

**Pembrokeshire County Council
Cyngor Sir Penfro**



EDUCATION DIRECTORATE

**Proposal for the Discontinuation of Cilgerran
Church in Wales Voluntary Controlled School
and establishment of the same as a 3 – 11
Community School**

OBJECTION REPORT

**Steven Richards-Downes
Director of Education**

October 2026

Published by:

**Pembrokeshire County Council
Education Directorate
County Hall
Haverfordwest
SA61 1TP**

October 2026

For a copy of this publication in Braille, in larger print or audio tape, or an alternative language, please contact Pembrokeshire County Council on 01437 776613

Foreword

Pembrokeshire County Council is responsible for promoting high educational standards and for delivering efficient primary and secondary education. Having the right schools in the right places and ensuring that they are fit for the 21st century learner is considered central to this and is a challenge facing councils across Wales.

Meeting this challenge involves reviewing the number and type of school the Council has in its area and assessing whether best use is being made of these schools to deliver effective education to meet the needs and aspirations of learners in Pembrokeshire.

The Council reviews its provision based on:

- Quality and future sustainability of educational provision
- Sufficiency and accessibility of school places
- The condition, suitability and standard of school buildings
- Value for money.

The Statutory Notice to discontinue Cilgerran Church in Wales Voluntary Controlled School and to establish the same as a 3 – 11 Community School was published on 24th June 2026 and resulted in 91 objections.

This Objection Report is published under Section 49 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 which states that proposers must publish a summary of the statutory objections and the proposer's response to those objections.

Steven Richards-Downes
Director of Education

1. Introduction

Pembrokeshire County Council undertook a statutory consultation between 16 December 2025 and 30 January 2026, with a proposal to discontinue Cilgerran Church in Wales Voluntary Controlled School and to establish the same as a 3 -11 Community School.

Subsequently, the Consultation report was considered by the County Council at its meeting of 14 May. The decision of Council was as follows;

That the Director of Education be authorised to publish a Statutory Notice to discontinue Cilgerran Church in Wales Voluntary Controlled School and establish the same as a 3-11 Community School.

A Statutory Notice was subsequently published on 24th June 2026 in accordance with the School Organisation Code. The statutory objection period for the notice ended on 21st July 2026. 91 objections were received.

This document represents the County Councils responsibility as part of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 to publish an Objection Report and provides:

- A summary of the statutory objections received, and
- the Councils response to those objections

2. Distribution of Objection Report

The Governing Bodies, Parents/Carers/Guardians and Staff of:	
Cilgerran VC School	
The Governing Bodies of other schools which the proposer considers are likely to be affected by the proposals	
It is not anticipated that any other schools will be affected by these proposals	
Elected Members:	
• Paul Davies – MS Ceredigion Penfro • Claire Archibald - MS Ceredigion Penfro • Kerry Ferguson - MS Ceredigion Penfro • Rt.Hon. Elin Jones - MS Ceredigion Penfro • Paul Marr – MS Ceredigion Penfro • Anna Nicholl – MS Ceredigion Penfro • Ben Lake MP – Ceredigion Preseli	• Cllr John Davies
Relevant Town and Community Councils:	
Cilgerran Community Council	
Trades Unions:	
NEU, NASUWT, UCAC, NAHT, ASCLE, UNISON, UNITE, GMB	
Church in Wales and Roman Catholic Diocesan Authority.	
St Davids	The United Archdiocese of Cardiff-Menevia
Local Authorities	
• Carmarthenshire County Council • Ceredigion County Council	
Others	
• The Welsh Ministers, • Estyn • Dyfed Powys Police and Crime Commissioner	• The Welsh Language Commissioner • Partneriaeth – Regional Education Consortium • Hywel Dda Health Board
Independent / Voluntary Early Years / Childcare Provider	
Playgroup Settings	Childminders
• Cylch Meithrin Hermon • Cylch Meithrin Bwlychygroes • Cylch Meithrin Crymych • Meithrinfa Playdays	• MG – Blaenffos • LP – Boncath • SD – Cilgerran • FB – Cilgerran

3. Objections Received and Council response

91 objections to the proposal were received during the statutory objection period, and these are included in full at **APPENDIX 1**.

This section of the report summarises the objections to the proposal and provides a Council response to them. Many of the issues raised during the statutory objection period were also raised during the statutory consultation period. The Council has therefore considered the objections alongside the Consultation Report, Equality Impact Assessment, Community Impact Assessment and responses received from consultees.

