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Faith Schools Research Bank

The faith schools research bank

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INTRODUCTION

Over a third of schools in Britain are faith schools, yet their place within public education systems remains deeply contested.

Proponents of faith schools claim that they improve parental choice, achieve superior educational outcomes, and are better at promoting moral values. The evidence from the research strongly contests these claims.

Such research is often piecemeal and difficult to access, making it hard to gain a comprehensive view of the debate. This research bank is intended as a valuable resource for policymakers, politicians, academics and anyone else interested in the ongoing debate around faith schools in Britain.

Each entry provides an at-a-glance overview of the key evidence and central arguments made in a different study. The research bank is arranged chronologically within a number of key sections: social cohesion; performance; school choice; values; and public opinion.

Together, the evidence provides a compelling and comprehensive case against state-funded faith schools.

We strongly encourage researchers to submit additions to the research bank to serve as a living document over time. To recommend a source, please contact education@secularism.org.uk . While efforts are made to update this PDF (see front cover for latest version), you should check the online version at secularism.org.uk/faith-school-databank to ensure you are up to date.

The analysis in this research bank focuses primarily on England and Wales, due to the very different educational contexts in Scotland and Northern Ireland, although some studies on Scotland and Northern Ireland are included where they raise themes and issues with wider relevance to the debate around faith schools. Sources are generally from 2010 onwards.

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SOCIAL COHESION

The evidence in this section shows that faith schools undermine social cohesion by segregating pupils on religious, ethnic, racial and social grounds. By reducing contact between people from different social groups, faith schools foster exclusionary in-group dynamics that are detrimental to the wellbeing of a liberal, multicultural society. This evidence strongly undermines claims by supporters that faith schools facilitate social integration, promote a communal religious ethos and help to integrate minority faiths into the life of the nation.

Community Cohesion: A Report of the Independent Review Team

T. Cante (2001), The Cante Report, Home Office, London.

An investigation by the Independent Review Team headed by Ted Cante (charged with examining the issue of community cohesion after civil disturbances struck a number of northern towns in 2001) identified a variety of problems. A key factor was faith schools. The report found a lack of ethnic diversity in many faith schools, noting that this was not simply due to the ethnic composition of the local area but could be due to the admissions policies of the school. As the author wrote: ‘One C of E school for instance in the midst of an Asian community had a policy whereby pupils had to produce a letter from their local vicar to prove they and their parents were regular church goers. Consequently, Muslim parents rarely bothered to apply to send their children to this school and were effectively excluded from it’.

The report went on to observe how the lack of diversity within a school contributed to a lack of diversity in wider social networks, claiming that the promotion of cultural knowledge and understanding outside the school ‘would be easier where the intake had a better mix of cultures and faiths, as this would also allow friendship and parental networks to naturally develop more easily. We are concerned that some existing faith schools appear to be operating discriminatory policies where religious affiliations protect cultural and ethnic divisions’.

The report went on to call for schools to try and limit their intake from one culture or ethnicity, and to offer at least 25% of places to reflect other cultures or ethnicities within the local area.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

Panel Report, Oldham Independent Review

D. Ritchie (11 December 2001).

This independent review into the civil disturbances that took place in Oldham in 2001 identified the segregated nature of the town's school system as a key contributor to underlying ethnic divisions. It noted the 'divisive' nature of faith secondary schooling in the town, pointing out that three of its faith schools (Blue Coat, Crompton House and Our Lady's) admitted no Muslims, and called for 15-20% of school places to be open to pupils of non-Christian backgrounds (claiming that: 'it is possible to admit a significant number of adherents of other faiths without fundamentally undermining a school's ethos'). The report further noted that: 'The problem of segregation would only get worse with the increase of single faith schools'.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

Faith-based schools and state funding: a partial argument

H. Judge (2001), Oxford Review of Education, 27(4): 463–474.

This article makes two principal and interrelated arguments against an expansion of state-funded faith schools in Britain. The first centres on the issue of academic performance and selection. The author notes that while denominational schools tend to secure good academic results, 'there is no agreement among sympathetic observers and researchers about the extent to which such achievement is related to the religious character of the schools in question'. The author adds that:

Any school granted the exceptional and remarkably attractive privileges of being able to choose its own teachers, to depart from bureaucratically designed procedures, to develop its own sense of mission and – this above all – in the last analysis to select its own pupils, whether by admission or through the ultimate sanction of exclusion, is almost certain to

succeed. Such a truism does not of itself constitute sufficient justification for the public funding of religious schools.

The second argument against an expansion of state-funded faith schools centres on their impact for social cohesion. While the author defends the rights of parents to educate their children in the manner of their choosing, and to raise them according to their religious principles, he contends that faith schooling has negative social consequences, and that: ‘any further extension of state aid to faith-based schools is likely to lead to an unwelcome fragmentation of society and a diversion of resources from schools committed to developing a common culture, while respecting a diversity of cultural identities’. The article claims that: ‘There are powerful and potentially dangerous tensions between the (publicly funded) nurturing of distinct cultural identities within a heterogeneous society, and an orderly process of integration’.

[Link to journal](#)

This article also appears in Performance and Selection.

Without prejudice: an exploration of religious diversity, secularism and citizenship in England

(With particular reference to the state funding of Muslim faith schools and multiculturalism). K. Moti Gokulsing (2006), Journal of Education Policy, 21(4): 459–470.

This paper examines the issue of religious diversity, with particular reference to the state funding of Muslim schools and their impact on secularism, citizenship and multiculturalism. The author suggests that New Labour’s policies on education were contradictory – promoting an enterprise culture through knowledge and skills with secular outcomes, but at the same time pursuing an increase in state-funded faith schools.

The paper goes on to discuss the English, French and US systems of dealing with religious diversity in schools, and questions whether faith schools contribute to the common good rather than the particular good of the faith community. The author notes that: ‘The problem of Britain as a pluralist society is to find some social cement to ensure that people with different moral

religious and ethical values as well as social, cultural and linguistic traditions can live together with a degree of harmony’, but argues that while faith is an integral part of the daily life of many communities, ‘religion approaches life in terms of non-negotiable absolutes whereas education is about challenges to and changes of often strongly held views’. The paper concludes that ‘secularism and citizenship in schools are not best served by the state funding of faith schools’, and makes a number of proposals for educational reform.

[Link to journal](#)

Social Capital, Diversity and Education Policy

I. Bruegel (August 2006), Families and Social Capital ESRC Research Group, London South Bank University.

This study examined patterns of children’s friendships in 12 English primary schools with significant variation in ethnic and faith diversity. The findings support claims that regular contact between members of different groups provides positive social outcomes. The children involved in the study ‘saw faith schools as isolating groups of children from one another’, and the report noted that: ‘day-to-day contact between children has far more chance of breaking down barriers between communities, than school twinning and sporting encounters’. It concludes by stating the need to consider ‘How far policies of enhanced school choice and the retention of existing faith schools have hindered integration’.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

Sharing crisps with someone different?

Social Cohesion, Diversity and Education Policy. I. Bruegel (August 2006), Submission to the Commission on Cohesion and Integration.

This report, which was submitted to the Commission on Cohesion and Integration, explores research into children’s friendships in 12 English primary schools between 2003 and 2005. It

found that school friendships ‘cross ethnic and faith divides wherever children have the opportunity to make friends from different backgrounds’ and observes that ‘the positive benefits of mixed primary schooling, particularly for white children, extend into the early years of secondary school’. The research also shows ‘that parents learned to respect people from other backgrounds as a result of their children’s experiences in mixed schools’. The report concludes by calling on the commission ‘to consider how far policies of enhanced school choice and the retention of existing faith schools have hindered integration’.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

School Admissions: Fair Choice for Parents and Pupils

S. Tough and R. Brooks (June 2007), Institute for Public Policy Research.

This report argues that the current admissions system for school places is a cause of segregation by social class and ability and is likely to lead to systematic unfairness. This is especially the case for schools that are their own admissions authorities (such as faith schools), which are found to be more unrepresentative of their local areas than schools with admissions that are controlled by the local authority. The authors claim that a system of fair choice would take into account the need to achieve a balanced intake in every school, and call for a system of area-wide banding for all local authorities in order to ensure that schools admit pupils of all abilities. The report argues that this should apply equally to faith schools, meaning that ‘religious faith would no longer take strict precedence over all other factors in allocating places’. They argue that this approach would also ‘be compatible with schools maintaining their own distinct ethos, religious or otherwise’.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

This report also appears in Choice and Admissions.

Identities in Transition: A Longitudinal Study of Immigrant Children

R. Brown, A. Rutland and C. Watters (2007), Universities of Sussex and Kent, ESRC Report Reference No: RES-148-25-0007.

This project examined the relationship between young children with immigration backgrounds and their peers from the majority in the host society. It focused on the issues of identity and acculturation processes and their implications for psychological well-being and social acceptance, centring on the development of children's identities and acculturation orientations between 5-11 years old. Data are drawn primarily from a 12-month longitudinal study of 398 students from over 20 schools.

The study highlights the importance of school diversity, with higher levels of diversity being positively related to higher self-esteem, fewer peer problems and more cross-group friendships. According to the authors, these findings 'show that school ethnic composition can significantly affect the promotion of positive intergroup attitudes'. The report concludes that: 'These findings speak against policies promoting single faith schools, since such policies are likely to lead to reduced ethnic diversity in schools'.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

Intercultural education: religion, knowledge and the limits of postmodernism

D. Coulby (2008), Intercultural Education, 19(4): 305–314.

This paper discusses the role of religion in school systems. After highlighting some of the destructive aspects of religion (such as the opposition of the Catholic Church to the use of contraceptives during the AIDS pandemic) the paper examines the role of knowledge and tolerance advocated in the Enlightenment, and presents a critical account of the role of religion in educational settings in various parts of the world. The author claims that this is exacerbating 'the cultural division of communities'.

The paper argues that schools and universities are 'one of the main sites for the production and reproduction of religion', particularly when this involves the teaching of religion and

religiously inscribed versions of history, and claims that: ‘Religious nationalism still thrives in the schools of the UK’. It goes on to criticise the expansion of faith schools under the governments of New Labour, claiming that this ‘adds an important additional divide in communities already fractured along the lines of race’, and takes issue with claims about the popularity of faith schools, claiming that: ‘a significant majority of people would prefer religious institutions to be kept out of schools’.

The paper concludes by considering the challenge that the institutionalisation of religion in schools poses to intercultural education and to postmodernity.

[Link to journal](#)

This paper is also freely available as a Word document from the University of Athens institutional repository. [Click here to access.](#)

This article also appears in Values and Morality.

Religious control of schooling in England: diversity and division

S. Ward (2008), Intercultural Education, 19(4): 315–323.

This paper argues that faith schools have a negative impact on community cohesion and calls for their removal. It claims that: ‘the idea that the religious ethos of faith schools improves educational performance is illusory’, and argues that: ‘the very definition of a faith school is that it must be exclusive and therefore divisive’. The author notes that:

There are only two distinctive features of faith schools: the curriculum and the selection of pupils. The faith school can preach and proselytize about a single religious faith, and it is allowed to select its pupils on the basis of their commitment to the faith. All other features claimed by faith schools such as a strong moral ethos, tolerance, good behaviour, high achievement are possible in a community school.

[Link to journal](#)

This article also appears in Values and Morality.

Religion, modernity and social rights in European education

E. Zambeta (2008), *Intercultural Education*, 19(4): 297–304.

This paper explores the role of religion in European education systems. It considers the historical context for the presence of religion in education systems (seeing this as a means of social control) and claims that the place of religion in state-funded schools raises ‘fundamental questions regarding the social role of education institutions in modern representative democracies’ with critical implications ‘for the conceptualization of democracy, religious freedom and social rights’.

The paper claims that: ‘the Enlightenment quest for social progress, rationality and emancipation, to a large extent, gave way to the aim of maintenance of social stability and reproduction of existing social hierarchies’, and argues that enlightenment thought is now ‘in danger of being silenced’ in schools due to the growth of religious fundamentalism. The author writes that the expansion of religious schools is creating a ‘new politics of segregation within education’, and warns that faith schools can promote xenophobia, racism and homophobia. The article observes that: ‘When, in the name of safeguarding religious identity, young people are deprived from access to the basic premises of modern knowledge and science, religion is transformed into a force of obscurantism’.

[Link to journal](#)

This article also appears in Values and Morality.

Catholic schools in Scotland and divisiveness

S. J. McKinney (2008), *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, 29(2): 173–184.

This study examines the extent to which faith schools in Scotland are divisive. Focusing on Catholic schools, and drawing on interview data with academics, Catholic leaders and educationalists, it finds that faith schools are divisive in five key ways: (1) their state funding; (2) their use of selective admissions processes; (3) social perceptions of their divisiveness; (4) their effects on social cohesion; and (5) their effects on the autonomy of children. The study finds that faith schools in Scotland are seen to be divisive socially, religiously and in terms of attitudes and beliefs that create, or promote, an alternative identity. The Catholic school system is also perceived to be a privileged system, with unfair employment opportunities for Catholic teachers in Catholic schools.

[Link to journal](#)

This article also appears in Values and Morality.

Faith-based schools in England after ten years of Tony Blair

G. Walford (2008), Oxford Review of Education, 34(6): 689–699.

This article presents a review of faith-based schooling in England after ten years of expansion under the governments of New Labour. It charts the growth of faith schools, considers some of the underlying rationales for this programme (based on the belief that a faith ethos would generate higher academic results) and finds that: ‘the evidence is at best mixed’. The paper shows that while faith schools have tended to produce higher academic results than non-faith schools, this can be explained by their selection of students from higher social classes, with faith schools taking a lower proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals. The author also points out that: ‘in value added terms, their success is much less clear’.

