

20,000 children sent to faith schools against parental preferences

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More than 20,000 children were sent to faith schools in England against the preferences of their parents earlier this month, National Secular Society research has exclusively revealed.

An NSS analysis of government data, revealed by the Department for Education (DfE) in response to a freedom of information request, has found that:

- 12,311 pupils were assigned faith secondary schools despite their parents requesting non-faith schools as their first choice during the application process.
- 8,333 pupils were assigned faith primary schools despite their parents requesting non-faith schools as their first choice.
- More than 4,300 of these children were sent to faith schools which they had not included in any of their choices.

The number of children being sent to faith schools against parental preference has risen from [just over 18,000](#) in 2017, and almost 19,500 in 2018.

Twenty-one per cent of those who put a non-faith secondary school as their first choice and missed out on it were assigned a faith school. The corresponding figure at primary level was 14%.

National Secular Society head of education Alastair Lichten said:

"These figures show that many children are having religion pushed upon them against their parents' wishes. They add to a growing weight of evidence showing that faith schools restrict choice for many parents, adding uncertainty and confusion to an already complex admissions system.

"The best response would be to stop building new faith schools and roll back existing religious control over state schools – particularly in areas where non-faith schooling is highly restricted. This would guarantee that all children got an education which enabled them to make up their own minds about religion.

"Short of that the government must act to ensure that every child has the right to a suitable secular school within a reasonable distance. As Britain grows increasingly religiously diverse and irreligious, politicians cannot assume people will accept their children being sent to schools which endorse religion."

Last year the NSS [revealed](#) that almost three in 10 families in England lived in areas where most or all of the local primary schools were faith-based, in its groundbreaking report [The Choice Delusion](#).

Other recent NSS research & lobbying

- Since 2018 the NSS has twice [written](#) to the Department for Education to urge it to ensure all parents had reasonable access to non-faith schools.

- Last year the government told the NSS that local authorities had a responsibility to "ensure there are the right number and types of places to both meet demand and to provide diversity and choice for parents".
- Last year NSS research [showed](#) that faith-based provision is treated preferentially during school reorganisations.
- The NSS has supported parents assigned faith schools from various religious traditions against their wishes. Faith schools from minority religious traditions are more likely to be undersubscribed and are therefore likely to exacerbate the difficulties facing parents who want to send their children to non-faith schools.

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