Comments have been categorised by theme with an indication of the number of respondents who objected to the proposal on these grounds:

No	Theme	No of responses (%)
1	Loss of Faith-Based education and parental choice	75 (82%)
2	Loss of Christian ethos, values and identity	69 (76%)
3	Federation is being used as the real reason	60 (66%)
4	Lack of educational benefit	55 (60%)
5	Public opposition to the proposal ignored	50 (55%)
6	Legal issues and land ownership	45 (49%)
7	Community impact	40 (44%)
8	Impact on Welsh language and culture	30 (33%)
9	Concerns about loss of dedicated Headteacher / shared leadership	25 (27%)
10	Financial case not proven	25 (27%)
11	Impact on pupils' wellbeing	15 (16%)

NB: More than one theme was raised in each objection, which means that the total number of responses exceeds the number of objections received.

The concerns raised are outlined in greater detail in the table below, together with the Council's responses.

Objection comments	Response
Loss of faith-based education and parental choice	
This was the most frequently raised concern, with respondents stating that Cilgerran is the only Church in Wales primary school in the Preseli area and that removal of VC status would eliminate the only realistic local opportunity for families seeking faith-based education. Many objectors stated that the nearest alternative VC school is approximately 23 miles away, making it inaccessible for most families due to distance and ineligibility for school transport. Several respondents considered the proposal discriminatory against those wishing to choose a faith-based education and argued that parental choice would be significantly reduced.	The Council acknowledges that implementation of the proposal would remove the only Church in Wales school in the immediate locality and reduce local faith-school provision. The Council recognises concerns regarding travel distances to alternative faith schools. However, the proposal relates to the governance category of the school rather than the closure of educational provision, and pupils would continue to receive education locally at the proposed community school. The proposed community school would continue to deliver Religion, Values and Ethics in accordance with the Curriculum for Wales and remain an inclusive school serving all families. The Council recognises that some parents value the Church in Wales designation but considers that the long-term organisational benefits of the proposal outweigh the impact identified.
Loss of Christian ethos, values and identity	
Many respondents stated that the Christian character of the school is critical to the school's success with the church ethos embedded in the school's day-to-day culture, values, behaviour management, pastoral support and relationships. Respondents argued that the school promotes values such as compassion, kindness, respect, service, forgiveness and responsibility, and that these values would be weakened if church status were removed. Many respondents highlighted the historic partnership between the school and the church which has existed for over 180 years.	The Council acknowledges that the distinct Church in Wales governance and ethos associated with VC status could not be replicated in the same way following implementation. However, the Council does not consider that positive values such as respect, compassion, inclusion, wellbeing and community involvement are dependent upon a particular category of school. The proposed community school will continue to promote these values through its vision, curriculum and daily practice.

Objection comments	Response
Federation is being used as the real reason	
Many respondents questioned the motive behind the proposal to remove the VC status, with many respondents feeling that the proposal is the first step in preparing the school for federation. Respondents questioned why such a significant and irreversible change was needed when no federation proposal currently exists, no partner school has been identified, and no detailed plans have been published. Concerns were raised about the lack of information on future governance arrangements should the proposal go ahead.	The proposal before the Council is not a federation proposal and would not result in any immediate change to leadership arrangements. Any future proposal to federate the school would require separate consideration, consultation and approval in accordance with the relevant legislation.
Lack of educational benefit	
Many respondents highlighted that both the Council and Estyn acknowledge that the school is successful, stable and performing well. Therefore, respondents were questioning why such fundamental changes were being proposed when there was no evidence that improved outcomes would be achieved and the school is already performing well, with a successful leadership team and governance structure in place.	The Council accepts that Ysgol Cilgerran is a successful school and that the proposal is not driven by concerns regarding current educational standards. The proposal forms part of the Council's longer-term strategic planning for education provision and leadership sustainability across the area. The Council notes Estyn's view that educational standards would be maintained and considers this demonstrates that learners would not be disadvantaged by the change.
Public opposition to the proposal ignored	
Many respondents referred to the outcome of the initial consultation where approximately 97% of respondents opposed the proposal. While acknowledging that consultations are not referendums, respondents believe such overwhelming opposition should have carried greater weight in the decision-making process. Some respondents expressed concerns regarding the legitimacy of the consultation and the lack of regard for local opinion.	The Council acknowledges the considerable level of opposition expressed during both consultation and objection periods. All responses were carefully considered and have informed decision-making. However, consultation is only one element of the statutory process. Whilst the level of opposition was significant, the School Organisation Code requires the Council to consider the nature and substance of the issues raised rather than simply the number of responses received. The Council must also consider strategic educational responsibilities, legal obligations, school organisation