The paper goes on to note that many faith groups do not want separate, faith-based schooling for their children and highlights substantial issues of ethnic as well as social segregation resulting from selection processes. It suggests that there is less chance of an education system producing social fragmentation and cultural tensions ‘if schools have a mix of children from different social classes, ethnicities and religions. The desire for cultural continuity can be achieved without the need for separation’.

[Link to journal](#)

This article also appears in Performance and Selection.

Faith schooling: implications for teacher educators. A perspective from Northern Ireland

N. Richardson (2008), Journal of Beliefs and Values, 29(1): 1–10.

This article examines the effects of sectarian divisions within the Northern Ireland education system on the structure of teacher training. The study is based on a survey of the relationship between two religiously separated teacher education institutions. The author notes that the current system of separating teacher training institutions on the basis of faith ‘is counter-productive in relation to the task of building a more inclusive, cohesive society’, and argues that: ‘If teachers are to be role models of mutual understanding, inclusion and respect for diversity, if they are to set and contribute to the kind of classroom and whole-school ethos that encourages the acceptance and celebration of diverse identities, then they need experience for themselves of that diversity’. The paper concludes by calling for the development of ‘an ethos of “shared faiths”, with full respect for those who are of no faith’.

Although this paper focuses on the context of Northern Ireland, the social and cultural impact of selecting teachers on the basis of their faith has clear implication for the wider debate around faith schools. Supporters of faith schools claim that the use of faith as a criterion for the employment of teaching staff is essential for upholding the ethos of faith schools, but as studies such as this demonstrate, selecting teachers in this way can lead to a narrowing of educative possibilities with potentially corrosive effects on social cohesion and diversity.

[Link to journal](#)

School diversity and social justice: policy and politics

A. West and P. Currie (2008), Educational Studies, 34(3): 241–250.

This paper examines diversity in the English education system and explores tensions between education policy, politics and social justice. The study shows that claims about the higher educational quality of faith schools are ‘questionable’, noting that research comparing GCSE and national test results (at age 14) for religious and non-religious schools finds any gains for the former being attributed to the quality of the pupils they admit. The authors write that: ‘It thus appears that the existence of religious schools privileges some children over others – with fewer children from poor backgrounds attending them’, and note that this has ‘undesirable consequences in terms of social justice considerations’. The authors go on to show how religious schooling can lead to segregation on religious and ethnic lines.

[Link to journal](#)

This article also appears in Performance and Selection.

Right to Divide? Faith Schools and Community Cohesion

R. Berkeley (December 2008) with research by S. Vij, Runnymede Trust.

This extensive report publishes the findings of a Runnymede Trust research project designed to find out whether a school system with faith schools could also promote equality and cohesion. The project involved a wide range of stakeholders, including parents, teachers, education experts, religious leaders, local authority officials and pupils.

The report makes a number of observations. Faith schools are criticised for being exclusive, for promoting singular faith identities and for their inaction on issues of social cohesion. The report notes that a commitment to the promotion of cohesion ‘is not universal, and for many faith schools not a priority’ and that, despite a statutory duty to promote community cohesion, ‘many faith schools have done very little to engage with community cohesion initiatives’.

The report further notes that faith schools ‘have not developed a distinctive approach to learning about diversity’ (expressing particular concerns ‘that faith schools do not put enough

emphasis on LGBT issues’) and claims that any advantages they might have in terms of educational performance might be due to their selection practices. Faith schools are found to take a lower proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals than non-faith schools and to be ‘disproportionately likely’ to have used unfair admissions practices, such as interviewing parents and asking about their ability to contribute funds. This, the report claims, ‘creates the perception that faith schools are exclusive rather than inclusive institutions with little interest in being schools of and for their local community’.

Although the report supports the inclusion of faith schools within the school system, it concludes that: ‘the most effective way of enabling faith schools to meet their obligation to promote cohesion’ is for them to be opened up to pupils from a wider range of faith and non-faith backgrounds.

Overall, the report makes six recommendations:

1. ***Faith schools should end selection on the basis of faith.*** *The report notes that: ‘Faith schools should be for the benefit of all in society rather than just the few ... With state funding comes an obligation to be relevant and open to all citizens ... All parents should be given access to what faith schools claim is a distinctive ethos ... At the moment, faith can be used by parents as a means of ensuring social exclusivity within a school’.*
2. ***Children should have a greater say in how they are educated.*** *The report asserts that children’s rights are as important as parents’ rights, and that, while much of the debate around faith schools has focused on issues of parental choice, children’s views have been excluded. As the authors put it: ‘Faith schools in particular emphasize parental choice ... but do not champion the rights of children’.*
3. ***RE should be part of the core national curriculum.*** *The report called for all schools to follow a common curriculum for religious education ‘as a minimum guarantee of learning about the role of faith in society, critical thinking about religion, ethics, and the diversity of faith traditions’.*

4. ***Faith schools should also serve the most disadvantaged.*** Here it was noted that, despite claims to serve the most disadvantaged in society, 'faith schools educate a disproportionately small number of young people at the lowest end of the socio-economic scale'. This was attributed to selection procedures based on faith, which gave an advantage to more privileged socio-economic groups. The report further noted that: 'When challenged on this data, faith school providers seem to be more keen in their public announcements to discuss statistical validity than engage with a mission to serve the most disadvantaged'.

5. ***Faith schools must value all young people.*** This recommendation focused on the way in which faith schools privileged the role of faith as a marker of identity over other identifying markers, such as ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation. The report noted that: 'given their emphasis on values and moral education, faith schools have not developed a distinctive approach to learning about diversity'.

6. ***Faith should continue to play an important role in our education system.*** In making this final recommendation the report asserted that 'faith schools remain a significant and important part of our education system', but reaffirmed the above problems that faith schools faced.

[Link to report](#)

Responses of three Muslim majority primary schools in England to the Islamic faith of their pupils

J. Ipgrave, J. Miller and P. Hopkins (2010), Journal of International Migration and Integration 11: 73–89.

This paper examines the responses of three English primary schools (one Muslim faith school and two community schools) to the education of their Muslim pupils. It focuses on the approaches of teachers and school leaders to the faith backgrounds of their pupils, their constructions of Islam for these educational contexts, and their preparation of Muslim children for a religiously plural Britain. The authors observe that debates around the education of

Muslim children in England commonly centre on two themes: (1) linkages between the affirmation of children's religious background and their engagement and achievement in school (a view typically promoted by supporters of Muslim schools), and (2) concerns that increases in distinctive separate education for Muslim pupils intensify existing trends towards segregation.

The study found that all three schools allowed pupils and staff to wear Islamic dress, provided halal food in the school canteen, made allowances to enable older pupils to participate in Ramadan and gave pupils time off school for Eid Celebrations. It also found variation in Islam-related curriculum provision. The Muslim faith school was characterised by a clear intention to frame educational provision around the tenets of Islam, being grounded in the idea that 'solutions to the problem of Muslim youth could be found by providing them with the sense of confidence in their religious identity'. The authors write: 'The school's policy is not just to make incidental links with Islam but to present the whole of learning through an Islamic lens'. In contrast, at one of the community schools in the study: 'The neutrality of the staff on religious matters is stressed. School assemblies are viewed more as learning experiences than as acts of worship'. The authors claim that the Muslim school had 'clearly opted for a degree of separation', although they added that the promotion of religious faith was oriented towards seeing religion as a social resource, and that 'a large part of the school's responsibilities towards its pupils' development is their preparation for wider British society'.

[Link to journal](#)

This paper is also freely available as a PDF from the University of Warwick institutional repository. [Click to access](#).

This article also appears in Values and Morality.

Conflicts of ethos: issues of equity and diversity in faith-based schools

G. McNamara and J. O'Higgins Norman (2010), Educational Management Administration and Leadership 38(5): 534–546.

This paper, which focuses on the experiences of faith schools in Ireland, highlights a range of problematic issues for schools owned and run by the Catholic Church. Extensive exemptions to employment and equality legislation give schools the power to discriminate against employees and pupils on grounds of ethos and to avoid teaching equality in the field of sex education. Research also shows that faith schools are ten times more likely to be unrepresentative of their local catchment areas than traditional schools, and highlights significant levels of homophobic bullying. The overall impression is that faith schools have become inhospitable places for minority groups, members of which are perceived to be ‘outsiders’.

A PDF copy of this paper is available from the Pennsylvania State University repository. [Click here to access.](#)

Why are English secondary schools socially segregated?

J. Coldron, C. Cripps and L. Shipton (2010), *Journal of Education Policy*, 25(1): 19–35.

This paper seeks to explain the persistent social phenomenon of segregated schooling in England, whereby children from families with broadly the same characteristics of wealth, education and social networks are more likely to be educated together and therefore separate from children from more socially distant groups. The operation of these class mechanisms is illustrated by considering the different ways in which segregation is generated in selective, faith and community schools.

The authors claim that the primary reason for this segregation is that more affluent and more highly educated parents are gaining greater access to the better schools, compounding the already existing inequality of educational opportunity between rich and poor. A reinforcing effect is also observed, in which poor pupils educated in schools with concentrations of other poor pupils do not progress as well as they would in a school with a more balanced intake. Conversely, those pupils that are already advantaged and educated with their more affluent peers flourish educationally. This is not only unjust but has a negative impact on attainment and a country’s position in the international league tables for educational performance. Socially segregated schooling is also implicated in the reduction of social cohesion and civility.

The paper shows that social segregation in school varies by geographical area but also by the type of school. Using data from the Sutton Trust, it finds that the average proportion of pupils on free school meals in voluntary aided (faith) schools was 5.6% compared with 14.6% for the surrounding areas. The paper also claims that church schools might engage in the covert selection of pupils by social background. For example, about 8% of faith schools (in 2006) asked for details that could facilitate social selection (such as the background of the family or child). The oversubscription criteria of faith schools frequently omitted to prioritise children who were more difficult to educate (e.g. those with special educational needs) and were more complex than those for other types of school. The criterion of religious commitment (verified by reference from a priest) was also likely to favour parents with more time and resources to demonstrate this in the community of the local church. The authors noted that where a faith school was already known to have a highly privileged intake, less affluent parents were less likely to apply.

[Link to journal](#)

A copy of this paper is available to download from ResearchGate. [Click here to access.](#)

Understanding public attitudes in Britain towards faith schools

B. Clements (2010), British Educational Research Journal, 36(6): 953–973.

This paper provides a detailed analysis of different aspects of public attitudes towards faith schools in Britain. It uses data from the British Social Attitudes Survey 2007 to analyse the relationships between attitudes towards faith schools and religious characteristics. The paper finds that Catholics and those who attend religious services regularly, those with higher levels of religious feeling and those with socially conservative beliefs are more supportive of faith schools. Importantly, there was found to be little impact in relation to measures of socio-economic status, except for past or current attendance at a private or fee-paying school of a household member. These findings support critics of faith schools who contend that they promote divisive, in-group dynamics.

[Link to journal](#)

This paper also appears in Opinion Polls.

FAITH SCHOOLS WE CAN BELIEVE IN:

Ensuring that tolerant and democratic values are upheld in every part of Britain's education system. *J. Bald et al. (2010), Policy Exchange.*

This report by Policy Exchange examines the issue of extremism in the UK's education system. It claims that: 'Britain's faith schools – and other schools – are increasingly vulnerable to extremist influences' and that: 'Our education system ... is not equipped to meet such challenges'. Of particular concern is the regime for inspecting religious schools. The report highlights potential conflicts of interest in the inspection process, which allows inspectors to be members of the same faith as the school they are inspecting. The authors write: 'Confessional allegiance is not an appropriate basis upon which to conduct inspections for the totality of the school's activity'. They add that: 'For schools of a religious character, an inspection should include how and what pupils learn about other religions and whether there is evidence of any religious bias in the secular curriculum – including the teaching of Creationism in science'. The report calls for the promotion of community cohesion by schools to be 'replaced by a sharper anti-extremism focus, combined with a clearer sense of British identity'.

A PDF copy of this report is available for download. [Click here to access.](#)

Oldham lives: still parallel or converging?

S. Burgess and R. Harris (Summer 2011), Research in Public Policy.

This article assesses the issue of social and ethnic segregation, ten years after civil disturbances spread through a number of towns in the north of England. Focusing their attention on Oldham, the authors find little evidence of greater integration in schools. A number of potential explanations for this are considered, including the use of geographically based admissions

criteria (which the authors deem to be an unlikely cause), rigid social attitudes and the prevalence of faith schools. More than one third of primary schools and over two fifths of secondary schools in Oldham are either Roman Catholic or Church of England with faith-based admissions criteria. The authors conclude that: ‘If such practices have cultural and ethnic underpinnings – which they do – then including them among the admissions criteria is unlikely to aid mixing within schools’.

A PDF copy of this paper is available to download from the institutional repository at the University of Bristol. [Click here to access.](#)

Fifty-odd years of inter-group contact: From hypothesis to integrated theory

M. Hewstone and H. Swart (2011), British Journal of Social Psychology 50: 374–386.

This paper claims that the contact hypothesis is not merely a speculative claim but has now reached the stage of a fully-fledged theory. The authors argue that while more work needs to be done and while more empirical evidence needs to be gathered, the contact view now has growing support from psychologists. Although the paper does not address the issue of faith schools directly, the claims of the contact thesis are frequently used by critics of faith schooling, who argue that it creates social divisions by segregating pupils and thereby reducing contact between people from different social groups.

