

Church of England seeks special protection for failing faith schools

Posted: Mon, 30th Nov 2015

One of the Church of England's bishops in the House of Lords has put down an amendment to the Education and Adoption Bill to protect the religious ethos of failing Anglican schools if they are forced to convert into academies.

The Bill will allow the Education Secretary to force "coasting" schools into converting to academy status. The Church fears that Anglican schools that are deemed to be failing could be taken over by a non-Christian academy sponsor and lose their religious character.

Because of this concern the Bishop of Ely has tabled an amendment on the "protection for schools which have a religious character".

The amendment states that "Where a school which has a religious character is eligible for intervention" the local authority or Secretary of State "must ensure the protection of that religious character".

Stephen Evans, National Secular Society campaigns manager, commented: "There's no good reason to offer privileged protection to preserve religious schools. In fact, given England's current religion and belief landscape, there's a very good case for reducing the Church's control of schools.

"The Church of England is the biggest sponsor of academies in England, and it is reasonable to expect that forced academisation could result in a significant number of community schools joining Church or other faith-based academy chains resulting in a loss of secular, community school provision."

In a consultation submission on the Bill the National Secular Society [argued](#) for the inclusion of a provision to ensure that upon conversion, and for a reasonable period of time subsequently, no non-religiously designated school would be permitted to acquire a religious designation or faith ethos – to prevent the takeover of non-religious schools by faith groups.

In September it was [reported](#) that the last local authority controlled school in Blackpool will be forced to convert to an academy and is to be taken over by an Islamic education group, the Tauheedul Education Trust.

The Trust says it is inspired by "progressive Islamic and British values" and has "roots in the Muslim faith" but the school, Highfield Humanities College, will not become an Islamic faith school upon conversion.

Assurances have been given by the DfE that when the Tauheedul Education Trust (TET) assumes control of Highfield Humanities College, the non-faith community status of the school will be protected under the academy's funding agreement with the Government.

Stephen Evans added: "Any protection the Government offers to preserve the character of schools should ensure that secular provision isn't eroded – particular at a time when the Government should be doing all it can to promote inclusiveness and social cohesion."

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