

Rethink ordered over discriminatory school transport cuts

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A controversial plan by Flintshire Council to cut funding for transport to faith schools for pupils unable to prove their religious beliefs has been thrown into doubt after a scrutiny committee called for it to be scrapped.

On Thursday 6 June, the Council's overview and scrutiny committee, which gives non-executive councillors the opportunity to hold the Cabinet to account, ordered a rethink of the policy.

Speaking during Flintshire Council's lifelong learning overview and scrutiny committee meeting, opponent Cllr Nigel Steele-Mortimer said he wished to see the current proposal amended or abandoned altogether.

TCC, an alliance of community groups in North East Wales, [condemned the proposals](#), saying they are discriminatory and will limit the educational choices for the poorest pupils.

TCC Lead organiser, Kay Polley, said: "The proposals will treat children differently because of their religious background. This is quite simply discrimination. Flintshire's only faith based secondary school, Saint Richard Gwyn, is open to all, but these proposals will limit access to the school for children not from a Catholic background, and even those from Catholic families who cannot provide "proof" of their faith."

The policy has also been criticised by the National Secular Society for using religion to single out specific children for discrimination.

Stephen Evans, campaigns manager of the National Secular Society, said; "We are pleased the Cabinet are being forced to look again at this policy. If parents wish to send their children to a school with a particular faith ethos, the associated transport costs should be a parental responsibility, rather than the responsibility of the state. It is however grossly unfair to target pupils unable to prove their religious beliefs for cuts in this way.

"It is regrettable that provisions in the Equality Act which place a duty on local authorities not to discriminate against people on grounds of religion or belief do not apply to the area school transport. For every religious privilege there's a victim, and this sort of policy highlights how the non-religious lose out when faith groups win exemptions from equality legislation."

The policy will now be looked at again by the council's cabinet on June 18.

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