

# Children allocated places at Sikh academy offered alternatives – but faith school allocations continue to cause resentment

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Parents who were allocated places at a controversial Sikh school against their wishes have all been found alternative places, the local authority has confirmed.

Bucks County Council have said 17 children have now been offered alternative places and 3 are holding out for schools they especially want, though alternatives are available if needed.

Parents were upset at being allocated places the Khalsa Secondary Academy, which has a strong Sikh ethos, despite the fact they weren't themselves Sikh. The school teaches Sikh values, starts the day with Sikh prayers and offers exclusively vegetarian meals with parents not permitted to make packed lunches in order to stop meat, fish, or eggs being brought onto site, which is also regarded as a place of worship.

The school itself is at the centre of a row over its permanent location. Members of the South Bucks District Council planning committee last week voted to turn down the latest application for Khalsa School to operate permanently from its Pioneer House site in Stoke Poges, which was purchased by the DfE for a reputed £4.5m.

Nick Kandola, chairman of Slough Sikh Education Trust, which runs the school, said: "We have the full support of the Department for Education and are confident that the decision will be overturned at appeal in July and that the school will remain at Pioneer House."

The DfE is estimated to have set aside £14 million for this particular free school project.

Meanwhile, parents in Colney Heath, near St Albans are appealing against their school places after they were denied any of their four preferred choices and placed in a faith school instead.

Parents there are unhappy that their children have been allocated places the Nicholas Breakspear Catholic School, even though they had not listed it as one of their preferred schools.

On its website the school promises to instil a "love of God" in pupils, and its mission statement says "as Catholics we believe in the redeeming power of Jesus' life, death and resurrection... everything we think and do will reflect and follow the ways of Christ."

Families allocated places at the school against their wishes [told the local media](#) that they were "extremely frustrated".

Their local councillor, Chris Brazier, said: "[Nicholas Breakspear] is a good school, a very good school, but if you are not Catholic, or have something against faith schools, why are you being given a place without consultation? This is not right, this shouldn't happen."

"It is a very stressful time for parents and children, faith schools with some parents are a major concern", he added.

A Herts county council spokesperson said: "If a family has been allocated a faith school as a non-ranked allocation and do not wish their child to attend for any reason they do not have to accept the offer. They can apply for any school with a vacancy on the published list while continuing to pursue a place at the original schools of preference."

Parents in Wandsworth, where 8% of families have not been given any of their six preferred choices, have also raised concerns about being expected to attend faith schools, despite not sharing the faith of the school.

One Catholic parent, whose children have been allocated places at the Mosaic Jewish free school commented: "The school may be very good, I don't doubt its standards, but I don't think it is unreasonable to be immensely unhappy about being asked to attend a faith school that is not my faith".

The National Secular Society [has warned](#) that the prevalence of faith schools and the lack of school places mean parents are increasing being expected to send their children to schools with a religious ethos that they don't share.

Stephen Evans, campaigns manager at the National Secular Society, said: "In a pluralistic society it makes sense for children of all religious and non-religious backgrounds to be educated together.

"An education system delineated along faith lines not only spells trouble for social cohesion, it also undermines children's autonomous rights, and makes it difficult to ensure all parents' beliefs are equally respected during their child's education.

"A religious upbringing should be the responsibility of parents that want that. Our publicly funded schools should be inclusive, secular and equally appropriate for all pupils, regardless of their religion or belief background."

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