

Don't extend selection in Catholic schools, NSS urges council

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The National Secular Society has urged Renfrewshire Council not to extend the priority it gives to children who are baptised Catholic for admission to Catholic schools.

The NSS made the call in response to a council [consultation](#) over [plans](#) to ask parents to submit Catholic baptismal certificates before it allocates places.

The NSS [said](#) the plans would "disadvantage non-Catholic families and further segregate communities".

Currently children in Renfrewshire are allocated schools based on where they live. If schools are oversubscribed places are allocated by ballot, with no religious test applying at that stage.

Baptised Catholics are only given priority if parents then request a Catholic school instead of their allocated school.

Under the proposed changes children with baptism certificates would even take priority over children with siblings at the same Catholic school and children who have medical needs that cannot be accommodated in any other school. The latter category would include wheelchair users.

The NSS said it was "particularly disturbed" by these proposals.

"Such criteria clearly place the desire of the Catholic Church to maximise the number of Catholics in the schools it controls over the welfare needs of pupils and their families."

The council will also base the initial allocation of a child's secondary school on the denomination of their current school and their home address. Currently the child's address is the only factor at this stage of the process.

The NSS's response also said:

- Introducing further religious selection in admissions would "needlessly exacerbate sectarian divisions as well as ethnic and socio-economic segregation".
- The proposals were "neither compatible with basic democratic principles, nor with the council's duty to treat all citizens under its jurisdiction equally and fairly".

NSS spokesperson Megan Manson said the council should "look again at these divisive and unhelpful plans".

"There's no justification for restricting access to publicly funded schools based on the religious beliefs of children or their families.

"Basing access to schools on the possession of a religious certificate will stir resentment and embed discrimination, undermining efforts to promote equality. And dividing children along religious lines will harm efforts to promote social cohesion.

"The council should work to make schools more inclusive and put the interests of its residents before those of the Catholic Church."

The council's rationale

In the consultation, the council says the proposal will allow it to "fulfil its duty to provide education to children and young people who are baptised into the Roman Catholic Church in a denominational school".

Further notes

- The consultation will end on Tuesday. Responses can be submitted [here](#).
- If approved, the policy is due to take effect for the August 2021/22 intake.
- There are 16 Catholic primary schools and three Catholic secondary schools in Renfrewshire. There are no other state-funded faith schools in the area.

Photo: St Peter's Primary School, Paisley (Catholic school in Renfrewshire); © [Leslie Barrie](#) [CC BY-SA 2.0]

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