

What types of school are there?

It's important to remember that while school type is a good guide to how religious it is likely to be, individual schools vary. It's not unusual to find community schools with multiple acts of collective worship a day and a teacher with an evangelising agenda. Similarly some faith schools have a lighter touch approach and teachers with little interest in proselytizing.

The rise of faith ethos schools and multi academy trusts (MATs) with a religious character, has blurred the lines between faith and non-faith schools. If you have a problem with proselytization, worship or inappropriate teaching, then your ability to challenge/negotiate with the school, and the headteacher's attitude may be more important than school type.

School types cover state funded schools in England, scroll down for the devolved nations.

Community school

Community schools are generally secular and inclusive, they may be referred to as non-religious or even secular schools. In theory religious groups have no special role in running them and they should be entirely free from religious discrimination.

However the lack of clarity over RE/evangelism in schools and the requirement for collective worship, mean that some community schools can still sometimes be problematic. Just because a school has 'community' in its name, does not mean it is a community school. The CofE for example likes to refer to their faith schools as 'Church schools for the community'.

Governance	Governors are appointed along secular lines with no reserved places for religious groups.
Religious education	Taught according to the locally agreed syllabus. It should be non-confessional, and is inspected through Ofsted.
Collective worship	It should be 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character' but may in practice be replaced by a secular assembly. SACRE can allow changes for non-Christian worship.
SRE/RSE	Comprehensive education about sex and relationships is required.
National Curriculum	The school must follow the National Curriculum.
Admissions	The local authority is the admissions authority and religious selection is not permitted.
Staff/employment	The school cannot discriminate on religious grounds in any cases.

Funding/capital The local authority funds the school and owns (or in rare cases lease) the land and buildings.

Academies - no religious ethos or designation

Academies (including 'free schools' and converter academies) are run by a Trust based on an agreement with the Department for Education (DfE). If the academy doesn't have a religious ethos it should be broadly secular and inclusive – much like a community school.

An academy might not have a religious ethos or designation, but be part of a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) which has a religious ethos which may influence aspects of the school such as the focus on collective worship.

Governance The Academy Trust appoints governors. Requirements vary. Governance should be secular in theory, but if the school has an affiliation with or is part of a religious Trust, then some governors may be appointed for religious reasons.

Religious education Set by the Trust, who may follow the locally agreed syllabus. It should be non-confessional and is inspected by Ofsted.

Collective worship It should be 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character' but may in practice be replaced by a secular assembly. DfE can allow changes for non-Christian worship.

SRE/RSE Comprehensive education about sex and relationships is required.

National Curriculum The school can follow the National Curriculum or a curriculum set by the Trust. But it must be 'broad and balanced' - including the promotion of 'fundamental British values'.

Admissions The school is the admissions authority but can usually not discriminate/select on the basis of religion.

Staff/employment The school cannot discriminate on religious grounds, however it may be part of an organisation/Trust which does apply religious discrimination to some posts.

Funding/capital Although funding agreements vary, in most cases all funding for running costs is direct from the central Government. The Academy Trust may own the land/buildings or the local authority may be required to lease them to the Trust.

Academies - religious ethos

An academy with a religious ethos, is less formal than a religious designation. Such an academy may promote its religious ethos in a range of ways, but is likely to be less prominent than in other types of faith schools (exceptions apply) and direct religious discrimination is more likely to be restricted.

Depending on the academy, the faith ethos may be more or less prominent – for example it may not be reflected in the name, and may be inherited from a parent organisation such as a MAT. Its ethos may be more generic – e.g. 'Christian' rather than 'Catholic' or 'Church of England'.

Governance	The Academy Trust appoints governors. Requirements vary. Some governors may be appointed for religious reasons.
Religious education	Set by the Trust, who may follow the locally agreed syllabus. It should be non-confessional and is inspected by Ofsted.
Collective worship	Likely to follow the religious ethos of the Trust.
SRE/RSE	Comprehensive education about sex and relationships is required, but may be taught in accordance with the Trust's religious ethos.
National Curriculum	The school can follow the National Curriculum or a curriculum set by the Trust. But it must be 'broad and balanced' - including the promotion of 'fundamental British values'.
Admissions	The school is the admissions authority but can usually not discriminate/select on the basis of religion.
Staff/employment	The school may be able to discriminate on religious grounds if it can show a 'genuine occupational requirement', but this is unlikely to apply to teaching posts. It may also be part of an organisation/Trust which does apply religious discrimination to some posts.
Funding/capital	Although funding agreements vary, in most cases all funding for running costs is direct from the central Government. The Academy Trust may own the land/buildings or the local authority may be required to lease them to the Trust.

Academies - religious designation

There are a range of different types of academies with formal religious designations. The level of religious influence or discrimination is affected by a number of factors, including its funding

agreement; which are in turn influenced by whether it is a new faith academy, or converted from a VC/VA school. Converted faith academies have the 'as is' assumption.

