

End religious discrimination in school admissions

All pupils should be able to go to their local school without facing discrimination because of their parent's beliefs. Open and inclusive schools allow children from diverse backgrounds to mix, strengthening community cohesion. However, [faith schools](#) have exemptions from equality [legislation](#), meaning they can discriminate based on perspective pupils' parents' religion or belief.

What's the problem?

Different types of faith schools in England & Wales can discriminate to different extents using religious selection criteria when oversubscribed. Scottish denominational schools can discriminate in admissions if they have the approval of their local authority.

In May 2018, following huge public opposition rallied by the NSS and others, the government abandoned its plans to scrap the 50% cap to encourage a wave of new 100% religiously selective schools.

However, the Government has sought to appease religious lobby groups by making it easier for faith groups to open new voluntary-aided faith schools, which can select 100% of pupils on faith grounds.

The Government has claimed its support of faith schools is intended to "promote inclusivity", but it should be obvious to everyone that facilitating a new generation of 100% religiously selective schools is, by definition, inimical to this aim.

Encouraging more voluntary-aided schools is a regressive step and a back-door attempt to expand faith school education and increase the number of school places allocated on the basis of faith.

Voluntary-aided schools are almost exclusively run by religious groups, predominantly the Catholic Church. In addition to imposing religious criteria on all pupil admissions, governing bodies can also unjustifiably apply a religious test on all teaching positions.

[Polling shows](#) a majority of all religion and belief groups are opposed to religious discrimination in state school admissions. Professor Ted Cantle, widely regarded as the UK's leading authority on community cohesion and intercultural relations, has called the 50% cap "the only measure of any substance, really in the history of the modern education system, that has directly sought to address the segregation that has been and continues to be caused by religious selection in schools".

The time has come to end religious discrimination and segregation in our schools – not extend it.

Wider issues of discrimination in admissions

When voluntary aided faith schools and religious academies are oversubscribed, they are permitted to use religious criteria to give priority in admissions to children, or children of parents,

who practice a particular religion. In many cases schools will require evidence of baptism or religious practice from a minister of religion.

We advocate for an end to the exemption from equality law that permits state funded 'faith schools' to religiously select children in this way.

Such admissions arrangements disadvantage local children whose parents are non-religious or of a different religion to the school's religious designation. Many parents find that because of their lack of religious belief, they are unable to send their children to their local state school, which is often the most appropriate school for their needs.

There is also strong evidence to suggest that the discriminatory admissions arrangements operated by some schools, in addition to being unfair, encourage social segregation and impede community cohesion.

Religious selection in schools is discriminatory, entrenches religious segregation in wider society, and often leads to ethnic and socio-economic segregation too.

In a society as diverse as ours, rather than facilitating segregation along religious lines, the Government should be doing everything it can to ensure that children of all faiths and none are educated together in inclusive schools.

What are we doing?

We work to end religious discrimination in school admissions. We publicise the effects that faith-based admissions to state schools has on discrimination, social selection and segregation. We challenge schools when their faith based admissions go beyond the level of discrimination permitted by the law.

- We were one of the leading organisations challenging the Government's proposals to scrap the 50% cap on faith based admissions to free schools, which resulted in the government abandoning this proposal in May 2018. See our [Submission To DFE Schools That Work For Everyone Consultation](#) and related news below.
- We regularly advise parents who are experiencing difficulties dealing with discrimination in school admissions. If you are experiencing these issues and would like support, [please get in touch](#).
- In April 2020 we [submitted evidence](#) to "Comprehensively Fair", a consultation by the Sutton Trust. Our submission focused on the plethora of evidence that religiously selective admissions contribute to social-economic inequality and the ancillary social benefits of ending the practice
- We play a prominent role in the ongoing national debate over the role of ending religious discrimination in school admissions.
- We regularly lobby MPs and decision makers to promote our vision for a secular and inclusive education system
- We provide support and advice for parents who are experiencing difficulties regarding faith schools, from issues regarding admissions to problems with RE and collective worship. If you're having issues related to religion in schools and would like our support, [please contact us](#).