[Link to journal](#)

A copy of this paper can be downloaded from ResearchGate. [Click here to access.](#)

Where tradition and “modern” knowledge meet: exploring two Islamic schools in Singapore and Britain

C. Tan (2011), Intercultural Education, 22(1): 55–68.

This paper explores ways in which Muslim schools assert their cultural heritage and negotiate learning in the modern age. It draws on a case study of two schools: one in Singapore and one in the UK, and examines common challenges faced by the students and teachers in their quest for a balanced curriculum. It claims that there is a fundamental difference between Islamic schools and secular state schools in how they view ‘truth’, ‘knowledge’ and other attendant concepts. Examples of this include the resistance of many Muslim students and parents towards the teaching of evolution as ‘truth’ in biology, and the introduction of sexuality knowledge in schools. While studying in an Islamic school allows the students to avoid these religiously objectionable topics, there remains an epistemological gap between Islamic schools and secular state schools. A ‘modernist’ view – one that is accepted in many secular state schools – states that ‘truth’ and ‘knowledge’ could be ‘discovered’, at least provisionally, and are subject to revisions by human beings. In contrast, many traditional Muslims see the starting point of all subjects (including ecology, the social sciences and the natural sciences) to be revealed scripture, which is not open for discussion or alternative interpretation. The author claims that these opposing views towards knowledge might explain the resistance and animosity that some Muslims have towards secular state schools, perceiving them to be ‘westernised’ and inimical to their religious and cultural heritage.

[Link to journal](#)

A copy of this paper is available on ResearchGate. [Click here to access.](#)

Measuring Social Segregation Between London’s Secondary Schools, 2003 – 2008/9

R. Harris (June 2011), Working Paper No. 11/260, Centre for Market and Public Organisation, Bristol Institute of Public Affairs.

This working paper examines patterns of social segregation between London’s state-funded secondary schools from 2003 to 2008. It finds ‘sizeable differences’ between schools in the proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals, and shows that faith schools under-recruit from this category of pupil compared to other local schools. The author writes:

It is notable that voluntary aided (VA) Church of England (CoE) and Roman Catholic (RC) schools – ones that set their own admissions criteria and can include commitment to the religious group or denomination amongst them – under-recruit FSM eligible pupils, on average and relative to their competitors, whereas voluntary controlled (VC) schools, which use the LEA admissions criteria, actually slightly over-recruit on average.

A PDF copy of this paper is available for download. [Click here to access.](#)

Educating for religious citizenship: multiculturalism and national identity in an English multi-faith primary school

P. J. Hemming (2011), Transactions, 36(3): 441–454.

This article examines informal religious citizenship education in schools, focusing on an English multi-faith community primary school. It explores the way in which religious minorities were recognised and accommodated, highlighting the significance of religion to debates about multicultural citizenship and the construction of British national identity.

Using semi-structured interviews with staff, parents and children, the study found that Christianity was the dominant religion in the school. ‘Major Christian festivals were the non-negotiable aspects of school life, and other religious occasions would only be celebrated if time and resources allowed’. It also found that ‘Christian festivals, such as Christmas nativities, were a taken-for-granted part of school life’, that Christianity was generally accepted ‘as the default religion’ and that this was often linked to constructions of national identity (such as identifying England/Britain as a ‘Christian country’). These findings support the view that, while the liberal state maintains an officially neutral position regarding religious affiliations, ‘majority populations still tend to enjoy a certain amount of privilege over minorities because of formal cultural and religious arrangements’. The author notes that while the school tried to take an open and accommodating approach to differing religious requests (such as food and attendance), provisions for religious minorities ‘only went so far’.

Although the paper is not about faith schools *per se*, and although the author goes on to suggest that these findings highlight the need to provide support for minority religious needs, the study nevertheless highlights the way in which religious identity can serve as a marker of, and a driving factor for, social divisions within an educational context.

[Link to journal](#)

A PDF of this paper is available from Brighton University. [Click here to access.](#)

Are separate schools divisive? A case study from Northern Ireland

J. Hughes (2011), British Educational Research Journal, 37(5): 829–850.

This article uses qualitative methods to examine social identity and intergroup attitudes amongst children attending a state-controlled Protestant school in Northern Ireland. The study found that most pupils had minimal or superficial contact with Catholics, and suggests ‘a relationship between ethnic isolation experienced by children and negative intergroup social attitudes’. Although the study was based in the context of Northern Ireland, the findings have strong implications for faith schooling in the UK as a whole, where issues of social segregation are common. The study notes that: ‘the separateness of the school [is] ... likely to contribute to strong “own” group bias, stereotyping and prejudice’, and concludes that greater inter-group contact ‘is seen to be effective by reducing inter-group anxiety and promoting trust and friendship, which in turn lead to self-disclosure, perspective taking and greater mutual understanding’.

[Link to journal](#)

Praying for success? Faith schools and school choice in East London

T. Butler and C. Hamnett (2012), Geoforum 43(6): 1242–1253.

The article discusses research into perceptions of educational choice amongst a group of middle-class parents in East London. It focuses on the way in which faith schools are being drawn into the mainstream discourse of choice, driven by the attractions of ethos, perceptions that faith schools contain ‘people like us’ and good academic standards. The paper argues that increased demand for faith schools is contributing to a long-term process of secularisation, in which the religious ethos is being undermined by an educational ethos based around the elision of school attainment and social composition, but that these changes continue to perpetuate social inequalities in the education system. In this respect, the socio-economic inequalities present within faith schools can become self-sustaining, even when the faith element is in decline.

[Link to journal](#)

*This article also appears in *Performance and Selection*.*

How many poor children go to faith schools?

S. Rogers (5 March 2012), *The Guardian*.

A study of data from the Department for Education, conducted by *The Guardian*, found that state faith schools in England were ‘failing to mirror their local communities by shunning the poorest pupils in their area’. The analysis found that 73% of Catholic primary schools and 72% of Catholic secondary schools had a lower proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals than the average of all children of school age in its local authority. The respective figures for the Church of England were 74% and 65.5%. This compared to 51% of non-religious primary schools and 45% of non-religious secondary schools.

The study also found that 76% of Catholic primary schools and 65% of Catholic secondary schools had a smaller proportion of pupils that were eligible for free school meals than was representative of their postcode. The respective figures for the Church of England were 63.5% and 40%. In contrast, the figures for non-religious schools were 47% and 29%.

[Link to article](#)

Leadership and faith schools: issues and challenges

S. Scott and D. McNeish (December 2012), National Centre for Social Research for the Centre for Understanding Behaviour Change.

This report charts the way in which faith schools have responded to opinion polls showing a lack of support for an expansion of faith schools and claims that they undermine social cohesion. One of the main responses here has been for faith schools to downplay their religious characteristics and to present themselves as a positive source of social cohesion. The authors of the report state that: ‘As a consequence, some schools have opted to promote social cohesion and downplay the importance of distinctive Christian teaching and Church doctrines’.

A PDF of the report is available from Bristol University. [Click here to access.](#)

Narrowing down the determinants of between-school segregation: an analysis of the intake to all schools in England, 1989–2011

S. Gorard, R. Hordosy and B. Huat See (2013), Journal of School Choice, 7(2): 182–195.

This article examines the social and economic segregation of pupils between schools in England, using data for all school intakes from 1989-2011. It claims that the mix of students in a school has an influence on how students are treated, on how well they are taught, on how well they learn, on the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged pupils and on wider school outcomes (such as students’ sense of justice) and longer-term outcomes such as levels of aspiration. Students growing up in more socially segregated settings tend to have less qualified teachers, substandard materials, more dilapidated buildings and experience higher crime and generally poorer local services. In contrast, the most egalitarian systems tend to have the highest average attainment in formal tests and the highest percentage of very skilled students. Data show that the segregation of students (even if unintentional) is socially detrimental.

The paper goes on to argue that schools that select their intake in terms of religion might also tend to increase segregation by ethnic origin, parental income and education, or social class. Therefore, the authors claim that a society that wishes to enjoy the advantages of mixed school intakes needs to do more than simply offer choice. The authors call for a national school system that does not select by attainment, aptitude, student background or faith.

[Link to journal](#)

A PDF copy of this paper is also available from Durham University. [Click here to access](#).

This article also appears in Performance and Selection.

Worse than an educated guess: British Humanist Association response to Theos's report on "faith' schools"
British Humanist Association (October 2013).

This report by the British Humanist Association (now Humanists UK) provides a critical response to an analysis of research into faith schools published by the Christian think-tank, Theos. The report claims that Theos 'cherry-pick' evidence to provide a more favourable impression of faith schools than is warranted by the available evidence and reach 'a number of conclusions without any justification for them having been provided'. The report also claims that the Theos analysis contains a number of factual inaccuracies (e.g. wrongly referring to the 2009 Admissions Code, rather than the revised 2012 version) and ignores a range of important factors. This includes a failure to consider the decline of religious practice (over 13% of secondary school places in England and over 17% of primary school places are restricted on the basis of faith, even though weekly church attendance in 2005 was just 6.3% of the national population), a failure to consider the impact of faith schools that do not belong to the Church of England or the Catholic Church and a lack of attention to issues around human rights and discrimination. Theos are also accused of failing to accurately report research showing that faith schools take fewer children eligible for free school meals compared to non-faith schools and that any educational advantages conferred on faith schools (such as higher outcomes in

terms of academic grades) can be explained by the quality of their pupil intake rather than any particular ‘ethos’ or ‘faith school effect’.

A PDF copy of this note is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

This report also appears in Performance and Selection.

Contact between Catholic and Protestant schoolchildren in Northern Ireland

R. N. Turner et al. (2013), Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 43(S2): 216–228.

This paper examines segregation and sectarianism in Northern Irish schools. The study involved pupils from both integrated and non-integrated schools, and sought to analyse some of the key factors influencing attitudes towards people not considered to be part of the in-group (in this case, Protestants or Catholics). The study found that cross-group friendships and extended contact were both closely linked to lower levels of prejudice.

[Link to journal](#)

Free schools in the Big Society: the motivations, aims and demography of free school proposers

R. Higham (2013), Journal of Education Policy, 29(1): 122–139.

This article examines the role of free schools in the context of the Conservative government’s Big Society agenda. It identifies two groups seeking to promote free faith schools – parent-led groups and faith organisations. A majority of both groups claimed to be driven by ideals of service to their local community, rather than evangelicalism, and argued that they sought to establish inclusive rather than segregated schools. However, the majority of faith school proposals also planned to use 50% faith admission criteria and to follow a well-publicised faith

ethos. The article argues that, in contrast to claims that the Big Society would promote altruistic behaviour from civil society actors, those actors best able to gain access to state resources brought a range of private and self-interested motivations into the public sector. Rather than being well disposed to meet the complex needs of disadvantaged communities, this process, including the provision of free faith schools, appears capable of diverting state resources towards more advantaged actors.

[Link to journal](#)

Faith in the system? State-funded faith schools in England and the contested parameters of community cohesion

C. Dwyer and V. Parutis (2013), Transactions, 38(2): 267–284.

This paper examines state-funded faith schools in England, and how opposition to them has been mobilised and negotiated. The discussion focuses specifically on the role of New Labour's community cohesion policy. This was adopted to combat social and ethnic division after social disturbances in 2001 and required all state-funded faith schools to 'promote community cohesion'. The paper argues that in pursuing the government's policy of community cohesion, faith schools interpreted the concept in ways that allowed them to strategically rework its meaning through their own theological discourses – for instance, by highlighting ways in which faith schools engaged with the local community, by presenting them as places where new immigrants could gain the social capital needed to participate as full members of British society and by extending the definition of 'community' beyond the locality to a wider networked 'global community'.

The paper also shows how these differing constructions of 'community' shaped political negotiations around a new admissions code for faith schools, leading to entanglements between religion and state over the authority to define religious belonging. While the new admissions code was intended to ensure greater equality in the allocation of school places (requiring a proportion of places to be given to pupils from other faiths, or no faith), an unintended and contradictory outcome was that the state sometimes emerged as the arbiter of how religious identification or belonging was measured. Thus, the attempt to regulate faith schools and to

ensure compliance with community cohesion measures led to ‘unanticipated entanglements of state and religious authority’, a situation that was dissatisfactory for both state and religious communities.

[Link to journal](#)

Inter-group contact at school and social attitudes: evidence from Northern Ireland

J. Hughes et al. (2013), Oxford Review of Education, 39(6): 761–779.

This article concerns the relationship between schools that are divided on ethno-religious lines and the implications of this for social cohesion. Examining the impact on outgroup attitudes of pupils attending mixed and separate post-primary schools in Northern Ireland, the analysis shows that intergroup contact is strongly associated with more positive orientations to the ethno-religious outgroup. It finds that integrated schools generally outperformed students in Protestant and Catholic schools on measures of intergroup contact and outgroup attitudes. Students attending relatively homogeneous Catholic and Protestant schools (those having 5% or less outgroup representation in the school) reported equivalent scores on the respective measures. In contrast, students attending more ethno-religiously diverse schools reported more favourable responses. These findings challenge the view that faith schools promote social cohesion by giving children a strong sense of their own identity that makes them more respectful of the beliefs and values of others.

