

New faith schools announced in latest round of free schools

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A number of new faith schools have been approved to open by the Department for Education (DfE) in the twelfth wave of free schools applications.

Twelve faith schools are included in the 131 free schools approved – with a further three schools to be run by the faith-based Oasis Multi Academy Trust (MAT).

The approved faith schools include three Islamic designated schools in Birmingham, Bradford and Manchester.

In Bradford the local council had wanted a co-educational school to meet local demand, however the DfE approved the Eden Boys' Leadership Academy. Speaking to the [Telegraph and Argus](#) Cllr David Ward, the Liberal Democrat group's education spokesman, said "This is a complete step in the wrong direction that we as a society should be going, I don't believe in segregating children by faith. What is the logic in this? I don't understand it."

NSS campaigns officer Alastair Lichten said: "As this case demonstrates, academisation is leaving local authorities with little power to ensure new schools are inclusive and suitable for the local community. Minority faith ethos schools – for which there is little demand within or outside of the schools' faith group – are likely to remain undersubscribed, meaning that either parents will be expected to take up places in such schools against their wishes, or the increased capacity will fail to alleviate the demand for spaces."

The NSS's analysis focussed on [111 schools](#), excluded the twenty special free schools which local authorities have identified a need for.

Eight of the new free schools will be designated as Church of England Academies – one in Cambridgeshire will be in coordination with the Catholic Church. Between three and six further academies will have a Christian [religious ethos](#).

Mr Lichten said the rise of Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) with a religious ethos and faith ethos schools had 'blurred the line' between faith and community schools.

"The lack of clear information about the schools' ethos in the announcement is concerning. This, and the [issues](#) we are seeing with non-religious schools taken over by religious MATs, means many parents will continue to find it difficult to know what role religious groups are playing in their children's schools."

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