Governance	The Academy Trust appoints governors. Requirements vary. Some governors may be appointed for religious reasons. In theory if the school has converted from a faith school than the proportion of faith based governors should stay the same.
Religious education	Taught according to syllabus set by the Trust, which will be confessional (unless it is converted from a VC school or the funding agreement stipulates otherwise). It is inspected by someone appointed by the religious body rather than Ofsted.
Collective worship	Must follow the religious ethos of the trust.
SRE/RSE	Comprehensive education about sex and relationships is required, but may be taught in accordance with the Trust's religious ethos.
National Curriculum	The school can follow the National Curriculum or a curriculum set by the Trust. But it must be 'broad and balanced' - including the promotion of 'fundamental British values'.
Admissions	The school is the admissions authority. Depending on the funding agreement it can discriminate/select a percentage of pupils on the basis of religion if oversubscribed. If converted from a VA school this will allow 100% selection. New free schools are currently capped at 50%.
Staff/employment	Can use a religious test in appointing, promoting, disciplining and setting the salary of any teacher. Non-teaching staff can be subject to similar religious discrimination if there is a 'genuine occupational requirement'. However if formerly a VC school then staff retain their protections from discrimination.
Funding/capital	Although funding agreements vary, in most cases all funding for running costs is direct from the central Government. The Academy Trust may own the land/buildings or the local authority may be required to lease them to the Trust.

Voluntary controlled (VC) schools

Traditionally VC schools have been seen as more of a 'light touch' faith school. The Church (almost all VC schools are Church of England) has less of a direct role in running the school, which was somewhat balanced by local authority oversight. Direct religious discrimination is more

limited in VC schools, and they

However things vary from school to school and have changed in recent years. The Church can now require that head teachers are of the faith, and is putting more pressure on VC schools to promote their ethos.

Governance	Between 20 and 25% of governors are 'Foundation Governors', appointed to represent the religious body. The rest should be appointed along secular lines.
Religious education	Usually taught according to the locally agreed syllabus, which should be non-confessional. However it is inspected by someone appointed by the religious body rather than Ofsted.
Collective worship	Must follow the religious ethos of the school's designated religion.
SRE/RSE	Comprehensive education about sex and relationships is required, but may be taught in accordance with the Trust's religious ethos.
National Curriculum	The school must follow the National Curriculum.
Admissions	The local authority is the admissions authority and religious selection is not generally permitted, but may be and would be lawful.
Staff/employment	Can use a religious test in appointing, promoting, disciplining and setting the salary of up to one fifth of teachers - including the headteacher. Non-teaching staff can be subject to similar religious discrimination if there is a 'genuine occupational requirement'.
Funding/capital	The local authority funds the school and owns (or in rare cases lease) the land and buildings.

Voluntary aided (VA) schools

Prior to academies VA schools were those that religious groups had the biggest direct role in managing. All teaching and pupil positions are potentially subject to religious discrimination and the RE is often confessional. Religious influences may be countered by the minority of non-religiously appointed governors and local influences, but are likely to be far more prominent than in other schools.

Governance	A majority of governors are 'Foundation Governors', appointed to represent the religious body. The rest should be appointed along secular lines.
Religious education	Taught according to syllabus set by the religious body, which may be confessional. It is inspected by someone appointed by the religious body rather than Ofsted.
Collective worship	Must follow the religious ethos of the school's designated religion.
SRE/RSE	Comprehensive education about sex and relationships is required, but may be taught in accordance with the Trust's religious ethos.
National Curriculum	The school must follow the National Curriculum.
Admissions	The school is the admissions authority and can discriminate/select all pupils on the basis of religion if oversubscribed.
Staff/employment	Can use a religious test in appointing, promoting, disciplining and setting the salary of any teacher. Non-teaching staff can be subject to similar religious discrimination if there is a 'genuine occupational requirement'.
Funding/capital	The local authority funds all the school running costs and 90% of the building costs (in theory the religious body pays for 10% of the building costs). A religious trust usually owns the buildings/land.

Scotland

Almost all schools in Scotland are split between **Denominational** (almost all Catholic) schools and **Non-denominational** (in theory community schools, but traditionally seen as Church of Scotland) schools.

Traditionally denominational schools in Scotland haven't applied religious discrimination in admissions, but this is subject to change if approved by local authorities. Religious discrimination is permitted in employment at these schools.

Schools are overseen by local education authorities, which must have three unelected religious representatives at least one of which needs to be appointed each by the Church of Scotland and the Catholic Church. Schools in Scotland are required to offer Religious Observance, which should be Christian. All schools must teach Religious and Moral Education (RME), which may be confessional in denominational schools.

Wales

The Education Act 1944 applied in England and Wales and Wales did not go down the road of academies following devolution. Therefore schools in Wales are almost all community, VC or VA, and follow the differences above.

Northern Island

Almost all public schooling in Northern Ireland is split along sectarian (Protestant/Catholic) lines. **Controlled** (effectively Protestant) schools are owned by the state, but governed in accordance with the Church's ethos. **Maintained** (Catholic) schools are owned by trustees and the employment of teachers is controlled by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools. All running and capital costs are paid by the state. There are a small number of **Integrated Schools** – which seek to offer a balanced curriculum without religious discrimination.