[Link to journal](#)

A PDF copy of this paper is available from ResearchGate. [Click here to access.](#)

Post-secular schooling: freedom through faith or diversity in community

J. E. Watson (2013), Cambridge Journal of Education, 43(2): 147-162.

This paper explores the relevance of faith schools in a post-secular society, ‘where religious and spiritual pluralism exponentially increases, and belief positions are both polarised and syncretised’. In this context, where faith can no longer be wholly privatised, ‘the democratic notion of the common or community school appears even more crucial to address community understanding’.

The paper sets out a detailed overview of some of the most popular arguments in favour of publicly funded faith schools, including claims around parental rights, educational outcomes and the poor quality of secular schools. These arguments are forcefully rejected – parental rights, for example, are rebuffed as impractical, since the state could not realistically provide all religious parents with a right to a place for their child (areas with small religious populations might not be able to sustain a specialist school, while areas with large religious populations might create problems of oversubscription) and ensure that ‘choice’ was equitably distributed.

The author maintains that the role of education is to expose children to diversity, openness and critical thinking, and to equip them for life in a plural, liberal democracy. The paper concludes by calling for a greater role for secular community schools.

[Link to journal](#)

Segregation of schools – the impact on young people and their families and communities

T. Cante (February 2013), Paper to the Accord Coalition and All-Party Parliamentary Groups, London and Liberal Democrat Conference Fringe meeting (March 2013).

This paper discusses the issue of segregation in schools. It notes that there are a number of ways in which schools can be divided, including ability and location, but notes that: ‘By far the most systematic inhibitor of free choice is that of faith – and as the vast majority of faith schools are supported by the state, government must accept responsibility for this restriction’. The author notes that, in the case of faith schools:

People of no faith are effectively excluded from up to one-quarter of schools, and may only be able to apply to faith schools if the schools in question are less popular and do not have sufficient applicants from their faith community. At a local level the choice may be almost non-existent if local schools happen to be faith based.

The author also discusses some of the ways in which these divisions can cause and/or exacerbate social problems, from ethnic segregation to bolstering the power of unelected faith ‘leaders’. As the author writes: ‘Religious identities often overlap with ethnic identities and faith schools effectively exclude some of the minority communities and can also contribute directly to ethnic segregation’. The paper adds that: ‘Faith schools are also part of a system which props up faith leaders and gives them a level of undeserved credence and power’.

[Link to paper](#)

Gay in Britain: Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People’s Experiences and Expectations of Discrimination

Stonewall (2013).

This report examines the experiences and expectations of LGBT people in respect of discrimination. It finds that more LGBT people express concern about the treatment that they would receive if they enrolled their child in a school outside local authority control. A total of 13% of LGBT people said that they expected to be treated worse than heterosexuals when enrolling their child in primary or secondary free schools and academies, compared to just 5% for maintained schools. This figure rose to 61% in the case of faith schools. A significant majority also feared discrimination if they wanted to become more involved with a faith school on a formal level. A total of 70% of LGBT people expected to face barriers because of their sexual orientation if they applied to become a school governor. This figure rose to 78% in the case of black and minority ethnic gay people.

The report called on academy and faith school trusts to ‘reassure gay parents that they will not be treated less favourably by having trust-wide policies to tackle homophobia and training for

member schools. Trust prospectuses and open evenings should make clear that their schools value diversity and difference’.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

***The Teachers’ Report, 2014: Homophobic Bullying in Britain’s Schools
Stonewall (2014).***

This report examines homophobic bullying in schools. It finds that teachers in faith schools are significantly less likely to report that their school allows them to teach about lesbian, gay and bisexual issues than teachers working in non-faith schools. The respective figures here are 51% compared to 62%.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click to access.](#)

***Who owns our schools? An analysis of the governance of free schools in
England***

R. Higham (2014), Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 42(3): 404-422.

This paper addresses an issue that is neglected by existing studies of faith schools, namely: school ownership. In particular, the study examines the effect that the purchasing of schools by private companies (including faith groups) has on education. According to figures from the Department of Education, at the time of writing 95 new school proposals had been made, and 29 of these were by faith groups. The author argues that ownership allows governance to become an additional lever through which certain groups can mould state education in their own interests (including increased profitability). This raises issues around inclusion. The author notes that: ‘the demographic makeup and social networks of a majority of local civil society groups do create risks of socio-economic stratification and/or faith and social group segregation’.

[Link to journal](#)

Contextual effect of positive intergroup contact on outgroup prejudice

O. Christa et al. (March 2014), Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

This paper assesses evidence for a contextual effect of positive intergroup contact, drawing on seven large-scale surveys. The study found a reliable contextual effect in multiple countries, and the authors note that: ‘These findings reinforce the view that contact has a significant role to play in prejudice reduction, and has great policy potential as a means to improve intergroup relations’. The study provides support for those who argue that faith schools promote segregation and undermine social cohesion.

[Link to journal](#)

The admissions criteria of secondary Free Schools

R. Morris (2014), Oxford Review of Education, 40(3), 389–409.

This paper analyses the admissions criteria used by the first two waves of secondary free schools in England. The type of criteria and their ranked order is explored and their potential impact on the school composition is considered. The findings demonstrate the diversity of criteria being used by this new type of school and give some insight in to how free schools appear to be prioritising access. Whilst the admissions policies of the majority of secondary free schools appeared to be adhering to the 2012 Admissions Code legislation, the study highlights the influence that such criteria might have in creating intakes which are less balanced in terms of socio-economic status, ethnicity or religious affiliation.

The study finds that faith was sometimes placed ahead of other admissions criteria, such as the presence of a sibling at the school, whether a child had medical or social needs, and proximity to the school. One school in the study included place of worship alongside their faith criteria.

This use of faith criteria was found to increase the ability of the schools to segregate on social grounds, with a potentially negative impact on social and academic outcomes. The author concludes by calling on free schools to give priority to children who are eligible for free school meals and to consider the use of random allocation as a fairer way to allocate places.

[Link to journal](#)

This paper also appears in Choice and Admissions.

Attitudes towards school choice and faith schools in the UK: A question of individual preference or collective interest?

S. Patrikios and J. Curtice (2014), Journal of Social Policy, 43(3): 517–534.

The study focuses on the attitudes of the general public towards school choice and faith-based schools, drawing on data from British Social Attitudes, the 2007 Scottish Social Attitudes survey and the 2007 Wales Life and Times survey. This article tackles the promotion of faith-based schools as an integral part of the New Labour agenda to widen school choice by giving parents in England the opportunity to choose between different types of schools. This was presented by the government as a way of meeting individual needs and improving academic standards. In this context, faith-based schools came to be regarded as one of the main ways of fulfilling this agenda. The authors argue that, rather than reflecting a supposedly asocial concern with choice, support for diversity of educational provision might be rooted instead in collective – and potentially antagonistic – social identities.

The reason for this, the authors claim, is that faith schools are designed primarily to accommodate the interests of a particular group and can be a trigger to stimulate feelings of religious identity and of the group interests attached to that identity. As they write: ‘one of the key goals of faith-based education in Britain has been to help ensure the survival of a minority group identity rather than simply to accommodate the aspirations of individual parents’. As such, faith-based schooling might invoke images of ‘us’ and ‘them’ (and a desire to protect ‘us’ from ‘them’). The article uses the example of Catholic schools. If these provide a mean of protecting the interests of the religious group, rather than as a mechanism for facilitating

individual choice, then Protestants might view the provision of Catholic schools as a threat to the country's predominantly Protestant heritage, thereby creating intergroup conflict. This is not however, confined to the pious. The non-religious might equally view faith schools as a threat to secular society.

The article finds that high public support for the principle of choice in public services does not necessarily reveal support for diversity of provision. While support for school choice in general was high across the UK (England 82%, Scotland 76%, N. Ireland 84% and Wales 81%), support for choice involving faith schools was low (England 31%, Scotland 24%, N. Ireland 32% and Wales 36%). Support for faith schools was higher amongst Catholics than Protestants and people of 'no religion' (see Table 5 below).

Table 5. Support for faith schools %

<i>Catholic</i>	<i>(England 58%, Scotland 68 %, N. Ireland 54%, Wales 67%)</i>
<i>Protestant</i>	<i>(England 33%, Scotland 16%, N. Ireland 17%, Wales 41%)</i>
<i>No Religion</i>	<i>(England 22%, Scotland 18%, N. Ireland 16%, Wales 29%)</i>

This leads the authors to note that:

Even in an age of new religious movements, religious syncretism, believing without belonging, and, of course, a general decline in traditional religious observance, the provision of faith-based schooling can still invoke religious identities that are far more powerful than any abstract commitment to choice. In short people's attitudes towards faith-based schools may have much more to do with their collective religious identity than with any demand to see individual preferences reflected in how public services are delivered.

The study concludes that public support for the principle of school choice does not necessarily extend to the provision of faith-based schools. 'Rather people's attitudes to such schools reflect their religious identity and how far the provision of faith-based schools might be thought to promote the values and interests of the group with which they identify'.

[Link to journal](#)

This paper is also available from the University of Strathclyde institutional repository. [Click here to access.](#)

Divisive Faith Schools Urgently Need Reform

J. Romain (2015), *The Ins and Outs of Selective Secondary Schools: A Debate, Civitas.*

This article discusses the variety of ways in which faith schools have a negative impact on social cohesion. The author claims that: ‘while many faith schools have laudable aims, others have been set up precisely because they wish to avoid any integration with wider society’. They add that: ‘In no other part of public life or state-funded institutions can you be selected or turned away because of your religion: not in hospitals, libraries, the police force, the civil service or anywhere else. It is illegal and morally unthinkable. Yet that is exactly what happens with state-funded faith schools’.

A PDF copy of this report is available for download. [Click here to access.](#)

Kingdom United? Thirteen Steps to Tackle Social Segregation

Social Integration Commission (March 2015).

This report from the Social Integration Commission explores ways of promoting social mixing between people from different ethnic and age groups and income backgrounds. It notes that faith schools have ongoing challenges in ensuring that pupils are able to mix with children from different backgrounds, and calls on the Department for Education to approve applications for new faith schools only in circumstances where they have ‘a clear plan for pupils to meet and mix with children from different faith backgrounds and communities’.

A PDF copy of this report is available for download. [Click here to access.](#)

Racial Discrimination by Religiously Selective Faith Schools: A Worsening Problem

Accord / Fair Admissions Campaign (2015).

The study examines the way in which socially selective admissions processes for faith schools can lead to indirect racial discrimination. The report provides a range of evidence to show how social selection takes place, and argues that this also has a racial dimension given that more affluent families are better equipped to navigate the system. The report states that: ‘Indirect racial discrimination by religiously selective schools should worry those concerned about cohesion in society’, and calls for schools to be less religiously selective ‘or for them to move away from religious selection altogether’.

A PDF copy of this report is available for download. [Click here to access.](#)

Non-governmental religious schools in Europe: institutional opportunities, associational freedoms, and contemporary challenges

M. Maussen and V. Bader 2015), Comparative Education, 51(1): 1–21.

This paper focuses on faith schools in a European context and highlights some of the key factors driving change in this area. These include structural pressures on religious schools (such as transformations around age, religion, ethnicity and secularisation), political forces such as the mediatisation and personalisation of politics, changes in party systems and electoral change, as well as the growth of “secular progressive” voices in public debate, transformations in the relationship between state and society (e.g. changes in the governance of domains traditionally of relevance to religion, such as health and education), and processes of Europeanisation, in which cultural and religious diversity is embedded in supranational human rights regimes, such as the Equality and Human Rights Commission (ECHR).

Against this backdrop, the study highlights a rise in public funding for religious schools across Europe, and questions why this is taking place. One explanation is that the demand for faith-

based schooling is on the rise due to the idea that faith schools obtain better educational outcomes. While much of the paper consists of a broad overview of the macrodynamics around the European debate on faith schools, the author also argues that religious schools function as domains of exclusion, creating problems for those attempting to justify continued state funding.

[Link to journal](#)

A PDF copy of this paper is also available on ResearchGate. [Click here to access.](#)

The Casey Review: A Review into Opportunity and Integration

Dame Louise Casey DBE CB (December 2016), Department for Communities and Local Government.

The Casey Review was set up by the prime minister and home secretary to examine issues of integration and opportunity in isolated and deprived communities. It found, in cases where faith schools were oversubscribed and where pupils came from particular groups (especially minority faith groups), that admission policies seemed ‘to play a role in reinforcing ethnic concentrations’. The report noted that the popularity of faith schools with parents meant that the abolition of state funding for faith schools would be ‘unproductive’, but added that: ‘Segregation appears to be at its most acute in minority ethnic and minority faith communities and schools’.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

The promotion of British values: sexual orientation equality, religion, and England’s schools

R. M. Vanderbeck and P. Johnson (2016), International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family, 30(3): 292–321.

This article argues that the inclusion of sexual orientation equality within the scope of ‘British values’ has given new impetus to debates about the appropriate balance between children’s rights, the right of parents to provide religious direction to children, the prerogatives of faith schools and the state’s legitimate interest in protecting sexual minorities. Though noting that: ‘movements affirmative of sexual orientation diversity exist in many churches and religious traditions’, and that: ‘opposition is not limited to people of religious faith’, the authors claim that faith schools are a site of contestation between morally conservative religious interests and advocates of sexual orientation equality. Thus, religious actors and interests ‘remain at the forefront of resistance to reforms that would make schools more inclusive’ in terms of sexual orientation.

The article goes on to highlight an unresolved tension at the heart of the government’s approach, between its assertions that sexual orientation equality is a universal British value to be promoted in all schools and a desire to keep discussion of sexual orientation issues within an ambiguous framework that is treated flexibly based on the particular religious character of schools. As the authors note: ‘This raises challenging questions regarding whether the practice of a faith school advocating heterosexual marriage as the only morally sanctioned form of sexual expression could ever be said to fully comply with requirements to promote respect and toleration for non-heterosexual people’.

