

The choice delusion: how faith schools restrict primary school choice in England

The report examines the actual primary school choices available across England, and within rural areas specifically. It also analyses school admission data and other school preference research to quantify how these effects impact school choice.

- **Almost three in ten families across England live in areas where most or all of the closest primary schools are faith schools.** There is significant regional variation and the problem is more prevalent in rural areas. However, even in urban areas around one in four families live in areas with high or extreme restrictions.
- **Every year between 45,000 – 60,000 families apply for primary schools in areas with extreme restrictions on non-faith school choice**, with a further 111,000 – 136,000 in areas of high restriction.
- **In 43.4% of rural areas restrictions on non-faith school choice are categorised as "high" or "extreme"**. In fact, 53% of rural primary schools are faith-based.
- **20.6% (7,727) of those who missed out on their first choice of a non-faith primary school in September 2018 were assigned a faith school.** This includes 1,398 people who had made all their preferences (typically five) for a non-faith school.
- When parents appeal against the allocation of a faith school, there is no guarantee they will succeed – effectively forcing children into faith schools against their parents' wishes.

What can be done?

The report makes a number of policy recommendations.

1. The Department for Education should monitor faith-based restrictions on school choice and suitability across England. New school plans should focus on addressing these.
2. Local authorities school provision should monitor faith-based restrictions on school choice and suitability and prioritise inclusive school provision when making decisions about amalgamations.
3. Faith-based discrimination in admissions should be phased out particularly in areas of significant restrictions on school choice.
4. A moratorium should be introduced on the opening of new faith-based schools. This could be phased in starting in the areas with the highest faith-based restrictions on school choice and suitability.
5. It should be made easier for faith schools to lose or downgrade their religious designation, particularly in areas where they are contributing to high faith-based restrictions on school choice or are significantly unrepresentative of their local communities.
6. There should be a legal entitlement for all families to have reasonable access to a non-faith school.

Update 2019

The report contained figures for the number of children assigned faith schools against their wishes in September [2017](#) and 2018. The updated [figures for September 2019](#) showed a further rise.

- 20,644 assigned faith school despite non-faith preference (8,333 primary | 12,311 secondary).

- [Read the full report](#)

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Printed copies of the report are available on [request](#).

[Almost three in ten families across England live in areas where most or all of the closest primary schools are faith schools. - Read the full report here:](#)

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[The choice delusion: how faith schools restrict primary school choice in England. Are you affected by the issues in this groundbreaking report?](#)

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Take a stand against faith schools

No More Faith Schools is a national platform for everyone who wants to see an inclusive education system, free from religious control.

- [Sign the petition](#)
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Are faith schools restricting your options?

Are you locked out of your local school based on religion? Have you been assigned a faith school against your wishes? Are faith schools your only option?

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Parents' perspectives

Below are three randomly selected parents' perspectives on the how faith schools restrict their choices. [Click the link here or below to browse a wider selection.](#)

Rob, from SOUTH EAST LONDON

"Everyone should be entitled to have their children educated at the school that is nearest to them, regardless of whether or not they subscribe to a particular religion or other superstition. No one

should be discriminated against on the grounds of "faith". I object to having to contribute to funding the local school to which my own child was denied access on religious grounds while also having to pay for him to be educated privately as a result."

John, from PLYMOUTH

"Both our children have had to go to faith schools because they were the only local schools available. We are an atheist family, and this was not at all what we would have chosen. In country areas the local faith school is effectively compulsory. Politicians bend over backwards not to offend faith groups, but by far the largest 'faith' group, atheists, are ignored."

Martin, from BRIGHTON

"In my area I have a choice of one primary school for my son if he wants a non-religious education. It's upsetting and discriminatory that the vast majority of non-religious people, and religious people who don't believe that belief is a public matter, in this country aren't catered for."

- [More parents' perspectives](#)

A selection of parents' perspectives on the issues in our report, and how faith schools restrict their choices.

[Read More](#)

Is a faith school your only option?

Are you locked out of your local school based on religion? Have you been assigned a faith school against your wishes? Are faith schools your only option?

* Required Field

Your name*:

Contact email address*:

Postcode:

This can be yours or that of the nearest school.

Details*:

Tell us more about your situation.

Is this an current/active situation you need support with?

Yes No

Would you like to receive Newslines – our free weekly roundup of news and opinion?

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