

Power grab: Academisation and the threat to secular education

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Schools should be run by and in the interests of school communities, not faith interest groups. Particularly in non-faith (community ethos) schools there is no justification for senior leaders to be selected based on faith or for religious organisations to have any privileged input in deciding policy.

Our 2020 report highlights how academisation and the development of mixed multi-academy trusts has enabled religious groups to increase their influence in thousands of schools in England, including those with no religious character.

Key findings:

- **More than 2,600 non-faith academies are in multi-academy trusts with religious governance.**
- **Two hundred and sixty-five former community schools which are now academies in multi-academy trusts have acquired an official faith designation or ethos.**
- **An estimated 19 to 38 academy trusts with no religious designation and only community-ethos schools have direct religious involvement in their governance.**
- **Seven in 10 (515 or 71%) former voluntary controlled schools now in multi-academy trusts are in trusts where a majority of trustees are appointed on religious grounds, as opposed to a minority in voluntary controlled faith schools.**
- **Short term solutions such as better transparency, clearer guidance on protecting community school ethos and a review of current governance arrangements might help to address these problems. However fundamental changes are necessary to protect secular education in the age of academisation.**

Recommendations:

1. The Department for Education (DfE) and regional school commissioners (RSCs) should ensure greater transparency over which trustees and governors are appointed on religious grounds and which are appointed through a secular process, either meritoriously or democratically.
2. The DfE should review all faith-based governance in non-faith academies and bring in new guidance to strengthen the protection of their community school ethos.
3. Guidance should strengthen the role of school communities over academisation decisions and end the diocesan veto.
4. Community schools should not be expected to compromise on their secular governance structures.

Need advice?

- Is your school being academised, and do you have concerns about it being taken over by a religious group?
- Is membership in a religious academy trust undermining your school's community ethos?
- Is a religious group using (or has used) academisation to increase their control over your school?

Then please get in touch.

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Read the full report

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