[Link to journal](#)

A PDF copy of this paper is also available through the University of Leeds institutional repository. [Click here to access](#).

This article also appears in Values and Morality.

Shh ... No Talking: LGBT-inclusive Sex and Relationships Education in the UK

Terrence Higgins Trust (July 2016).

This report examines the extent to which Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) is taught in UK schools. It notes that SRE is compulsory only for maintained secondary schools, meaning that primary schools, free schools and academies in England do not have to teach it. The report draws on data from an online survey of young people aged 16-25. It finds that, of those respondents that did not receive SRE: ‘there were a disproportionate number who went to private, state religious and free schools’. Conversely, of those who did receive SRE, ‘a disproportionate number went to state comprehensive schools’. The report goes on to note that: ‘State religious schools had lower proportions of pupils reporting having been taught a variety of SRE topics. This included safe sex, sex and pleasure, consent, teenage pregnancy, the contraceptive pill, the morning after pill, condoms, STIs and oral sex’.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

This article also appears in Values and Morality.

Research into Religiously Selective Admissions Criteria

Fair Admissions Campaign (2017).

This report provides a review of existing studies on the debate around faith schools and outlines research conducted by the Fair Admissions Campaign. This research found clear evidence of socio-economic and ethnic segregation. An analysis of comprehensive secondary schools found that schools without a religious character admitted 11% more pupils who were eligible for free school meals than the proportion of such pupils in their local area. In contrast, Church of England schools admitted 10% fewer, Roman Catholic schools admitted 24% fewer, Jewish secondaries 61% fewer and Muslim secondaries 25% fewer. On average, faith schools whose admissions criteria allowed for religious selection for all places admitted 27% fewer pupils from this category than would be expected if such schools were a true reflection of their local area.

In addition to this, research conducted in 2013 found that Church of England secondaries that did not select on the basis of religion took an average of 0.7% more pupils from Asian backgrounds than their local areas. In contrast, church schools that used selection for 100% of

their places took an average of 1.5% fewer. Roman Catholic schools had an average of 4.4% fewer Asian pupils than would be expected given their local areas. Schools with no religious character had an average of around 1% more Asian pupils than would be expected.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

This article also appears in Choice and Admissions.

Mixed Signals:

The Discrepancy Between What the Church Preaches and What it Practises About Religious Selection at its State-Funded Schools. *A report by the Accord Coalition for Inclusive Education for the Fair Admissions Campaign (November 2017).*

This report examines the admissions policies of state-funded faith schools. It shows that half of Church of England faith schools were operating a discriminatory policy and challenges the view, often stated by the Church of England, that its faith schools are inclusive, community schools. The report notes that: ‘at best, the inclusive assertions by national Church figures are inaccurate and therefore misleading’. Detailed research by the Fair Admissions Campaign in 2013 found that 49.7% of places at Church of England secondary schools could be filled through religiously discriminatory selection criteria. The figure for Catholic schools was 99.8%.

The report goes to show how religious selection leads to social segregation on religious, ethnic and socio-economic grounds. Using the 2013 figures, it shows that Church of England secondary schools with an admissions policy selecting for 100% of pupils on a faith criteria admitted 34.6% fewer pupils who were entitled to free schools meals than would be expected if they admitted local children. On the theme of social cohesion, it goes on to claim that:

Schools are the state-funded institutions that should be doing most to prepare people for life in an increasingly diverse society ... schools should not purposely separate children from one another by religion. Schools should not help entrench and create fault-lines for

a Britain that already needs to work at social cohesion and does not need extra religious tensions added to existing ones.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

This report also appears in Choice and Admissions.

School Report: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bi and Trans Young People in Britain's Schools in 2017

Stonewall (2017).

This report into the experiences of LGBT young people in British schools found that LGBT pupils attending faith schools were less likely to report that their school taught that homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying was wrong compared to other types of school. The figures are shown below.

LGBT pupils who report that their school says homophobic and biphobic bullying is wrong

<i>Faith schools:</i>	<i>57%</i>
<i>Single-sex girls' schools:</i>	<i>60%</i>
<i>Pupil referral unit:</i>	<i>62%</i>
<i>Boarding school:</i>	<i>63%</i>
<i>Special school:</i>	<i>63%</i>
<i>Private school:</i>	<i>67%</i>
<i>Single-sex boys' schools:</i>	<i>82%</i>
<i>...</i>	
<i>All schools:</i>	<i>68%</i>

LGBT pupils who report that their school says transphobic bullying is wrong

<i>Faith schools:</i>	<i>29%</i>
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<i>Single-sex girls' schools:</i>	34%
<i>Boarding school:</i>	39%
<i>Private school:</i>	42%
<i>Pupil referral unit:</i>	47%
<i>Single-sex boys' schools:</i>	52%
<i>Special school:</i>	53%
...	
<i>All schools:</i>	41%

The report goes on to note that faith schools perform poorly in terms of providing pupils with information on same-sex relationships, including being taught about contraception and safe sex, with just 10% of LGBT pupils attending faith schools being taught about where to go for help and advice, compared to the (admittedly poor) 20% for schools generally. The report also notes that: 'LGBT pupils of faith are somewhat more likely to have tried to take their own life than those who aren't of faith (30 per cent compared to 25 per cent)'.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

This report also appears in Values and Morality.

Understanding school segregation in England, 2011 to 2016

iCoCo Foundation, SchoolDash and The Challenge (2017).

This study, which was carried out by the iCoCo Foundation, SchoolDash and The Challenge, draws on the 2016 school census and covers nearly every school in England for which data were available (excluding independent and unregistered schools). The study set out to explore the reasons behind school segregation, to assess whether schools were segregated by socio-economic status and ethnicity and the extent and nature of these trends from 2011 to 2016. The study examined trends in a variety of school types and according to local authority area.

The study finds that faith schools at primary level are more ethnically segregated than non-faith schools, with 28.8% of faith schools being classified in this way compared to 24.5% of

non-faith schools. This discrepancy was particularly pronounced for Roman Catholic schools, of which 26.7% have a low proportion of white British students, compared with 9.1% of non-faith schools and 9.9% of all schools. Non-Christian faith schools (though small in number) fared even worse, with 84.5% being segregated. The report found a similar picture at secondary level. Schools of non-Christian faiths were more likely to under-sample white British students, with 64.5% of these schools falling into this category, compared to an average for all schools of 13.4%.

Similar discrepancies were found for intakes of disadvantaged pupils. Just 4.4% of faith schools at primary level were found to have a high intake of pupils eligible for free school meals compared with nearby schools, versus 11.4% for non-faith schools. This was particularly pronounced for Roman Catholic schools (of which 38.3% had a low intake of eligible pupils compared to 17.1% of non-faith schools) and non-Christian faith schools (of which 63.8% had a low intake and none at all had an intake with significantly higher numbers). A similar relationship was found at secondary level. A total of 23.8% of Roman Catholic schools had a low intake of pupils eligible for free school meals, compared with 17.2% of non-faith schools. A total of 43.8% of schools of non-Christian faiths had a low intake, with none having a high intake compared to other schools around them.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

This study also appears in Performance and Selection.

Segregation in education

T. Hannay (22 March, 2017), SchoolDash.

This blog post for SchoolDash examines issues of ethnic and socio-economic segregation in schools, drawing on data published in a report by the iCoCo Foundation, SchoolDash and The Challenge. A number of factors behind segregation are identified, including house prices and academic selection. Faith schools were found to be a particular site of segregation. The data

show that, overall, faith schools have higher levels of ethnic and socio-economic segregation than non-faith schools.

A school was said to be ethnically segregated ‘if the proportion of White British pupils is more than 15 percentage points higher or lower than that in other nearby schools’. Breaking these data down for ethnicity shows that Church of England schools had similar levels of segregation to non-faith schools at primary school level, but Roman Catholic schools had higher levels of segregation and a ‘substantial bias towards non-White-British pupils’ at both primary and secondary school levels. The highest levels of ethnic segregation were found in non-Christian faith schools. The figures below report these findings, by ‘low’ and ‘high’ proportions of white British pupils in comparison to other schools in the local area.

Ethnic segregation in primary schools

	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
<i>Church of England</i>	5.5%	18.3%
<i>Roman Catholic</i>	26.7%	13.9%
<i>Other Christian</i>	5.7%	18.9%
<i>Non-Faith</i>	9.1%	15.4%
<i>All schools</i>	9.9%	16.1%

Ethnic segregation in secondary schools

	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
<i>Church of England</i>	14.6%	28.8%
<i>Roman Catholic</i>	25.4%	18.5%
<i>Other Christian</i>	14.7%	14.7%
<i>Non-Faith</i>	11.2%	28.4%
<i>All schools</i>	13.4%	27.2%

Faith schools were also found to fare worse in terms of intakes of disadvantaged pupils (as measured by their eligibility for free school meals). The highest discrepancies at primary level were found in Roman Catholic and non-Christian faith schools (both of which took a lower proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals than non-faith schools). The highest

discrepancies at secondary level were found in Church of England and non-Christian faith schools. The data for free school meals are shown below, reported by comparatively ‘low’ and ‘high’ intakes in relation to neighbouring schools.

Socio-economic segregation in primary schools

	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
<i>Church of England</i>	22.7%	5.1%
<i>Roman Catholic</i>	38.3%	2.3%
<i>Other Christian</i>	19.6%	8.4%
<i>Non-Faith</i>	17.1%	11.4%
<i>All schools</i>	20.8%	8.8%

Socio-economic segregation in secondary schools

	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
<i>Church of England</i>	27.4%	9.9%
<i>Roman Catholic</i>	23.8%	3.1%
<i>Other Christian</i>	22.7%	14.7%
<i>Non-Faith</i>	17.2%	9.3%
<i>All schools</i>	18.8%	8.8%

[Link to post](#)

This post also appears in Performance and Selection.

Is tolerance of faiths helpful in English school policy? Reification, complexity, and values education

R. Bowie (2017), Oxford Review of Education 43(5): 536–549.

This article discusses a range of issues around the tolerance of faiths in a democratic society. This issue has become more pressing with government requirements for schools to teach and

promote British values, of which tolerance is a critical part. The author highlights the way in which government often shifts the burden of translating tolerance policy onto teachers and school leaders, using the threat of inspections and sanctions, and claims that this leads to a simplification of complex issues (tolerance of faith may be seen as a virtue but can also be seen as a means of sustaining inequalities in areas such as gender identity).

Although the article does not address the subject of faith schools directly, the author nevertheless engages with one of the central themes of the faith schools debate, pointing out that: ‘While tolerance of religion is necessary in plural liberal democracies, emphasising religion contributes to a reification that religion is the determining identity criteria of concern which may have the unintended consequence of polarising interests and communities’.

A copy of this article is available as a Word document from the repository at the University of Canterbury. [Click here to access.](#)

The Ties that Bind: Citizenship and Civic Engagement in the 21st Century
House of Lords Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement (April 2018), Report of Session 2017–19, HL Paper 118.

This report by the House of Lords Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement examined a wide range of issues on the theme of citizenship, from national citizenship service, volunteering, democratic participation and civil society. In respect of faith schools, the report found that a majority were adhering to, and promoting, fundamental British values, but expressed concerns about a small number in which there had been ‘a serious failure to act in accordance with Shared British Values’. The report also noted its unease with proposals to lift the 50% cap on the allocation of school places according to a religious criterion, stating that: ‘There are concerns that this could cause greater social segregation within faith schools’. The report went on to state that: ‘Any change in the rules governing admissions criteria to faith schools should ensure that they do not increase social segregation’.

[Link to report](#)

Religious schools, civic education, and public policy: A framework for evaluation and decision

I. MacMullen (2018), *Theory and Research in Education* 16(2): 141–161.

This paper addresses claims that faith schools are poorly suited to prepare children for citizenship in a multi-faith, liberal democratic society, which depends on the ability to make rational, well-informed decisions and to respect others outside one's own social group. Highlighting the diversity within the faith-based sector, it notes that not all faith schools are equally religious and cautions against public policy decisions on regulations and funding that fail to take this diversity into account. Although the paper is supportive of faith schooling in certain contexts, the author claims that acceptable faith schools are those that are weakly religious and argues that 'strongly religious' schools are 'very poor instruments of civic education'.

[Link to journal](#)

Attitudes towards faith-based schooling amongst Roman Catholics in Britain

B. Clements (2018), *British Journal of Religious Education*, 40(1): 44–54.

This paper analyses Roman Catholic attitudes towards publicly funded faith schools. It notes that Roman Catholics have tended to be more supportive of faith schools than other Christian groups (including Anglicans), and that Catholics with higher levels of religiosity show a greater propensity to express support. Using a nationally representative survey of adult Catholics in Britain, the paper shows that Catholic support for faith schools is strongest for Roman Catholic and Anglican schools (with 67.8% and 66.7% in favour respectively), supporting claims that faith schools foster in-group sensibilities. Roman Catholic support for faith schools declines for other faiths (being lowest for Muslim schools), with broadly similar levels of support being

shown for publicly funded faith schools for other Christian groups (55%) and faith schools in general (57.4%).