What you can do:

* Required Field

Let us know if you support this campaign

Messages of support help inform our future work on this issue.

Name*:

Email*:

Your message of support:

Please leave a message of support for the campaign. Responses may be used in accordance with our supporter comment policy.

Postcode:

Would you like to join our newsletter to be kept up to date with this and our other campaigns?

Yes

Do you want to receive local updates based on your postcode?

Yes

Count me in

Supporter comments

This campaign deserves far more widespread support.

John from CARDIFF

"It's a fact that there are many different religions as well as non-religions in our society. I believe that educating children of different religions together will help to reduce conflict between religions. Please keep the 50% cap. Thank you."

Margaret

[More supporter comments >>>](#)

Write to your MP

Ask your MP to help end religious discrimination in school admissions.

Enter Postcode:

Find my MP

- [Other representatives](#)

We also have template letters to write to your Members of the Scottish or Welsh Parliaments or Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly.

[No child should face discrimination for their parents' religion or belief. Join me in supporting an end to religious discrimination in school admissions.](#)

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Share

You can use the share buttons on the right to share this campaigns page with your social networks. Help show the importance of this campaign by sharing your story.

- [Share your story](#)

Parents, pupils, and teachers: need advice?

Are you having issues with religious discrimination in school admissions? A lot of our casework is responding to people who need advice. In addition to the information below, please feel free to:

- [Visit our advice page](#)
- [Get in touch](#)

More information

[Public opinion](#)

Despite being widespread, religiously discriminatory admissions are incredibly unpopular, including across all religion and belief groups. The academic consensus is clear that religious selection encourages social segregation, economic selection, explains performance differences between schools and undermines community cohesion.

In a 2018 poll by Censuwide just 17% of respondents said they agreed with the statement: "Publicly funded schools should be able to select pupils on the grounds of their religious beliefs". This compares to the 13% of the public who think state schools should be able to select pupils on the basis of their parents' political views.

One of education's most powerful features is the ability to bring people together and to open opportunities for our children, no matter their background. What sort of message do our schools send to children when they discriminate based on religion? An inclusive education system today is

the best chance we have of creating an inclusive society tomorrow.

Since 2010, new academies and free schools with a religious character have had a 50% limit on the amount of places they can allocate based on faith i.e. 50% of places must be equally open to all pupils regardless of their religious background. While not perfect, the cap is the only tangible action the Government has taken to tackle discrimination and segregation wrought by faith schools.

Following vigorous opposition from a large number of groups and individuals including the National Secular Society, proposals to scrap the 50% cap have been abandoned. However, the government is still supporting the development of new discriminatory schools by making it easier for faith groups to open new voluntary-aided faith schools, which can select 100% of pupils on faith grounds.

A secular approach to school admissions would create a more inclusive education system that values and caters for all pupils equally.

- [Campaign briefing](#)

Read and share our campaign briefing on ending religious discrimination in school admissions.

[Read More](#)

- [Only 17% of the public and 18% of teachers think schools should practice religious selection in admissions.](#)

Check out our range of statistics on religiously selective school admissions.

- [Submission To DFE Schools That Work For Everyone Consultation](#) (PDF, 403 Kb)

NSS response to the Government's 2016 consultation on scrapping the 50% on religious discrimination in Free School admissions.

- [Majority Of All Religious And Belief Groups Oppose Religious Selection In School Admissions](#) (PDF, 250 Kb)

In November 2016 a Populus poll commissioned by the Accord Coalition and the British Humanist Association questioned voters and found overwhelming opposition to selection by faith, including among all religion and belief groups.

- [Faith-shaped holes: How religious privilege is undermining equality law](#)

This 2020 report highlights how exceptions in the Equality Act 2010 enable religious discrimination at schools.

[Read More](#)

- [Admissions Response Form](#) (PDF, 348 Kb)

NSS response to the 2011 Consultation on the Changes to the Admissions Framework

While you're here

Education is a huge part of our campaigning, policy and casework. Please consider a donation to enable us to continue making a difference.

- [Support us from just £1 a month](#)