Objection comments	Response
	policy, equality duties and long-term sustainability when reaching a decision.
Legal issues and land ownership	
Many respondents raised concerns about the ownership of the school site, stating it is owned by the St Davids Diocesan Board of Finance rather than the Council. Respondents questioned how a successor community school could legally occupy the site if the Diocese refused consent and that these issues need to be resolved before any decision on the long-term future of the school is raised.	The Council notes concern regarding ownership of the school site and the legal position advanced by the Diocese. The Council has obtained its own legal advice regarding these matters which is set out in the report to Council.
Community impact	
A recurring theme was that Cilgerran School and St Llawddog's Church form the heart of village life. Respondents described the school as central to the community and argued that its link with the church helps to strengthen local identity and provides intergenerational links. Many feared that removing church status would weaken these long-established traditions over time.	The Council fully recognises the important role Cilgerran school plays within the local community. The proposal does not involve the closure of educational provision in the village and pupils would continue to receive their education locally. The Council believes that the school can continue to serve as a community focal point regardless of its category.
Impact on Welsh language and culture	
Many responses argued that the church contributes significantly to the use and promotion of Welsh outside the classroom. Services, concerts, assemblies and community events provide opportunities for children to use Welsh in authentic community settings. Some respondents linked the church-school relationship to the preservation of Welsh heritage and culture.	The Council acknowledges concerns regarding Welsh language use and community-based cultural activities. The proposal would not alter the school's Welsh-medium language category and Welsh would remain the principal language of teaching and learning. The Council remains committed to its Welsh in Education Strategic Plan and expects opportunities for Welsh language development to continue within the proposed school.
Concerns about loss of dedicated Headteacher / shared leadership	
Many respondents, particularly parents argue that Cilgerran's current success is closely linked to having a visible, full-time headteacher who knows every child and family. There are concerns that the proposal will lead to	The Council notes these concerns. However, the proposal does not include any changes to the current leadership arrangements at Ysgol Cilgerran, nor does it propose federation with another school. If

Objection comments	Response
the loss of a dedicated Headteacher and result in shared Headship. This, they argue, will impact greatest on safeguarding and pupils with ALN. A number of respondents expressed concern that the proposal could lead to the loss of a dedicated headteacher and the introduction of shared leadership arrangements in the future. Respondents highlighted the importance of visible and accessible leadership and considered the current leadership structure to be a key factor in the school's success.	implemented, the school would continue to operate with its own governing body and leadership structure. The Council considers concerns regarding future shared leadership arrangements to be speculative, as they do not arise directly from the proposal under consideration. Any future proposal affecting leadership structures would be subject to separate statutory processes, consultation and decision-making, and would require a full assessment of the educational and operational implications before any decision could be taken.
Financial Case not proven	
Many respondents referred to statements within the consultation document that indicated the proposal would generate no immediate financial saving. Given the potential legal costs, governance changes and land negotiations, respondents questioned whether the proposal represented value for money and if the risks with the proposal outweighed the benefits. Some suggested the changes were financially motivated despite there being no published evidence of savings.	The Council has not presented the proposal as an immediate cost-saving measure because that is not the intention of the proposal. Rather, it forms part of longer-term planning for the sustainability of the school in the context of declining pupil numbers within the Preseli area.
Impact on pupils' wellbeing	
A smaller but important group of respondents focused on pupil wellbeing. Respondents highlighted the importance of routine, familiar staff, community relationships and stable leadership, particularly for neurodiverse children and those requiring additional support. There were concerns that uncertainty and structural changes could have negative effects on pupils' wellbeing.	The Council recognises the importance of continuity and stability for all learners, particularly those with additional learning needs. The proposal would not result in pupils changing school, staff, curriculum or educational setting. The Council therefore believes that any direct impact on learner wellbeing would be minimal and that the existing pastoral care and support arrangements can continue within the proposed school structure.