

Government plans to create 36 new religious free schools in England

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The government plans to create 36 new faith schools in England as it rolls out its latest round of new free schools, the National Secular Society has found.

An NSS analysis of the [latest data](#) from the Department for Education found that it plans to open 20 Church of England schools with a Christian faith character or ethos. It will also create nine other Christian schools, four Muslim schools, two Hindu schools and one Jewish school.

The C of E will also open three new schools which do not appear to have a faith character or ethos.

A number of the faith schools will discriminate on religious grounds in their admissions criteria. [City Gates School](#) in Redbridge says it "will admit up to 50% of our pupils based on their Christian faith if the school is oversubscribed".

The Church of England [Wren Academy Enfield](#) says "priority for up to half of the available places will be given to those who attend church regularly". It also says "all students, be they Christian, of other faiths or none, will be expected to attend events which celebrate our Christian ethos" - in defiance of the [parental right to withdraw from collective worship](#).

Four of the proposed schools will be Islamic, including the Hujjat Primary School in Harrow. An [article on Islamic education](#) on the Hujjat.org website by Sister Tahera Kassamali makes clear that the goal of Muslim schools is to inculcate Islamic beliefs.

Kassamali writes: "In a non-Muslim environment the child struggles to belong, and often has to compromise what he/she believes in. Even when not compromising, it can become a continuous battle with the self, or parents, community etc." She says this battle can "...lead to skepticism [sic] and rejection of faith as the child has overwhelmingly witnessed beliefs and practices contrary to Islam".

She adds that "the environment in an Islamic school models what it means to be a Muslim".

"Children can see practical examples of Islamic behavior each day. This reinforces the behavior in them and encourages the child to follow the examples he sees. Seeing their friends and peers say the salaah, wear the hijab, fast . . . etc. creates a desire to do the same."

The other three Muslim schools are two boys-only secondary schools and one primary school run by [Tauheedul Education Trust](#). [Feversham Education Trust](#), which runs the Islamic Feversham College, will also open a new girls' school but this will not have a faith designation.

Two new free schools will be opened by [Avanti Schools Trust](#), which is governed by iFoundation. This charity's purpose is to evangelise the Hindu faith, specifically the teachings of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), more commonly known as the 'Hare Krishna' movement.

The Kisharon Academy Trust will open a Jewish special free school in Barnet. [Kisharon](#), whose tagline is "Jewish answers for learning disabilities," was [rated](#) 'requires improvement' by the Care Quality Commission in January due to unsafe recruitment practices.

NSS education & schools officer Alastair Lichten said: "Despite the government saying that it wants to build strong integrated communities, the number and variety of new religious free schools in the pipeline suggests that it is still unwilling to tackle one of the core causes of division in society: faith-based segregation.

"It is particularly disappointing to see that a number of these schools will apply faith-based criteria in their admissions policies, including Church of England schools. This flies in the face of the Church's common claim that church schools are inclusive.

"With the government proposing to drop the 50% cap on faith-based admissions for new free schools, it doesn't look like the situation is set to improve any time soon."

The faith schools will be among 318 new schools which open in total.

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