

Call to found an Islamic faith school in Scotland 'open to all'

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An academic at the University of Edinburgh has called for the Scottish Government to open an Islamic faith school in response to the country's "multifaith and multicultural landscape".

Dr Khadijah Elshayyal of the University of Edinburgh's Alwaleed Centre for the Study of Islam in the Contemporary world said Scotland should open a state-sponsored Islamic faith school "open to children from all backgrounds".

In response, the National Secular Society said: "It's nonsense to say that an Islamic faith school will be open to all. It is very hard to imagine why non-Muslim parents would want to send their child to a school with a religious ethos they don't share.

"By their very nature faith schools are discriminatory and segregate children from one background. That does nothing to aid integration.

"In the wake of the Casey Review on integration, which found that ethnic segregation was worst in minority faith schools, the very last thing we need is more divisive faith-based schooling.

"Muslim state schools are not the answer to increasing religious diversity in Scotland."

Though Muslims make up less than 1.5% of Scotland's population, the Muslim population is concentrated in specific areas, with some parts of Glasgow where almost half of the school-age population is from a Muslim background.

The [report](#) said: "At the moment, there is no state-funded Muslim school in Scotland, although there is a strong tradition of state funding for Roman Catholic schools, as well as three state-funded Episcopalian schools and one state-funded Jewish school.

"The evidence in this report suggests that, in view of the significant proportion of Muslims among school-aged children in some wards within Glasgow and Dundee, there is an opportunity for the Scottish Government to demonstrate its commitment to parity by taking steps towards funding a Muslim school.

"While there may be opposition from some quarters to the potential expansion of the faith school sector, in the context of real anxieties around sectarianism for example, such a step would signal a solid intention to deliver equity in parental choice.

"If such a school were open to children from all backgrounds, it would serve as an acknowledgment of Scotland's multi-faith and multicultural landscape, and could represent an opportunity for successful community engagement with the education system, as well as for inter-faith integration, interaction and learning."

NSS campaigns director Stephen Evans said: "Scotland has relatively little of the non-Christian religious diversity that England has, and it can avoid making some of England's mistakes when integrating religious minorities into society.

"In the long-term, balkanising society by dividing children by their parents' faith will do nothing to help religious minorities or foster integration."

The report seeks to "promote improved religious literacy and understanding," but Mr Evans added that dividing pupils by faith "will do nothing to promote understanding."

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