

Church of England 'misselling school admissions policies'

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The Church of England is misleading the public over the extent of religious discrimination in its schools' admissions policies, according to a [report](#) published this week.

The Accord Coalition found that Church bodies gave schools autonomy to determine how they select pupils, meaning they were not guided towards religious inclusivity. Only one in eight of the 40 dioceses it studied advise their schools not to engage in faith-based selection. In contrast one in four advise them to reserve some places on faith grounds.

The research, which was carried out on behalf of the Fair Admissions Campaign, found that many schools continue to select pupils by faith. Even in the five notionally inclusive dioceses, half of the Church's schools retained discriminatory policies.

The findings appear to contradict the Church's public statements. Until last month, the C of E's website said its schools were "not faith schools for Christians, but Christian schools for all and, as such, are committed to serving the needs of the local community". And in 2013 the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby said there was a "steady move away from faith-based entry tests" in Church schools.

Accord said such claims were "at best inaccurate and therefore misleading".

"By deflecting attention away from schools practising religious discrimination, such comments present a false image and encourage complacency," it added.

Rabbi Dr Jonathan Romain, Accord's chair, [said](#) the Church should "practice what it preaches".

He added that most people in Britain did not want state funded schools to select or divide pupils on religious grounds. Last year a [Populus poll](#) found that 72% of the public agreed that 'state funded schools, including state funded faith schools, should not be allowed to select or discriminate against prospective pupils on religious grounds in their admissions policy'.

The Church runs around 4,500 primary schools – roughly a quarter of the total – and 200 secondary schools. Around one million pupils in England and Wales attend these schools, which are exempt from the provisions of the Equality Act 2010. The Act prevents discrimination on religious grounds.

Alastair Lichten, NSS education and schools campaigner, said the Church of England's claims of inclusivity should not be taken at face value.

"The Church likes to claim its schools are inclusive when in fact, many still operate religiously selective admissions policies. Where 'Church schools' don't discriminate in admissions, they are often seen as an opportunity to proselytise to pupils and parents that otherwise wouldn't go anywhere near a church. This isn't inclusive education, its evangelism – and all paid for from the public purse."

The Church of England's Chief Education Officer, Rev Nigel Genders, disputed the findings and backed the decision of schools which discriminated on faith grounds.

"Those schools that give some priority to Christian children do so in areas where competition for places is acute and often providing places purely on distance from the school would mean that only the wealthiest, who can afford to move house nearby, can access the best schools," he said.

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