

Academisation leading to more religious control of schools, NSS finds

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Religious groups have gained greater control over thousands of schools – including many which nominally have no religious character – as a result of opportunities created by academisation, the National Secular Society has revealed.

In [*Power grab: Academisation and the threat to secular education*](#), the NSS says academisation and mixed multi-academy trusts (mixed MATs) have "seriously undermined community-ethos education in England".

The NSS has found around 2,650 community academies in England are now in MATs with a degree of religious governance. This figure represents almost half (48%) of all non-faith schools in MATs.

Meanwhile 265 schools have acquired an official faith designation or ethos after becoming academies in MATs.

And an estimated 19 to 38 academy trusts which have no religious designation or faith schools have direct religious involvement in their governance.

Diminishing secular oversight in faith schools which academise

The report has also revealed a trend of diminishing secular oversight in existing faith schools which have entered multi-academy trusts.

Seven in 10 former voluntary controlled (VC) schools which have entered MATs are in trusts where a majority of trustees are appointed on religious grounds. This amounts to more than 500 schools.

In VC schools only a minority of trustees are appointed on religious grounds.

Problems with academisation

The report identifies five ways the academisation process has enabled religious groups to consolidate control over schools:

- Community ethos academies have become subject to faith-based governance.
- Community schools have become faith schools as a result of academisation.
- Community ethos MATs have developed faith-based governance.
- Secular oversight of faith academies has diminished.
- Community schools' ethos has not been protected.

Recommendations

The report recommends:

- Increasing transparency over which trustees and governors are appointed on religious grounds and which are appointed through a secular process.
- A review of faith-based governance in non-faith academies and new guidance to strengthen the protection of their community school ethos.
- Strengthening the role of school communities over academisation decisions.
- Reversing the assumption that community schools should compromise on their secular governance structures, rather than faith schools compromising on theirs.

NSS comment

NSS head of education Alastair Lichten said: "Opaque academisation processes have substantially expanded religious groups' role in schools, making those responsible for children's education less accountable to society as a whole.

"With little public attention or debate, large swathes of England's education system have come under religious governance, while secular democratic oversight has diminished. An unhealthy bias towards religious schooling is undermining efforts to keep schools secular, and to check the extent of religious groups' control over faith schools.

"Our report recommends a series of practical steps which the government can take to address this in the short term. But it also notes that the best long-term solution would be to roll back faith-based education, so all state schools serve their communities equally and fairly – regardless of residents' religion or belief."

[Read more and download the full report on our dedicated page.](#)

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[**Power grab: Academisation and the threat to secular education** Please read and share this new report, exposing how religious groups are expanding their influence over thousands of schools through academisation.](#)

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