

This report has been prepared by His Majesty's Inspectors of Education and Training in Wales.

Under the terms of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and its associated Code, proposers are required to send consultation documents to Estyn. However, Estyn is not a body which is required to act in accordance with the Code and the Act places no statutory requirements on Estyn in respect of school organisation matters. Therefore, as a body being consulted, Estyn will provide their opinion only on the overall merits of school organisation proposals. Estyn has considered the educational aspects of the proposal and has produced the following response to the information provided by the proposer.

The proposal is to discontinue Cilgerran Church in Wales Voluntary Controlled Primary School on 31st August 2026, and to establish the same as a 3-11 community school from 1st September 2026.

Summary / Conclusion

Estyn considers that the proposal is likely to, at least, maintain the standard of education provision in the area.

Description and benefits

The local authority has set out a clear rationale for its proposal. This identifies plainly and fairly the expected benefits and disadvantages when compared with the status quo and how they will manage any risk.

Cilgerran Church in Wales VC Primary School (hereafter referred to as Cilgerran VC School) is identified in the School Organisation Code as a rural school. While the proposal involves closure of the school on 31st August 2026, this is a technical measure required to remove its voluntary controlled status, with a view to reopening as a community school on 1st September 2026. For this reason, the proposal does not address the additional procedural requirements that are to be considered when formulating a proposal for the closure of a rural school.

The local authority provides a clear description of the proposal and a projected timetable for statutory procedures, and for its implementation. The local authority has provided a Welsh language Impact Assessment and a Community Impact Assessment as part of its proposal.

Cilgerran VC School is a 3-11 Welsh medium primary school maintained by Pembrokeshire County Council under the voluntary control of St David's Diocese. It is one of 7 primary schools in the Preseli cluster and the only one with a Christian foundation. The proposal identifies a steady, but modest, decline in pupil numbers at

Cilgerran VC School over the last four years, resulting in 21% surplus places in December 2025. Projections of pupil numbers based on PLASC data show that this surplus is likely to increase slowly to 32% by 2030. The proposal also highlights that the overall proportion of surplus places across the 7 primary schools in the Preseli cluster, of which Cilgerran VC School is a part, was 34.07% in 2025.

The Council rightly recognises that its proposal will not reduce the number of surplus places at the school or across the cluster. However, the proposer argues, not unreasonably, that given the rising trend in surplus places, the long-term sustainability of individual schools may be enhanced by potential future federation between schools. In particular, the proposal identifies that future opportunities to federate may enable schools to pool resources and benefit from economies of scale. The proposal also suggests, fairly, that such an arrangement may provide a significant benefit to the recruitment of headteachers at a point when senior leadership roles in small schools become vacant.

Because voluntary controlled faith schools can only federate with schools of the same category, the proposal identifies that Cilgerran VC School would need to change to community school status for any potential future federation with other local schools to occur.

The proposal outlines that there is no anticipated financial saving for the local authority as a result of the change in status. Importantly, however, the proposal does not identify whether the school currently benefits from additional financial support through the Church in Wales as a result of its VC status and what impact, if any, there may be on the school's overall finances as a result of the proposed change.

The proposal acknowledges that, whilst the school is maintained by the local authority, ownership of the school site rests with the St David's Diocesan Board of Finance. The proposer states that negotiation would be required to transfer ownership to the Council should approval be given to secure community school status. The document does not appear to anticipate any financial costs associated with future transfer of ownership arrangements and provides no further detail.

The local authority sets out two possible options in its proposal, one of which is to maintain the status quo. The proposer has considered the likely impact of each on the quality and standards of education, the local community and travel arrangements. The proposal sets out suitable reasons for rejecting the viability of maintaining the status quo. The proposer's principal reason for discounting this option is that it does not enable any future federation opportunities to improve long-term sustainability. In its FAQs, the proposal considers and rejects the possibility of changing the status of other local schools to VC to enable potential federation with Cilgerran VC School. This on the grounds that it would require changing the status of

several community schools to VC schools, whereas the proposal only requires a change of status to one school to enable future federation opportunities in the area.

The proposer has considered the impact of the changes on learner travel arrangements. Given that the school will remain at its current location, there are no changes anticipated which will affect pupils' existing eligibility for school transport or impact on their use of walking and cycling routes to school. However, there is no alternative faith provision in the local area, with the nearest Welsh medium VC school being 23 miles away. The proposal recognises that parents and carers who wish their child / children to continue to receive an education at a Church in Wales faith school, will be impacted by this proposal and that pupils would not be eligible for school transport to the nearest alternative Welsh medium VC school. There are no proposed measures to mitigate this impact.

Given the nature of the proposal, there are no anticipated changes to admission arrangements, staffing or to any associated facilities or services connected with the school. This includes the Mudiad Meithrin which would continue to offer provision for 2-year-olds in the Early Years Centre on the school site should the proposal be implemented.

The proposal acknowledges that it may not meet the wishes of all parents, carers or community members who want to see the school's VC status retained. It recognises, in addition, that the removal of VC status would have a negative impact on the protected characteristic of Religion and Belief. The council proposes to mitigate any negative impact by responding fully to concerns raised through the consultation process.

As part of the proposal for the discontinuation of Cilgerran VC school, and establishment of the same as a community school, the school's governing body would cease on discontinuation, and a new governing body would be established for the community school (and constituted in accordance with the Education Act 2002). The key difference being that there would be no Foundation Governors (responsible for representing the Church in Wales) on the Governing Body for the community school. However, the proposal identifies that there would be an opportunity for existing governors (before the change of status) to seek to be reappointed on the new board.

The proposal assumes, reasonably, that the planned change in school status will have a neutral impact on the Welsh language. The school would remain a category 3 Welsh medium school, with language provision continuing to support the objectives in the local authority's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP). It is possible that some pupils may choose to transfer to other local schools, all of which also provide education through the medium of Welsh.

Educational aspects of the proposal

The local authority gives appropriate consideration in its proposal to the impact of the change on the quality and standards in education. For example, it evidences the school's most recent Estyn inspection report (October 2017) and a recent evaluation by the school's Improvement Adviser that identifies the school's main strengths and areas for development. Given that teaching and leadership are not affected by the planned change, the proposal concludes, fairly, that neither the progress made by pupils, including those eligible for free school meals and those with additional learning needs, nor their well-being and attitudes to learning will be materially affected as a result of a change of status.

The proposal does not provide information on the school's most recent Church in Wales section 50 inspection or consider any alterations in the school's practice or curriculum that may result from the change. For example, discontinuation of the school's VC status would remove the need for the school to uphold a distinctive Christian character. However, the school would continue to be required to provide a holistic education, including through delivery of mandatory aspects of Curriculum for Wales such as the provision for educating pupils about religion, values and ethics and the requirement to hold daily acts of worship that must be wholly or mainly of a broad Christian character.