

# British public opposes religious influence in education, poll finds

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British adults are strongly opposed to religious influence in school admissions, assemblies and the teaching of Religious Education, a National Secular Society-commissioned poll has found.

The survey found that fewer than one in six British adults agree with religious selection in state schools generally. Fewer than one in three support it even when they are specifically asked about faith schools.

Just 17% of respondents said they agreed with the statement: "Publicly funded schools should be able to select pupils on the grounds of their religious beliefs". Even when the question said "faith schools should be able to select pupils on the grounds of their religious beliefs" just 29% agreed.

Support for religious selection in schools was not much higher than support for hypothetical political selection in schools. Thirteen per cent of respondents agreed that "publicly funded schools should be able to select pupils on the grounds of their parents' political beliefs".

A majority (52%) say school assemblies should be about moral issues, whereas just over a quarter (26%) agree that they should feature religious worship.

And just 14% of respondents disagreed with the statement: "State-funded faith schools should be obligated to teach RE in a way that is inclusive of all religious and non-religious belief systems".

The findings suggest education policy across Britain is out of step with the views of the public.

Last month the education secretary Damian Hinds [announced](#) that he would not lift the 50% faith-based admissions cap on new free schools in England, following NSS campaigning. But he announced a new wave of voluntary-aided schools, which will allow religious groups to open schools which can select 100% of their pupils on a religious basis.

In recent weeks the Scottish government has [committed](#) to the future of state-funded Catholic education, while the Welsh government has [said](#) religious schools will continue to be allowed to teach sex education according to their faith ethos.

In response to the poll campaigners including NSS chief executive Stephen Evans and honorary associate Peter Tatchell have called for a rollback of religion's role in state schools.

Mr Evans said the findings showed that "our current education system simply does not align with the views of the public when it comes to religion's role".

"Most people take a much more secular stance and don't want children to be exposed to overbearing religious influence in their schools. It is impossible to imagine a system in which state schools were allowed to select pupils on the basis of whether their parents shared the same political views. That should be the case for religion too – and very similar proportions of people agree with religious selection as political selection.

"We were pleased to see the education secretary decide against lifting the cap on faith school entry recently. However, this does not cover voluntary-aided faith schools and we would urge against any future attempt to increase selection by religion through the back door.

"The National Secular Society is proud to campaign for a fair and inclusive education system and it is pleasing to see that these values are reflected across the wider public. In particular, Religious Education and Sex & Relationships Education teaching must be consistent across all schools, ensuring all children gain a comprehensive and impartial grounding in religious and ethical issues."

Mr Tatchell told us: "To ensure a cohesive and harmonious society, it is more important than ever that our children can enjoy a diverse and fair education, with the opportunity to learn from each other's differences. Government policy should reflect the low level of public support for religious selection in state-funded schools. I am proud to support the National Secular Society's campaign for an inclusive education system."

The NSS campaigns to roll back religious influence in schools. We recently launched our [No More Faith Schools](#) campaign. We also [champion](#) an end to [end compulsory worship](#) in schools and call for all children to be entitled to an [impartial](#) curriculum about religion and belief issues.

The company Censuswide carried out the poll of 2,003 British adults.

## Join our national campaign against faith schools

We campaign for an inclusive and secular education system free from any form of religious privilege, partisanship, proselytization or discrimination. Please consider a donation, from as little as £1 a month, to help support our work in this area.

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