

Lib Dems back proposals to end compulsory worship and faith school discrimination against teachers

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Liberal Democrats have voted in support of a motion to abolish compulsory worship in schools and to end religious discrimination against teachers in faith schools. Conference delegates however rejected an amendment to ban faith schools from selecting children on the basis of faith.

The votes took place in the conference debate on [Expanding Opportunity, Unlocking Potential](#) – the party's main equality policy paper. National Secular Society honorary associates [Julian Huppert MP](#) and [Dr Evan Harris](#) spoke in support of the amendments.

The proposal to ban faith-based pupil selection was defeated after Business Secretary Vince Cable and Justice Minister Simon Hughes urged delegates to reject the amendment saying it risked "really serious harm".

Julian Huppert, himself a former governor of a faith school, sought to correct the 'misconception' that the amendment was about 'closing down' faith schools.

He cited 73% of the public supporting an end to faith based school admissions and criticised discrimination against non-religious parents and those who do not share, or are unwilling to fake, the faith ethos of their local school.

He told the Conference that it was "right to question things which bias one group over another".

"We wouldn't allow them to discriminate based on sexuality, ethnicity or anything else. So why have a special rule for religious education", said Huppert.

Delegates however voted in support of repealing the legal requirement on schools to hold acts of collective worship of a broadly Christian character.

Julian Huppert said: "We don't require anybody else necessarily to partake in religious activity. Why should we require children to do so?"

Lib Dems also backed a motion to remove opt-outs from employment and equalities legislation which allow faith schools to discriminate against teachers on the basis of their religious beliefs or practice.

The Conference also approved a motion to accelerate the recognition of caste as an aspect of race under the Equality Act. The Government agreed to make [discrimination on grounds of caste unlawful](#) in 2103, but the law has not yet come into force.

A motion to change to the job title and role of the Minister for Faith and Communities was also backed. Under the proposals, a new Minister for Faith, Belief and Communities, with responsibility for working with community leaders to promote religious tolerance, would be attached to the Cabinet Office.

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