

DfE doesn't know how many schools have discriminatory admissions

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The government has admitted it does not know how many schools apply religious discrimination in their admissions.

The Department for Education has said it "does not hold information on which schools select on the basis of religion as an element of their admissions criteria", in response to a freedom of information request from the National Secular Society.

[Exemptions](#) in the Equality Act 2010 enable some kinds of faith schools to prioritise children from particular religious backgrounds if they are oversubscribed.

The DfE has also refused to record which schools practice faith-based selection on their public data service, after the NSS [urged the new schools' minister](#) to provide transparency over school admissions.

Currently the Get Information About Schools (GIAS) service, which provides data on all schools in England, only records whether a school is academically selective. The NSS has warned this could be confusing for parents, as hundreds of schools that can select all their pupils based on faith list their admissions policy as "non-selective".

The NSS has [previously warned](#) that use of the term "non-selective" can be potentially misleading, particularly in proposals for new religiously selective schools.

NSS head of education Alastair Lichten said: "If religious groups are given exemptions from equality laws to facilitate discrimination on grounds of religion or belief, then there needs to be transparency around that. If the DfE do not and will not record which schools discriminate on this basis, and to what extent, transparency and scrutiny is impossible.

"Are they trying to spare the blushes of faith school groups who know discriminatory admissions are unpopular and morally bankrupt?"

"It's long past time we ended faith-based selection. No publicly funded school should be able to discriminate against children based on their parents' beliefs."

Explaining their decision not to record religiously selective admissions, a spokesperson from the DfE told the NSS this would "constitute an additional burden for schools designated with a religious character".

The DfE also said such transparency isn't necessary because local authorities are required to provide a [composite admissions prospectus](#), which explains the admissions policies for all schools in the area.

However, such prospectuses are inconsistent, and it can often be difficult to understand faith schools' selection criteria from the prospectus. The NSS's request would have seen a simple indication of either whether a school has religiously selective oversubscription criteria, or the

number of places subject to such criteria.

How many schools have religiously discriminatory admissions?

Although the DfE does not hold data on school admissions policies, [various estimates](#) have been made of these figures. One method is to look at the numbers of [different school types](#). The latest NSS analysis has found that in England there are:

- 2,639 voluntary aided faith schools, which may be able to religiously select up to 100% of their pupils.
- 105 faith based free schools, which may be able to religiously select up to 50% of their pupils.
- 1,624 voluntary controlled faith schools, which can only rarely religiously select pupils with the agreement of their local education authority.
- 1,952 faith-based converter academies and 490 other faith schools, which may be able to religiously select pupils, though the level of religious selection would depend on many factors including their predecessor school.

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