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Ysgrifennydd yr Esgobaeth **Howard Llewellyn**



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Howard Llewellyn Diocesan Secretary

29 January 2026
Mr Steven Richards-Downes
Director for Education
Pembrokeshire County Council

By email only: Steven.Richards-Downes@pembrokeshire.gov.uk

Dear Mr Richards-Downes

Proposal To Discontinue Cilgerran Church in Wales Voluntary Controlled School and to establish a new 3-11 Community Primary School in Cilgerran

We write further to your letter dated 21st July 2025.

As the appropriate religious body, the Diocese of St Davids formally objects to this proposal. While we wish to work collaboratively with the local authorities and in particular Pembrokeshire County Council (PCC), this specific proposal is fundamentally flawed due to insurmountable legal barriers regarding land tenure, as well as significant educational and community disadvantages.

Our objection is based on the following points:

1. Legal and equitable title issues

The proposal assumes that if the VC school closes, PCC can simply negotiate a lease (or occupation) with the Diocesan Board of Finance to use the building as a Community Primary School. We are firmly advised this is a legal impossibility. The school site is held in trust for the specific purpose of providing education in accordance with the principles of the Church in Wales. We are advised that the site is subject to the School Sites Act 1841 and the Reverter of Sites Act 1987. If the Voluntary Controlled school is discontinued, the specific purpose of the trust fails. Consequently, the Diocese would not have automatic right to grant a lease to the Council.

PCC's "Risk and Countermeasures" section entirely fails to address this. If you proceed with the closure, you risk creating a new Community School with no legal right to occupy the premises. The Diocese cannot sanction a breach of its own trust deeds to accommodate a non-religious school.

2. Erosion of parental choice and statutory rights

The proposal claims no learner will need to move. However, by removing the religious character of the school, you are fundamentally changing the nature of the education provided. The nearest alternative faith-based provision is Ysgol Ger Y Llan VC, located over 23 miles away (approximately 45 minute journey).

Religion is a protected characteristic. Removing the only faith-based provision in the catchment severely disadvantages families who prioritise this ethos. Further, it is unreasonable to expect families to travel 23 miles to exercise their right to faith-based education.

Additionally, this will inevitably lead to increased school transport costs for PCC.

3. Procedural unfairness

The stated rationale for removing the VC status is to facilitate a future federation. However, the proposal fails to identify which schools would form this federation. It is impossible for stakeholders to provide an informed response to a consultation when the ultimate destination (the federation partner) is unknown. Therefore, the argument that VC status "must" be removed to allow federation is unproven and premature. It is also counter to previous federations of schools with VC status - whereby the VC status has remained i.e. **Gelliswick VC, Penrhyn VC, Tenby VC**. This is the most sensible model to adopt in the case of Cilgerran, particularly for the reasons set out below. The community have demonstrated a desire to maintain faith-based education in the area, and it is the wish of both the school and the diocese that faith-based education remain. It would be undemocratic to remove this status. Given we live in a democratic society, and Pembrokeshire County Council operates for the benefit of the society and for those residents in Cilgerran, it would be, clearly, undemocratic to remove this status.

The removal of the Voluntary Controlled status from Cilgerran VC School will not improve outcomes for learners. The school is performing well with a strong Estyn report. This recommendation will not add value to learning and teaching or standards. It disadvantages families who value a faith-based education for their children by removing it from them.

Lastly, Cilgerran VC School has a pupil capacity of 133 learners. There are currently 105 learners registered at the school. As the learner numbers at Cilgerran are forecast to remain relatively stable the proposal does not address the issue of surplus places at the school.

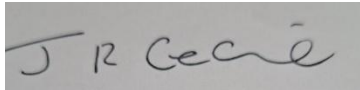
There is a viable alternative, namely following the precedent for merging schools under the voluntary controlled status, rather than removing that status. This solves the impasse of the trust and would achieve PCC's goal of streaming school structures.

In conclusion, Cilgerran VC School is a high-performing school with a strong Estyn report. There is no educational or financial logic in closing it to simply reopen it as a community school, particularly when doing so triggers a legal mechanism that strips the Council of the use of the building.

We urge the Cabinet to withdraw this proposal immediately to avoid a costly legal impasse regarding the site ownership. We remain open to discussing a federation model that protects the VC status.

On behalf of the Diocese of St Davids, I thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in black ink. The signature appears to be 'J R Cecil'.

Rev Canon John Cecil
Diocesan Director of Education, The Diocese of St Davids