

Tristram Hunt criticises “absurdities” caused by having faith schools in the education system

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Labour's Shadow Education Secretary Tristram Hunt has warned that faith schools leave little hope for an integrated education system in the UK.

Warning of the demands placed on the education system and taxpayers by religious groups, Mr Hunt wrote in the [Guardian](#): "When every mosque, temple, synagogue, church, chapel and gurdwara wants its own free school, what hope have we for a national education system that integrates rather than segregates?"

He added that "one of the many absurdities" of the Government's education policy is "a school commissioning system that militates against cohesion, while demanding a unified sense of British values."

There have been repeated warnings for many years that faith schools are divisive and cause social segregation. In March 2015, a report by the Social Integration Commission called on the Department for Education to restrict new faith schools, and [warned that](#) "increased numbers of children [are] being educated in peer groups dominated by a single faith group or community".

The Shadow Education Secretary described the problems caused by religion in schools as "thorny". He said that questions of "religion, ethnicity and school provision" were even "more thorny" than serious concerns over academic attainment of pupils from white working-class backgrounds.

The shadow education secretary also criticised the DfE's plan to open a further 500 free schools in the next five years "whether needed or not".

Mr Hunt stressed the need to "be brave in challenging some of the consensus areas of education policy."

The National Secular Society welcomed Mr Hunt's comments. Stephen Evans, NSS campaigns manager, said: "We've long argued that the product of faith schools will be a more divided society in years to come. We are pleased to see more-and-more politicians starting to articulate this.

"The rush to open more free schools may well result in a proliferation of faith-based schools, further promoting religious polarisation and making it difficult for parents in some areas to get the secular education they expect.

"We now hope Mr Hunt's party will find the courage to review the outdated educational settlement between religion and state that channels public money into faith schools, and instead advocate for a secularised and inclusive school system free from discrimination and undue religious influence.

Mr Hunt's comments came after it emerged over the weekend that a Church of England school in Bury may face a legal challenge over its admissions policy after a complaint that it was indirectly

discriminatory on grounds of race was rejected by the Office of the Schools Adjudicator. The Accord Coalition said that religious selection in schools can act as a "proxy for selection by race".

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