[Link to journal](#)

Integrating Northern Ireland: Cross-group friendships in integrated and mixed schools

D. Blayloc et al. (2018), British Educational Research Journal, 44(4), 643–662.

This study focused on Northern Ireland, where more than 92% of pupils attend schools that are divided on religious lines, and compared pupils attending religious and integrated schools. The study found that for ‘in school’ interactions and friendships, pupils attending a school with a strong religious (in this case Catholic) ethos had a greater tendency for same-group friendships than pupils attending integrated schools, who instead showed a greater tendency towards cross-group interactions.

A PDF copy of this paper is available from the institutional repository at the University of Oxford. [Click here to access.](#)

Influence of segregation versus mixing: Intergroup contact and attitudes among White-British and Asian-British students in high schools in Oldham, England

M. Hewstone et al. (2018), Theory and Research in Education, 16(2): 179–203.

This paper reports on three longitudinal studies into the extent, quality and consequences of intergroup contact between young Asian-British and white-British secondary school students in Oldham. It highlights the fact that schools are a particularly important setting for mixing between ethnic, religious and other social groups, and provides robust support for the ‘contact hypothesis’ – the idea that ‘positive face-to-face contact between members of different groups,

rather than mere coexistence, helps to reduce prejudice and improve intergroup relations'. The study shows that mixing promotes intergroup contact and improves attitudes and trust towards the outgroup. While the study does not overtly examine the 'relative merits or demerits of faith schools per se', the authors note that faith schools, 'when highly segregated, deprive young people of valuable opportunities to mix with ethnic counterparts in a safe, cooperative setting, and thus appear likely to impede social cohesion and prevent young people from developing more positive attitudes towards members of ethnic and religious outgroups'. The authors note that their findings 'suggest that faith schools, to the extent that they involve high levels of segregation, are a barrier to integration, even if they might achieve other positive goals for their students from religious and ethnic minorities'.

[Link to journal](#)

A PDF copy of this paper is also available through ResearchGate. [Click here to access.](#)

Jewish schools rather than Jewish education? School choice and community dynamics in multicultural society

M. G. M. Samson (2020), *Social & Cultural Geography*, 21(2): 222–244.

This study aims to understand the influences behind parents' decisions to send their children to Jewish schools. The paper highlights a tension experienced by Jewish parents between a desire for their children to be educated with a community of 'peers' and the segregation that might result. The study is based on the Jewish Community Secondary School (described as England's only pluralist Jewish secondary school) and finds that, in order to justify their choice of separate schooling, parents have constructed a desirable notion of 'Jewishness' that coalesced their two main selection criteria: academic standards and the presence of other Jewish students. These dynamics intimate a desire amongst Jewish parents to define multiculturalism on their own terms, enabling them to ensure that their children receive a perceived excellent education, are socialised among 'like-minded' peers and away from the adverse influence of the 'other', whilst supposedly remaining open to extra-cultural activities outside.

The paper finds that identity issues were a significant factor in the choice of school. As the author writes: ‘identity construction, however this is conceptualized, generally represents an important goal’, and parents often overlooked other local schools to find a more ‘comfortable’ school environment, invariably defining this in terms of a shared ‘Jewishness’, a decision that, they believed, enabled their children (and possibly also themselves) to become part of a specifically Jewish Community’. Thus, ‘parents regularly perceived that their children enjoyed commonalities with other Jewish children by virtue of their Jewishness, whereas other values (including, for instance, interests, national identity or academic ability) were not viewed as sufficiently unifying’.

It was also noted that: ‘parents were simultaneously concerned that by attending a Jewish school, their children would become separated from other cultures and faiths’, and ‘would thus be unable to interact meaningfully with people from other backgrounds’. This, in turn, ‘would jeopardize their development of broader liberal values of tolerance and respect for difference’. Nevertheless, for most parents ‘the precedence of academic concerns ultimately justified the decision to overlook any ambivalence towards faith schooling’.

[Link to journal](#)

Faith schools, community engagement and social cohesion: A rural perspective

P. J. Hemming (2018), *Sociologia Ruralis*, 58(4): 805–824.

This article notes that much of the debate around faith schools and social cohesion has taken place in an urban setting, although much of the faith-based sector in England and Wales consists of rural, Anglican primary schools. To address this gap, the study involved an in-depth case study of two rural Anglican primary schools, drawing on qualitative data from staff, pupils, parents and local villagers. The article is generally positive towards faith schools, noting that both schools had made efforts to engage with their local communities and were therefore a source of social capital, but also found that rural faith schools could ‘erode social cohesion in certain circumstances’. One example of this was the way in which faith schools could draw in pupils from beyond the local area. Here, the author notes: ‘the disruption to close-knit

communities and village character that can stem from commuters and newcomers coming from outside of the local area in order to take advantage of school provision’.

[Link to journal](#)

A PDF copy of this paper can be downloaded from the institutional repository at the University of Brighton. [Click here to access](#).

Faith in schools

T. Hannay (29 November 2018), SchoolDash.

This blog post for SchoolDash examines the numbers and distribution of faith schools in England, as well as their academic performance and effects on segregation. It finds that: ‘Faith schools tend to show better academic results at both primary and secondary phases, but these effects vary by faith type and seem to be mainly a result of differences in intake rather than anything that goes on inside the schools themselves’. It also notes that: ‘Many types of faith school show higher levels of segregation than non-faith schools, not only with respect to ethnicity but also deprivation’.

Assessing schools by the proportion achieving expect standards in reading, writing and maths at age 11 finds that Church of England primary schools scored three percentage points higher than non-faith primary schools. The author claims that this difference is accounted for by differential intakes of pupils eligible for free school meals, those with special educational needs and those having English as an additional language. Once these differentials are equalised, Church of England schools ‘do slightly worse than similar non-faith schools, though the difference is so small that we can reasonably declare it a score draw’. A similar comparison for Catholic primary schools finds a bigger gap. The proportion of Catholic schools achieving expected education outcomes is almost six percentage points higher than non-faith schools, with just over half of this gap being explained by the above differentials. Non-Christian faith schools showed a gap of nearly ten percentage points, although ‘most of this seems to be attributable to intake’. Other Christian schools were found to underperform by more than two percentage points after controlling for intake. The author concludes that ‘faith-based primary

schools do tend to show better results than non-faith schools, but this varies by faith type and where there is a positive effect it seems to be mainly a result of the pupils they attract rather than anything that goes on inside the school itself’.

Secondary school performance is assessed according to the Department for Education’s “Attainment 8” measure, which looks at absolute GCSE performance. This also shows that Church of England schools do slightly better than non-faith schools (by 1.8%) although this falls to 1% once intake is accounted for. Again, Catholic schools show a bigger gap (at 2.8%) but this falls to 0.7% once the factors around intake are equalised. Other Christian schools have a higher performance level of 3.7%, falling to 2.9% once intake is controlled for, and non-Christian faith schools show the biggest gap in attainment, at 10.8%, but this falls to 3.2% once intake is accounted for.

Assessing secondary school performance by the “Progress 8” score, which measures the progress of pupils between the ages of 11 and 16 produces similar results to the Attainment 8 measure. Here, Church of England and Catholic schools have a slight advantage compared to non-faith schools, although this is halved once intake is controlled for. Other Christian schools have a small advantage after controlling for intake, and non-Christian faith schools show a substantial advantage, half of which is attributable to intake.

The author notes that, overall, the supposed academic benefit of faith schools ‘is largely a mirage caused by differential pupil intakes’.

In terms of socio-economic segregation, the data for intake of pupils eligible for free school meals show that, when compared to neighbouring schools, Catholic and non-Christian faith schools have higher levels of segregation at primary school level (tending to be ‘biased towards more affluent families’). At secondary school level, the author notes that: ‘all faith school types show greater segregation than non-faith schools, though other Christian schools and non-Christian faith schools show the highest levels. Here, too, they tend to attract more affluent families. Overall, non-Christian faith schools are about twice as likely to be socioeconomically segregated as non-faith schools’.

Performing a similar analysis for levels of segregation by ethnicity finds that Catholic and non-Christian faith schools are the most segregated at both primary and secondary school levels.

The author notes that: ‘Across both primary and secondary phases, non-Christian faith schools are about three times as likely to be ethnically segregated as non-faith schools’. Church of England schools were found to have a similar profile to non-faith schools. Other Christian schools were found to be more likely than average to be in balance with their local communities.

[Link to post](#)

This post also appears in Performance and Selection.

Promoting Ethnic and Religious Integration in Schools: A Review of Evidence

C. Manzoni and H. Rolfe (April 2019), National Institute of Economic and Social Research.

This report provides a review of the research on promoting religious and ethnic integration in educational settings. It finds strong evidence that parental choice works to increase segregation by social class, religion and ethnicity. Highlighting the positive effects of contact between pupils of different ethnic and faith groups, the report points to evidence that ‘faith schools contribute to segregation both through ‘reducing diversity of their intake’ and ‘also through impacting on the diversity of neighbouring schools’. The review strongly recommends greater control and inspection of school admissions policies and practices, and calls for ballots and banding systems to be given consideration, noting that these systems aim to achieve a more comprehensive intake.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

Queer religious youth in faith and community schools

Y. Taylor and K. Cuthbert (2019), Educational Review, 71(3): 382–396.

This article offers a qualitative exploration of both “faith” and “community” school experiences of queer religious youth in England. This is timely given the UK government’s allocation of funding to the charities Stonewall and Barnardo’s for tackling homophobia, biphobia and transphobia (HBT) in faith schools, in apparent recognition of these sites as particularly problematic. This occurs amidst wider concerns over ‘British values’ and the increasing mobilisation of ‘sexual orientation equality’ rhetoric as part of these discourses. Recent political discourses of ‘British values’ has meant government support for faith schools now exists uneasily alongside the commitment to gender and sexualities equality.

Whilst faith schools have been continuously exempted from statutory sex education, a number of faith schools have failed Ofsted inspections on the grounds of their inadequate handling of gender and sexualities equality. For example, a recent Ofsted report on a failed Jewish girls’ school stated that: ‘pupils are not taught explicitly about issues such as sexual orientation ... as a result, pupils are not able to gain a full understanding of fundamental British values’.

The paper cautions against reductionist assumptions that faith schools are particular places of risk or danger for queer youth (noting that faith schools are not monolithic) but highlights a recent *Stonewall Schools Report*, indicating that LGBT pupils in faith schools are less likely than their peers in non-faith schools to report issues around bullying, more likely to say that school staff never challenge HBT language, and less likely to learn about safe sex in relation to same-sex relationships. They also report that LGBT pupils of faith are more likely to have attempted suicide.

[Link to journal](#)

A PDF copy of this paper is also available from the University of Strathclyde institutional repository. [Click here to access.](#)

Education policies and teacher deployment in Northern Ireland: Ethnic separation, cultural encapsulation and community cross-over

M. Milliken, J. Bates and A. Smith (2019), British Journal of Educational Studies, (no issue at time of writing).

This research examines sectarian divisions in the Northern Ireland education system and the impact that this has had upon teachers. In particular, the study tries to assess the extent to which ‘the deployment of teachers in mainstream schools in Northern Ireland reflects the enduring community divide’. The paper shows how a number of legal and cultural barriers restrict teachers’ ability to move across and between the divided school sector. The authors note, for example, that: ‘The recruitment of teachers is excepted from fair employment legislation’ and that they are ‘legally entitled to use religious belief as grounds on which to discriminate between candidates for teaching posts’.

Drawing on data drawn from an online survey of 1,015 teachers, the study finds high levels of ‘cultural encapsulation’, meaning that ‘divided schools are staffed, on the whole, by a community consistent workforce of teachers – i.e. that Catholic teachers were generally employed in the Maintained and Catholic grammar sectors and Protestant teachers in Controlled schools and non-denominational grammars’. The authors note that ‘as many as half of the teachers employed have had little or no professional engagement across the community divide; they have remained community consistent throughout their entire education and career’. Thus, while ‘education has been identified as a key mechanism for reconciliation in NI’, the cultural divisions between teachers limit their ability to engage in divisive issues.

Although this study focuses on the unique conditions in Northern Ireland, it nevertheless highlights an important and neglected issue within the debate around faith schools: namely, the extent to which employment barriers and cultural expectations can limit the career possibilities of teachers and constrain their ability to perform effectively in their role as educators.

[Link to journal](#)

This article also appears in Values and Morality.

PERFORMANCE AND SELECTION

A core feature of the debate around faith schools is the claim that they provide better education outcomes than non-faith schools. The evidence in this section shows that any educational advantages for faith schools are small and are explained by factors around pupil intakes, such as religiously selective admissions arrangements, rather than a faith ethos.

Faith-based schools and state funding: a partial argument

H. Judge (2001), Oxford Review of Education, 27(4): 463–474.

See entry in Social Cohesion for summary.

