

NSS leads call for national inquiry into school admissions

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The National Secular Society has raised concerns about the impact of faith-based discrimination and segregation as it jointly coordinated a call for an inquiry into England's school admissions system.

A coalition of 40 politicians, experts, activists and educationalists have called on the education select committee to instigate a review in an [open letter](#) to *The Observer*.

The NSS and Comprehensive Future, which campaigns for inclusive schooling, coordinated the letter, which criticised the "increasingly complex and fragmented school admissions system".

Its signatories included Labour MP David Lammy, Layla Moran of the Liberal Democrats and Green MP Caroline Lucas.

The letter highlights recent initiatives which will increase faith-based selection to schools. In November the government [committed](#) funds to a new wave of voluntary aided (VA) faith schools, which can select all their pupils on the basis of their parents' religion.

The NSS is strongly [opposing](#) plans to open new VA schools.

The letter says an inquiry is "long overdue" and admissions arrangements should be "transparent, just and easily understandable to all families".

Stephen Evans, the NSS's chief executive, said: "Recent policy on school admissions has entrenched religious division and privilege in the school admissions system. As a result children are increasingly segregated by their parents' faith, while families who do not want to send their children to faith schools are left unable to find suitable school places.

"And the government's approval for a wave of new 100% selective faith schools threatens to make this worse.

"An inquiry would help to address the discrimination and unfairness that faith-based admissions have caused in the education system."

The letter's other signatories included: Kevin Courtney and Mary Boustead of the National Education Union; Professor Becky Francis, the director of the UCL Institute of Education; and activists Andrew Copson of Humanists UK and Rev Stephen Terry of the Accord Coalition for Inclusive Education.

Comprehensive Future's chair Dr. Nuala Burgess said the group had "found overwhelming support for a review of school admissions" and there had been "no proper review" of the admissions system "for years".

In a separate joint letter to members of the education select committee, the NSS wrote: "We would like to see an admissions system which allows children of all backgrounds an equal chance to

succeed, is easily understandable by all parents, accountable to local communities and allows both schools and local authorities to plan for future school need in some of our most stretched and segregated areas."

The letter drew attention to the NSS's recent report, [The choice delusion](#), which outlined the ways in which faith schools restrict primary school choice for many families in England.

The report found that almost three in ten families across England live in areas where most or all of the closest primary schools are faith schools. Almost 8,000 families who missed out on their first choice of a non-faith primary school in September 2018 were assigned to faith schools.

The open letter in full:

"When Theresa May came to power in 2017, she pledged to review our increasingly complex and fragmented school admissions system.

"Such an inquiry is long overdue, following significant changes to our school landscape over the last decade. Over 70% of secondary schools now act as their own admissions authority and local authorities have little say in how pupils are admitted to schools in their area. In addition, recent policy initiatives point the way to increasing numbers of pupils being selected for grammar and faith schools.

"School admissions lie at the very heart of our school system, and how fair such a system is perceived to be. Arrangements should be transparent, just, and easily understandable to all families.

"We therefore call upon the Education Select Committee, as a matter of urgency, to set up an inquiry into school admissions."

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