

INFORMAL CONSULTATION: SCHOOL OF RELIGIOUS CHARACTER

Frequently Asked Questions

Why is the change of status to a School of Religious Character being considered?

The Governors of Crickhowell High School believe partnership with the Church in Wales, in full compliance with the new National Curriculum for Wales, is an option worthy of serious consideration in order to maintain and develop a vibrant and successful 11 to 18 age school in the Crickhowell area, with the ability to accommodate 1000-1250 students as is necessary to ensure broad provision of subject specialisms, direct management of admissions, and provide improved funding for future development. The Church in Wales has subscribed fully to the multi-faith/non-faith model defined by the Welsh Government for the establishment of schools of religious character which will teach the new Curriculum for Wales in full.

Who is leading this process?

The Governing Body. A Task and Finish Group has been set up to advise Governors, who will make decisions and recommendations as a full Governing Body. The Headteacher is a member of the Governing Body but remains neutral. The Governing Body is liaising with the Local Authority, the Church in Wales and other experts to ensure all processes are carried out in full and are legally correct.

What exactly is a School of Religious Character?

A school of religious character teaches tolerance and understanding of different religions and non-religious philosophy in line with the new National Curriculum for Wales. It is not a faith school.

Will the curriculum change?

No. If Crickhowell High School were to become a school of religious character (SoRC), the curriculum would be maintained in compliance with the National Curriculum and Education National Mission, as it is now. As part of this, all students aged 3 to 16 in Wales are taught Religious Values and Ethics (RVE) as part of the Humanities Area of Learning and Experience. RVE must be objective, critical and pluralistic both in content and how it is taught. The Curriculum and Assessment Act Wales 2021 ensures that all learners must be offered opportunities through RVE to engage with different religions and non-religious philosophical convictions, considering their own locality of Wales as well as the wider world.

Will RS be required at GCSE or A level?

Students are currently required within the Welsh curriculum to study RVE until the age of 16 and can choose to sit a short or full GCSE. This will continue under the 2021 Act when the new Qualifications Framework comes into force in 2025, with examinations in 2027.

Religious Studies will remain a subject option at A level.

Will the school remain subject to the same Estyn inspection regime?

Yes.

Will there be prayer in school?

Currently, assemblies include references to prayer under different world religions and/or consideration to atheist or agnostic viewpoints as part of our annual assembly programme, which will continue. Students will not be expected to pray unless they wish to do so privately. All religions and no religions will continue to be supported.

Will students participate in religious celebrations?

The Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE) curriculum in Wales gives the opportunity to explore and understand religious celebrations for all world religions in our pluralistic society. Through assemblies and RVE lessons, students learn about celebrations and tolerance of religious and non-religious diversity. This approach will continue.

Will there be religious symbols in school?

Only in teaching of understanding of religious symbols in RVE or where it may be directly relevant to the curriculum, such as in Art or History.

Will the application process for enrolment change?

As a SoRC, the admissions process would be directly managed by the school, not Powys Local Authority or any other education authority. Parents will apply directly for their children and the Governing Body will manage the admissions process with agreed criteria.

Will existing students need to re-apply if the school changes its status?

No, students will automatically transfer to the new school.

Does the proposal affect school transport arrangements?

No.

Will the catchment area change?

The school would continue to serve its immediate catchment area and receive students from its existing feeder primary schools in Powys as a priority. The school has a significant number of students from a broader geographic area whose parents will be able to apply directly to the school for admission.

Can students outside existing catchment area in Powys be enrolled at the school?

Yes. Parents can apply directly to the school.

Who will set the admissions policy?

The Governing Body, instead of the Local Authority.

What admission issues are causing the Governors to want to exercise control over the process?

About 40% of Crickhowell High School has always come from outside Powys, and we draw students from 29 primary schools. Most schools only deal with 4 or 5. We also deal with 4 children's social services departments and 2 health boards (for mental health issues). Over time, our intake has moved more out of Powys. If the school was to run its own admissions, we would do this via an agreed admissions policy which would still give priority to looked after, forces and Additional Needs students. School run admissions are not allowed to use religious involvement or academic attainment in prioritising admissions in any way. The change is likely to make for a far simpler and more predictable process, and a more local intake.

Will students from Church in Wales primary schools who attend church or practise religion regularly be given preferences in admissions?