The Impact of Specialist and Faith Schools on Performance

S. Schagen et al. (2002), National Foundation for Educational Research LGA Educational Research Programme, Report 28.

This paper provides a detailed analysis of the performance of specialist and faith schools (Roman Catholic, Church of England, ‘other Christian’ and Jewish) at Key Stage 3 and GCSE levels. Taking prior attainment and other variables into account, the study found that Catholic schools were above the norm in some areas, but that overall ‘the data suggests that the performance of Roman Catholic schools is basically the same as non-faith schools’. Church of England schools were found to be ‘perhaps slightly ahead, but only just’. The report showed that, while Church of England and Catholic schools did better than the norm on some outcomes, considering KS3 and GCSE performances in the round indicated that there was ‘no clear pattern of enhanced performance’ and that the likelihood was ‘that the good “raw” results achieved by many church schools reflect the nature and quality of their intake’. The authors conclude that: ‘There is no evidence to suggest that an increase in the number of faith schools would improve overall performance’.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

School Admissions: A Report of the Social Market Foundation Commission

M. Haddad (ed) (July 2004).

This report examined the issue of school admissions and fairness in secondary schools. It found ‘little evidence to support the notion that faith schools educate children better’, but supported the continued presence of faith schools in the state sector on the grounds that this was a lesser of two evils (the view of the Commission being that ‘preventing religious schools from operating in the state sector would simply lead them to move into the private sector’). As such, the preferred option was to allow faith schools to continue, ‘but with open enrolment and without any power to select on the basis of faith’. The authors noted that there was a liberal argument in favour of allowing parents to choose schools on the grounds of religion, but that it was not acceptable for schools to choose parents on religious grounds.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

Combining multilevel analysis with national value-added data sets – a case study to explore the effects of school diversity

I. Schagen and S. Schagen (2005), British Educational Research Journal, 31(3): 309–328.

This study examines the value-added results of secondary education, drawing on a national dataset, comparing 380,000 pupils’ Key Stage 2 levels in 1996 to their GCSE performance in 2001. The results of the analysis highlight the impacts of different school types and selection processes on pupil progress. The study found that faith schools as a whole ‘were significantly ahead on only two outcomes: total point score and number of GCSE entries’, which was explained as faith schools encouraging students to take an additional GCSE. The differences between Roman Catholic, Jewish and ‘other Christian’ schools were not significantly different from Church of England schools in most cases. Roman Catholic schools performed above the

norm in English. Jewish schools performed better in terms of average GCSE point score, but not in English, mathematics or science. The authors conclude that: ‘On the whole, faith schools seem to make very little impact’.

[Link to journal](#)

The Social Composition of Top Comprehensive Schools

Rates of Eligibility for Free School Meals at the 200 Highest Performing Comprehensive Schools, The Sutton Trust (January 2006).

This report draws on data provided by the National Foundation for Education Research and is based on a survey of the top 200 comprehensive schools in the UK. The survey found that faith schools were over-represented in this category, amounting to 18% of all secondary schools in the country but 42% of the top 200 comprehensives. However, the survey also found that faith schools were considerably less representative of their neighbourhoods, noting that there was a substantial gap between the proportion of pupils in faith schools who were eligible for free school meals compared to the average for their local area. Overall, 5.9% of pupils attending the faith schools in the sample were eligible for free school meals, compared to 5.3% for non-faith schools, but the proportion of pupils in their local area was 15.2% (and 8.6% for non-faith schools). This gave faith schools a gap of 9.2% compared to just 3.3% for non-faith schools.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

School choice, equity and social justice: The case for more control

A. West (2006), British Journal of Educational Studies, 54(1): 15–33.

This paper examines school choice and the extent to which admissions to state-funded secondary schools in England address issues around equity and social justice. The author argues that ‘schools with responsibility for their own admissions are more likely than others to act in their own self-interest by “selecting in” or “creaming” particular pupils and “selecting

out” others’. ‘In short, the evidence suggests negative consequences for equity and social justice once schools become responsible for school admissions’. The article goes on to suggest that, for this reason, individual schools should not be responsible for admissions and that this should be controlled by a local authority or non-partisan body.

Although the paper does not address the issue of faith schools directly, the core argument is applicable to the debate around faith schools given the extent to which faith schools are able to control their own admissions processes.

[Link to journal](#)

Never mind the evidence: Blair's obsession with faith schools

D. Gillard (2007), Education in England.

This paper reviews faith school developments under the New Labour governments of Tony Blair. It examines the history and the motives behind the expansion of faith schools and provides a critical analysis of issues such as social cohesion, diversity and academic performance. The author rejects claims that faith schools ensure higher academic performance, arguing that any advantages are due to the quality of their intakes, and that ‘for all Blair's bluster to the contrary, faith schools are operating a covert system of selection’. The notion that faith schools promote interfaith tolerance and understanding is rejected as being ‘equally dubious’, and the idea that faith schools provide a special ethos for the development of morality is ‘highly questionable’ given the poor record of faith groups on issues such as human rights issues and gender and sexual equality.

The author goes on to show a lack of public and professional support for faith schools (polling evidence shows that just 11% of the general public and 9% of head teachers are in favour) and suggests ulterior motives for the expansion of faith schools based on Blair's support for selection and the privatisation of education. The paper concludes by arguing that religious groups see faith schools as a way of arresting the decline of faith in the UK. The author writes: ‘Children in faith schools are seen as the only hope for the future. They are a captive audience

for religious mumbo jumbo ranging from the plain stupid (creationism) to the thoroughly evil (misogyny and homophobia)'.

This article is freely available online. [Click here to access.](#)

This report also appears in Values and Morality

Allocating pupils to their nearest secondary school: The consequences for social and ability stratification

R. Allen (2007), *Urban Studies*, 44(4): 751–770.

This study examines the stratified nature of secondary school choice in England. Using data from the National Pupil Database, and focusing on pupils in year 9 (age 13/14) in 2002/03, it found that current levels of sorting (defined as ‘pupils who do not attend their proximity allocation school’) were around 50%, and noted that: ‘grammar schools and own-admissions authority schools are associated with greater levels of school segregation, measured using free school meals eligibility as an indicator of low income’.

The study also found that patterns of school choice and segregation were consistent with existing research on the “cream-skimming” of pupils, and research showing that the role of voluntary aided faith schools in producing post-residential sorting was ‘far greater than for foundation schools’. The author notes that voluntary aided schools seemed to be responsible for ‘well over half of all cream-skimming’ while schools with admissions processes controlled by their local authority ‘rarely appear to be cream-skimming’. The report also noted that around one in ten voluntary controlled schools (schools that had a religious character but whose admissions processes were controlled by a local authority) had ‘a much lower than expected’ proportion of pupils that were eligible for free school meals.

A PDF copy of this paper is available from the institutional repository at the University of Central London. [Click here to access.](#)

This report also appears in Choice and Admissions.

School diversity and social justice: policy and politics

A. West and P. Currie (2008), *Educational Studies*, 34(3): 241–250.

See entry in Social Cohesion for summary.

Faith-based schools in England after ten years of Tony Blair

G. Walford (2008), *Oxford Review of Education*, 34(6): 689–699.

See entry in Social Cohesion for summary.

Faith schools: admissions and performance

P. Bolton and C. Gillie (2009), *House of Commons library, Standard Note: SN/SG/4405.*

This report details the numbers and types of faith schools in the UK, and discusses a range of issues around existing research. The report shows that faith schools scored higher academic results than non-faith schools, but that this gap can be explained by differences in pupil intake.

On the question of attainment, figures show that faith schools tend to get higher educational outcomes than non-faith schools. In 2007/08, 71.3% of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 in faith schools achieved five or more GCSEs or equivalent at grades A*-C, compared to 64.5% of pupils at non-faith schools. On average, Jewish and Muslim secondary schools had the highest results (albeit from a small sample size), followed by ‘other Christian’, Roman Catholic and Church of England schools. Faith schools overall also performed better in terms of Contextualised Value Added scores by just under 5 points (6 points being the equivalent of one grade improvement per pupil in one exam).

The authors point out that there has been ‘little research’ into measuring the direct academic effects of a faith school ethos, but research suggests that any attainment gap can be explained by factors such as the prior attainment and background of the pupils. Figures from January 2008 show that 11.2% of pupils at primary faith schools and 11% at secondary faith schools were eligible for free school meals, compared to national averages of 15.6% and 12.9% for non-faith primary and secondary schools. The authors note that: ‘The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at all types of secondary faith schools was less than the proportion of pupils in their local area’.

The authors also show that faith schools have a lower proportion of pupils with special educational needs (SEN). In 2008 1.2% of pupils at mainstream state faith schools had stated SEN and 15.9% unstated special educational needs, compared to 1.7% and 18.9% for non-faith schools. Attainment differences between school types are also discussed. The authors conclude that the evidence points towards the importance of school status, and whether or not a school has autonomy over its own admissions policies and processes.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

Quasi-regulation and principal – agent relationships

A. West, H. Pennell and A. Hind (2009), Educational Management Administration and Leadership, 37(6): 784–805.

This article examines the issue of school choice through the lens of the English market-oriented reforms, focusing on changes to the admissions criteria and practices of state-maintained secondary schools in London between 2001 and 2005. It found that fewer voluntary aided schools gave priority to children from lower social class or disadvantaged backgrounds, and that, ‘while local authorities act broadly in line with government guidance and regulations as the agent of the government, schools acting as agents do not necessarily do so and more appear to select particular groups of children as opposed to others’. The authors called for greater government regulation of admissions procedures to prevent manipulation by individual schools.

Although the study did not directly engage with the issue of faith schools (it did note that: ‘Religious criteria were only used by voluntary-aided schools’), the central argument is nevertheless applicable to the general debate around faith schools given the extent to which faith schools are able to control their own admissions processes.

A PDF copy of this paper is available from the institutional repository at the London School of Economics. [Click here to access.](#)

Religious schools in London: school admissions, religious composition and selectivity

R. Allen and A. West (2009), Oxford Review of Education, 35(4): 471–494.

This article provides an empirical examination of the way in which religious schools appear to select pupils, as well as the subsequent social, ability and religious segregation of pupils across schools. Analysing the composition of secondary schools with a religious character in London, the paper shows that faith schools foster segregation by catering for pupils from particular religions and/or denominations and ethnic groups. The data show that 96% of pupils in Roman Catholic schools and 76% of pupils in Church of England schools are recorded as ‘Christian’, with very small percentages of pupils coming from other faiths or none. Pupils from South Asian minority groups are particularly under-represented, with just 1% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils being educated in religious schools.

The study finds that faith schools also tend to admit pupils from more affluent backgrounds and pupils who have higher levels of prior attainment than those in non-religious schools. Just 17% of pupils in religious secondary schools in London were eligible for free school meals, compared to 25% in non-religious schools. Just 19% of pupils in faith schools were from the lowest ability category, compared to 31% in non-religious schools. Faith schools also admit a greater proportion of highest scoring pupils at Key Stage 2 (at 28% versus 25% for non-faith schools).

The authors caution that these results cannot be used to show clear evidence of “cream-skimming” (‘because we do not know whether the less affluent families applied to the school’)

and that ‘the unique character of London means these results cannot be generalised across England’, but argue that the findings do show a ‘distortion of mission for at least some religious schools given that they were originally set up to educate the poor’.

A PDF copy of this paper is available from ResearchGate. [Click here to access.](#)

This article also appears in Choice and Admissions.

Why do faith secondary schools have advantaged intakes?

The relative importance of neighbourhood characteristics, social background and religious identification amongst parents. R. Allen and A. West (2011), British Educational Research Journal, 37(4): 691–712.

This paper examines the reasons why secondary schools with a religious character have pupil intakes that are of a higher social background and ability than their secular counterparts, and assesses the extent to which faith schools contribute to socially segregated schooling. Using data from the National Pupil Database and the Longitudinal Survey of Young People in England, the authors show that parents who have a religious affiliation are more likely to be better educated, belong to a higher occupational class and have a higher household income. The authors argue that it is these factors that make the greatest contribution to faith schools’ advantaged intakes.

The paper shows that Church of England and Roman Catholic schools have fewer children eligible for free school meals (a crucial indicator of poverty) than schools without a religious character (at 11.5%, 13.6% and 14.7% respectively). It also contends that, compared to non-religious schools, secondary schools with a religious character have a higher proportion of top ability pupils and are more affluent in their intake than the neighbourhoods they are located in.

The authors maintain that the complex nature of many school admission policies might enable parents from higher social class backgrounds to negotiate the admissions process more effectively and understand how to meet specific admissions criteria.

[Link to journal](#)

Faith primary schools: Better schools or better pupils?

S. Gibbons and O. Silva (2011), *Journal of Labor Economics* 29(3): 589–635.

This paper estimates the effect of attending a state faith school on primary education achievement in England. Drawing on administrative student-level data, and controlling for prior attainment and postcode, the study finds that while pupils progress faster in faith primary schools, ‘all of this advantage is explained by sorting into faith schools according to pre-existing characteristics and preferences’.

The data show that pupils in schools with autonomous governance and admissions structures (a category that includes faith schools) progress marginally faster. A pupil starting in an autonomous school at age seven could expect to be one percentile higher in the distribution of pupil attainments by age eleven than a comparable pupil attending a standard secular non-autonomous school, even when these two pupils live in the same postcode and go on to attend the same secondary school. However, the study also found that pupils in faith schools that were under local authority control did not progress any faster than similar pupils in comparable secular schools. As such, the researchers conclude that any performance impact from faith schools seemed to be closely linked to their autonomous governance and admissions arrangements, and not to their religious character.

[Link to journal](#)

A copy of this paper is also available from the London School of Economics. [Click here to access.](#)

Praying for success? Faith schools and school choice in East London

T. Butler and C. Hamnett (2012), *Geoforum* 43(6): 1242–1253.

See entry in Social Cohesion for summary.

Selective Comprehensives: The Social Composition of Top Comprehensive Schools

The Sutton Trust (June 2013).

This study looks at publicly available data on the proportion of pupils eligible for, and claiming free school meals (FSM) in the top 500 comprehensive state schools (as measured by GCSE results), and considers the extent to which they are representative of their localities and school type. The study finds that faith schools are over-represented amongst the schools, accounting for 19% of schools nationally but 33% of the top 500. The study also finds that faith schools are slightly more likely to take pupils eligible for free school meals than other schools in the top 500 (at 7.9% compared to 7.5%) but overall their FSM intake nationally is ‘significantly lower’, at 11.7% compared to a national average of 17.2%.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

Narrowing down the determinants of between-school segregation: an analysis of the intake to all schools in England, 1989–2011

S. Gorard, R. Hordosy and B. Huat See (2013), Journal of School Choice, 7(2): 182–195.

See entry in Social Cohesion for summary.

