse and growing community of Hampton Water.

What is a voluntary aided (VA) faith school?

- A VA faith school has a formal religious designation and the ability to both discriminate on the basis of that religion and promote it through the curriculum and other activities.
- The school acts as its own admissions authority and can select pupils on the basis of faith when oversubscribed. VA schools can also appoint, promote or retain teachers on religious grounds. The religious foundation will appoint a majority of governors based on their ability to promote the school's religious ethos.
- Religious education will be denominational (taught from a religious perspective) and inspected by a religious body. Religious body will also inspect worship and all aspects of the school to ensure they are promoting a rigorous religious ethos.
- Relationships and sex education (RSE) will also be taught from a religious perspective.

What is a community ethos school?

- A community school is the typical 'non faith' or mixed local school most people are familiar with. They don't select any pupils or teachers on religious grounds, and they teach a broad locally agreed RE syllabus.
- Such schools have a community ethos based around inclusion and welcoming everyone from the community, rather than one based on a formal religious ethos or designation.
- Community schools that convert to be academies (or new academies without a religious designation or ethos) retain this community school ethos.

How did these proposals come about?

- Since 2010, the Catholic Education Service and [Catholic Diocese of East Anglia](#) have opted not to engage with the Department for Education (DfE)'s new academies programme. The single reason for this was that new academies if oversubscribed were required to have at least 50% open admissions (i.e. pupils of all faiths and none were able to apply for 50% of places). This looked set to change in 2017 when the Conservative Party manifesto promised to allow new faith based academies to select up to 100% of their pupils based on faith.
- However following our campaigning and unprecedented opposition from [across the political and religious spectrum](#) the DfE [abandoned](#) the policy for fully religiously selective academies and [committed](#) instead to funding new VA (voluntary aided) faith schools.
- These proposals were in turn so unpopular that only fourteen were published in the initial round, of which only the Hampton Water proposal is currently moving forward.

What is the Council's role?

What decision does the Council have to take?

- The DfE has approved the VA school proposals in principle. This is not a final determination. In the final stage the Council must decide how the proposal fits its duty to ensure adequate school provision, value for money and "integration and community cohesion objectives".

When will they make it?

- Between 9 September and 20 October 2019 the Catholic Diocese of East Anglia conducted its own '[consultation](#)'. This stage serves as publicity exercise and opportunity to gather evidence in support of the proposal. It does not represent public opinion or compare the option of a faith school with that of a community ethos academy.
- On Thursday 21 November, a formal statutory notice was published detailing the final proposal for the school. This triggered a four week 'representation period' – a consultation run by the local authority where local people can raise their objections. This closes on Thursday 19 December 2019.
- The council will review responses and announce its decision by the end of February 2020.

Why oppose the school?

The representation period should be a time for all advocates of inclusive education to raise their objections to these proposals.

- The DfE's [own equality impact assessment](#) acknowledges that this school will be **bad for families and teachers who do not share the faith of the school and risk harms to community cohesion**. This is because Catholic VA schools can practice up to 100% religious selection in admissions, teach denominational RE and faith based sex education. On a plain reading of the School Standards and Framework Act they can religiously discriminate in the appointment, remuneration, promotion, discipline and dismissal of any teacher. In practice, such discrimination is usually restricted to senior and/or RE teachers.
- Discriminatory faith schools are unpopular. In a 2016 [Populus poll](#) a majority of all religion and belief groups (including 63% of Catholics) opposed religious selection of pupils. In a 2018 poll by Censuwide, just 17% of respondents said they agreed with the statement: "Publicly funded schools should be able to select pupils on the grounds of their religious beliefs".
- There is almost nothing to hold the school accountable for commitments or platitudes about inclusion of (any) pupils of other faiths/no faith. They will be subject to state subsidised inspections

by the Diocese to ensure they are promoting a rigorous religious ethos. Ofsted no longer inspect schools' promotion of community cohesion and will not inspect the school's denominational religious education.

Open admissions?

- Following criticism, the Diocese have agreed to have 20% of their admissions open in the first year (they could change this in future). However, the admissions policy still has up to 80% of places based on religion and sends a message of exclusion and exclusivity:

"As a Catholic school, we aim to provide a Catholic education for all our pupils. At a Catholic school, Catholic doctrine and practice permeate every aspect of the school's activity. It is essential that the Catholic character of the school's education be fully supported by all families in the school. We therefore hope that all parents will give their full, unreserved and positive support for the aims and ethos of the school."

- The proposal is clear that "The Catholic ethos will permeate all areas of the curriculum and underpin the school's work and objectives." And that children from other faith backgrounds are welcome only if they "respect the values of a Catholic education".

Funding

- 100% of running costs for the school will be paid by taxpayers. 90% of capital costs will come from the DfE (Department for Education). The remaining 10% of capital costs for setting up the school will come from a Section 106 agreement (an agreement between the council and a housing developer, where the developer agrees to provide a community asset in return for planning permission). This means that effectively 100% of the schools initial capital and running costs will come from public sources, but the dioceses will own it.

Alternatives

There is a very viable alternative

- Hampton Academies Trust (HAT) is an established local academy group who already run four schools in the area. All are inclusive without a specific religious ethos. It [opposes](#) the plans for the faith school and has put forward their alternative proposals as part of the government's free school programme. These proposals are on hold while the VA school is considered.
- HAT opposes the plans because: (1) "the school will not meet public need / local demand"; (2) "true community cohesion happens when people come together"; and (3) they will have an "adverse impact on families and the environment".

What about other alternatives to a faith school?

- The Council has a legal duty to identify new school need and there is clearly need for a school in the area. If the faith school proposal is unsuccessful and the HAT alternative were for some reason also not to get the green light, then the council would need to run what's called a 'presumption competition' inviting proposals for new academies to meet this need. When publishing the specification the local authority can stipulate that it is seeking an inclusive school without a specific religious ethos.
- If an alternative proposal to meet need for school places is published, the Council must consider it.

Take action

How we can win this campaign

There is a very strong principled and practical case against this faith school. If the Council is willing to listen and if we take action together, then this is a very winnable campaign. If you live in the area and are opposed to the plans (or are a national group who support inclusive education), the No More Faith Schools campaign is here to help.

- Please visit our [dedicated Hampton Water campaign page](#) to be kept up to date and join our local petition. This needs to be shared to inform other local residents. The petition will help gather quotes, comments and evidence of local feeling.
- We will be holding a public meeting in the first week of November (details TBC).
- When the local authority consultation opens, we will be providing information and advice to encourage supporters to respond.
- We are also encouraging people to support the national petition and No More Faith Schools campaign and write to their MPs and local representatives using our template letters.
- There will be leaflets and posters available.

For more information:

- Please contact Alastair Lichten – head of education at the NSS, and coordinator of the No More Faith Schools campaign – via alastair.lichten@secularism.org.uk or 020 7404 3126.