No. A SoRC is a pluralistic school not a faith school, and all students within our catchment will be admitted as they are currently. No preference will be given to those under any specific religious choosing.

Will the school become significantly bigger in future?

No. 1000 to 1250 students is the optimum size consistent with supporting a full range of specialisms, specialist teachers and support staff. The aspiration is to keep numbers high enough to enable a broad range of curriculum numbers but to cap this, ensuring the community feel and individualised focus on students remains.

Which students will be entitled to free travel to and from the school?

All students within the current catchment area will continue to be entitled to free travel. In addition, students admitted to the school as the nearest School of Religious Character will be entitled to free travel in line with Welsh government policy, whether they are elsewhere in Powys or other areas.

How would the 11 to 18 SoRC school relate to local primary schools?

After the decision to retain separate primary and 11 to 18 provision in the recent Powys consultation, the High School is committed to continuing to support the primary schools closely via teaching and administrative collaboration. The current collaboration between the separate schools will continue.

Will the change impact annual funding of the school?

Powys Local Authority would continue to fund the school budget using its existing formula, but the Church in Wales will be able to provide additional resources of grant funding for key projects.

Does changing the school in this way lead to better funding for the budget?

These proposals do not directly lead to more funding per student. We will continue to be funded through the Powys funding model, which has recently been improved to make it more generous to larger schools and Powys has an intention to continue to change the model over time. The church has funds available to fund projects in their schools.

Why are you not continuing to fight for a better deal on funding from Powys?

Powys capital reserves have been prioritised for other sites. There are currently no plans to substantially rebuild or improve the site at Crickhowell High School and this situation has not changed in 20 years. The recent improvements of temporary classrooms was obtained after a long period of discussion led by the school. The school borrowed money to rebuild the school's all-weather sports pitches and is still paying it back. No other secondary school has had to do this. The current funding scheme for new school buildings provides 65% of

funding from the Welsh Government if the school is an LEA funded school, and 85% funding if the school is a school of religious character.

What other options would be available? Could more funding be obtained from businesses as with Academies in England?

In Wales, Academies are not allowed and there is no legal provision for schools to enter into long-term arrangements with businesses. There is no other option in Wales for school structures.

Will there be a new school building?

There are no current plans for a new school building, however, should this be agreed in future, funding would be available for 85% of a new school building or building elements, subject to a business case, from Welsh Government.

Will the school calendar remain the same as Powys?

Yes.

Will the school continue to participate in non SoRC school extra-curricular activities and sporting fixtures?

Yes.

Will school facilities remain available to the wider community?

Yes. Welsh Government recommendations encourage wider community engagement.

Will the school still run the sports centre and library?

Yes. This will continue in line with the agenda for wider community engagement.

What is the time frame for change?

Informal engagement with parents and the wider community will take place in June and July 2023. A formal consultation would be conducted in autumn 2023. If this supports a change to a SoRC, the school would formally change its status on 1 September, 2024.

Will the school change its name?

Yes. A new name would be chosen by the school community. The change of name would be effective from 1 September 2024 and include the words School of Religious Character.

Will there be a new school uniform?

Minimising cost is a key priority. The name change may need a change to the school badge, but parents and students will be part of consultation over a six-month period. Any change would only affect new students, as existing uniform may be worn by continuing year groups in line with legal requirements for school uniform in Wales. Sew on badges will be provided for current students who may want them, and a phased transition would be supported over time.

Will school leadership or staff change whilst this consultation takes place?

No. The headteacher's post is being extended as Acting for another year while this process concludes, along with the rest of the school leadership team. The role for permanent Headteacher will be advertised once the formal consultation period has ended, with the selected candidate being appointed in readiness for September 2024. This will happen whatever the results of the consultation.

Will the governance of the school change?

5 additional Foundation Governors, selected from the wider community, will be appointed by the Church in Wales to join the existing Governing Body of 20 governors which represents parents, staff, the Local Authority and the community.

Will all church nominees for Governors be CIW members?

Nominees for the Board of Governors from the Church in Wales are expected to include leaders from other religions and/or an atheist. They will be in a minority on the Governing Body with other categories of governors continuing in their role.

Will the employer of staff change?

Yes, but the terms of employment for staff will remain the same.

Who will set school policies?

The Governing Body, as is the case now.