

Priest criticises Catholics-only school bus policy for faith school pupils

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Flintshire Council has come under attack from a priest over its policy of only funding school bus travel to faith schools for pupils who can provide evidence of their religious affiliation.

Canon Joseph Stewart has described the school bus policy of Flintshire Council as discriminatory.

Currently, free transport to faith schools is only provided by Flintshire Council to pupils who are of their same faith as the school's religious ethos. This means that free buses to Catholic faith schools are only provided for Catholic pupils, and non-Catholic pupils are not given free transport.

Stewart said: "These are children who live in the same streets. There's one policy for Catholics and another entirely for the others."

Seemingly unaware of the fact that most Catholic schools discriminate in their admissions policies, he said, "discrimination in this day and age is unacceptable."

Under the policy, students must have proof of their denomination, such as a note from a Catholic Priest or a baptism certificate for the Council to fund their transport to school.

Stewart said "I feel very strongly they shouldn't be asking me to perform that sort of policing."

[News North Wales](#) reports that Stewart has written to the Council on behalf of an 11 year-old pupil who is not entitled to free transport, because he was not christened.

National Secular Society campaigns manager, Stephen Evans, commented: "We certainly agree that the policy is discriminatory. We have raised [concerns about this case](#) with the Welsh Education Minister and are strongly critical of any policy which uses the faith of a child's parents to determine whether children can use a school bus.

"However, what Fr Stewart is arguing for is for the local authority to fund every parent's decision to send their children to a religious school rather than schools closer to home. It still seems unfair that parents who choose to send their children to more distant faith schools are financially supported, when parents who may choose more distant schools for other reasons receive no such support.

"But rather than looking at this from a position of self-interest, Fr Stewart should perhaps realise that, particularly in the current economic climate, local authorities have more pressing things to spend their money on than assisting parents to send their children to faith schools when other schools are available more locally."

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