Geographies of transition and the separation of lower and higher attaining pupils in the move from primary to secondary school in London

R. Harris (2013), Transitions, 38(2): 254–266.

This paper uses a statistical and spatial analysis to examine the transitions made by pupils from state-funded primary to secondary schools in London in 2008. It finds that faith schools can be a mechanism for reinforcing social divisions. The report shows that higher and lower attaining pupils separate from each other when they transition into secondary schools, with the ‘best in class’ pupils more likely to be found in selective schools that set entrance exams and faith schools that control their own admissions policies. The paper notes that: ‘The implication is that where belonging to or sympathy for a faith group form part of the admissions criteria, that faith criterion acts as a filter between higher and lower attaining pupils’.

The study also shows that faith schools recruited disproportionately few pupils that were eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils who were eligible in 2008 (based on the London data) was 0.266. In voluntary aided Church of England schools, the proportion was 0.242. In Roman Catholic schools the figure was 0.201. The report notes that, insofar as eligibility for free school meals is a sign of economic disadvantage: ‘it is hard to avoid the conclusion that selective schools especially but also faith schools, on average, are socially selective’.

[Link to journal](#)

This paper also appears in Choice and Admissions.

Worse than an educated guess: British Humanist Association response to Theos’s report on “faith schools” (October 2013).

See entry in Social Cohesion for summary.

Minority faith schools as claims for cultural recognition? Two examples from England

J. Pecenka and F. Anthias (2014), Identities, 22(4), 433–450.

This paper examines the grassroots interests and perspectives of minority groups involved in mobilising behind faith schooling. In particular, it looks at the motivations of local campaign groups for two minority faith schools, one Sikh and one Muslim. The study finds that support for these faith schools was not always rooted in issues around identity and calls for recognition. Rather, most campaigners were motivated by beliefs around academic performance, school discipline and their experiences of discrimination. Importantly, none of these factors were seen to be linked to, derived from or dependent upon any particular ‘ethos’ that a faith school might claim to have. These findings, which challenge claims of an intrinsic link between the religious ethos of a faith school and its academic performance, were said to ‘undermine the assumption that the minority faith schools in question are institutions inspired by religious grounds’. Instead, the authors point out that the two faith schools involved in the study were seen not as a means of promoting religious identities, but ‘as instruments in a strategy of resisting or escaping racism’.

[Link to journal](#)

Living with Difference: Community, Diversity and the Common Good
Report of the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life, The Woolf Institute,
Cambridge (December 2015).

This report by the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life makes a variety of recommendations about public policy towards the role of faith in the public square. On the subject of faith schools, it calls for reform of the admissions and inspections processes. The report notes that: ‘Bodies responsible for admissions and employment policies in schools with a religious character (“faith schools”) should take measures to reduce selection of pupils and staff on grounds of religion’. On the issue of inspections, the report called on state inspectorates ‘to be concerned with every aspect of the life of faith schools, including religious elements currently inspected by denominational authorities’.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

This report also appears in Choice and Admissions.

Reducing the attainment gap: good ways and bad

T. Hannay (24 June 2016), SchoolDash.

This post for the SchoolDash blog examines the attainment gap between schools, looking at a range of variables and school types. It measures the attainment gap by the proportion of pupils achieving at least five GCSEs, at A*-C (including English and maths) compared by prior attainment at age 11. Drawing on a range of data sources, including statistics from the Department for Education, the Office for National Statistics and Ofsted, the analysis only found a slight effect in favour of faith schools. The author notes that: ‘Faith schools tend to get better results but their effect on the attainment gap, while positive, is generally modest’.

[Link to source](#) (This post has been archived by the Wayback Machine.)

Can school competition improve standards? The case of faith schools in England

R. Allen and A. Vignoles (2016), Empirical Economics 50: 959–973.

This paper measures the extent to which the presence of religious state-funded secondary schools in England impacts on the educational experiences of pupils who attend neighbouring schools. National administrative data are used to estimate pupil test score growth models between the ages of 11 and 16. The paper finds significant evidence that religious schools are associated with higher levels of pupil sorting across schools, but no evidence that competition from faith schools raises area-wide pupil attainment. The paper maintains that the apparent ‘effectiveness’ of faith schools is due to within-area sorting based on unmeasured pupil characteristics.

[Link to journal](#)

A PDF copy of this paper can be downloaded from the National Centre for Research Methods. [Click here to access.](#)

Faith Schools, Pupil Performance and Social Selection

J. Andrews and R. Johnes (December 2016). Education Policy Institute.

This report looks at the educational performance of faith schools and the social and academic composition of their intakes. Examining raw attainment data and basic value-added data shows that faith schools at both primary and secondary levels tend to produce higher educational outcomes, both in terms of overall attainment and in the progress they make. At Key Stage 2, 83% of pupils in Church of England schools and 85% of pupils in Roman Catholic schools achieved level 4+ in reading writing and mathematics, compared to 81% in non-religious schools. At Key Stage 4, 60.6% of pupils in Church of England schools, and 63.2% of pupils in Roman Catholic schools, achieved five good GCSEs, including English and mathematics. The figure for non-faith secondary schools was 57.4%. Overall, Church of England schools produced results that were one twentieth of a grade higher in each of eight GCSEs. The figure for Catholic schools was one sixth of a grade higher. Other ‘non-Christian’ faith schools scored around two thirds of a grade higher.

The report goes on to explain that a primary reason for these outcomes is the characteristics of the pupil intake, with faith schools admitting fewer pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Overall, 12.1% of pupils at faith schools are eligible for free school meals at Key Stage 2 and 12.6% are eligible at Key Stage 4, compared to 18.0% and 14.1% for non-faith schools). Faith schools also educate a lower proportion of pupils with special educational needs – 16.8% at Key Stage 2 and 14.4% at Key Stage 4, compared to 19.7% and 16.6% for non-faith schools. Faith schools also enrol a larger proportion of high attaining pupils – 28.4% at Key Stage 2 and 27.4% at Key Stage 4, compared to 23.7% and 24.5% for non-faith schools.

Taking these figures into account, the report notes that once these pupil characteristics are accounted for, the differences between faith and non-faith schools at Key Stage 2 are

‘educationally insignificant’ and those at Key Stage 4 are ‘relatively small’, being reduced to just one-seventh of a grade. The authors conclude that, given the socially selective nature of faith schools, ‘there is a risk that such small gains would come at the price of increased social segregation, with a risk of lower social mobility’.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

Segregation in education

T. Hannay (22 March, 2017), SchoolDash.

See entry in Social Cohesion for summary.

Understanding school segregation in England, 2011 to 2016

iCoCo Foundation, SchoolDash and The Challenge (2017).

See entry in Social Cohesion for summary.

Faith in schools

T. Hannay (29 November 2018), SchoolDash.

See entry in Social Cohesion for summary.

Educational attainment in the short and long term: was there an advantage to attending faith, private, and selective schools for pupils in the 1980s?

A. Sullivan et al. (2018) Oxford Review of Education 44(6): 806–822.

This paper examines whether faith schools in England and Wales in the 1980s provided an academic advantage to their pupils. Using longitudinal data from the 1970 British Cohort Study, the paper examines the link between school sector and academic outcomes at ages 16, 18 and 42. It finds that any academic advantage from faith schools ‘is restricted to the short term’ once pupil characteristics such as family background and prior attainment are controlled for. The authors note that: ‘faith schools tend to be more socially selective than non-faith schools, and it is not clear that there is a benefit above and beyond the school selectivity effect’.

The paper notes that pupils from faith schools were more likely to obtain higher secondary school and university qualifications compared to students at non-faith schools, but that this advantage disappears once other factors are taken into account. As the authors put it:

In the case of faith schools, only the advantage in examination performance at age 16 is robust to the background controls. The fact that the benefits of faith schools only extended up to age 16 suggests that the practices of these schools were sufficient to raise attainment at age 16, but not to drive up participation and attainment once compulsory participation was over.

[Link to journal](#)

A PDF copy of this paper is available from the Oxford Review of Education. [Click here to access.](#)

Faith Schools in England: FAQs

R. Long and S. Danechi (20 December 2019), House of Commons Library, Briefing paper #06972.

This document provides an overview of the numbers of faith schools in the UK and discusses a variety of issues around their performance. Data show that faith schools recorded better academic results than non-faith schools. The average Attainment 8 score in mainstream state-

funded faith schools in 2018 was 49.6. The figure for non-faith schools was 47.0. A total of 48% of pupils attending faith schools achieved grades 9-5 in English and maths at GCSE level. The figure for non-faith schools was 44%. However, the report also highlights key differences in pupil intakes. Figures show that pupils at faith schools were more likely to have higher levels of prior attainment than pupils at non-faith schools, and that faith schools took a lower proportion of pupils that were eligible for free school meals. As of January 2019, 13% of pupils at state-funded primary faith schools and 13% of state-funded secondary faith schools were eligible for free school meals. This compares to 17% and 14% at non-faith schools.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

Fairer school admissions: Social segregation in schools: the view from parents & teachers

Research Brief, The Sutton Trust (February 2020).

This research briefing highlights a range of issues around socio-economic segregation and selectivity in the UK education system. It finds that faith schools (along with academies and free schools) are over-represented in the category of selective schools and notes that: ‘faith schools are among the most likely to be highly socially selective’. Just 29% of faith schools reported taking the socio-economic composition of their community into account when constructing admissions policies, compared to 32% for converter academies, 34% of sponsored academies and 34% of local authority-controlled schools.

Figure 9. Proportion of teachers reporting their school takes socio-economic makeup of community into account, by school type

Voluntary aided/controlled (faith schools)

Very strongly: 11%

Strongly: 18%

Converter academy

Very strongly: 16%

Strongly: 16%

Sponsored academy

Very strongly: 19%

Strongly: 15%

Local authority controlled

Very strongly: 21%

Strongly: 13%

The briefing shows how senior leaders in faith schools appear to be unaware of these discrepancies. It notes that: ‘while 14% of those at faith schools felt they took in lower levels of disadvantage than their local community, 45% perceived that they took in higher levels of disadvantage, despite such schools being the most socially selective in reality’. The report concludes that:

Faith schools are among the most socially selective schools. This arises from the often complex eligibility criteria set out by such schools, which those from more well-off homes may be better equipped and more motivated to navigate. Such complex criteria can often reveal information about the social background of the family to the school and could enable “covert selection”.

A PDF copy of this briefing is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

This paper also appears in Choice and Admissions.

CHOICE AND ADMISSIONS

One of the main arguments made in favour of faith schools is that they increase diversity and choice by enabling parents to have their children educated according to their own faith tradition. This section points to evidence of the opposite effect. Faith schools restrict school choice for parents who do not share the religion of their local school. Some parents are left with little option but a faith school, while others face restricted access to local schools through the use of unfair admissions procedures. Some critics have also seriously questioned the consumerist framing of school issues around choice.

Non-believers

J. Crace (5 December 2006), The Guardian.

A Headspace survey of primary and secondary head teachers, carried out by Education Guardian and EdComs (and administered by ICM) found that many head teachers had serious concerns about the effects of faith schools. Almost half (47%) felt there should be either fewer or no faith schools, a third (32%) felt there should be no change and only 9% believed that the number of faith schools should be increased. Only 25% believed that faith schools created more religious tolerance in society, 18% felt they made no difference and 45% thought that they promoted less tolerance.

The article notes that:

Many headteachers have misgivings about the practicalities of admissions policies. Faith schools often achieve better results and, while the effects of discipline and ethos on pupil performance cannot be ignored, these schools rarely reflect the social composition of the communities in which they are located ... faith schools seem to get a disproportionately high percentage of their intake from the educated middle-classes in comparison to non-denominational community schools.

[Link to article](#)

This article also appears in Opinion Polls.

Ballots in School Admissions

The Sutton Trust (May 2007).

This report by the Sutton Trust examines attitudes about school admissions processes. It finds that, when presented with the scenario of an oversubscribed faith school, more people (36%) believed that a random ballot was the fairest way of allocating places than a system based on determining which families were most committed to the Christian faith (preferred by just 20%). The report also found that selecting children by religion or faith was most often described as unfair. This view was held by 40% of respondents, with just 8% claiming that this method was fair. The report added that: ‘allocation by proximity to the school or by faith’ had been shown by other research ‘to be highly socially selective’.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

This article also appears in Opinion Polls.

School Admissions: Fair Choice for Parents and Pupils

S. Tough and R. Brooks (June 2007), Institute for Public Policy Research.

See entry in Social Cohesion for summary.

Allocating pupils to their nearest secondary school: The consequences for social and ability stratification

R. Allen (2007), Urban Studies, 44(4): 751–770.

See entry in Performance and Selection for summary.

School choice in London, England: Characteristics of students in different types of secondary schools

A. West and A. Hind (2007), Peabody Journal of Education, 82(2-3): 498–529.

This article compared a range of school types to analyse variation in school composition. Using a database of secondary schools in London produced by the Department for Education, the study found statistically significant links between the ability of a school to determine its own admissions policy and the admission of children with higher levels of academic attainment and lower levels of poverty and disadvantage. The study also found evidence of ethnic selection. Voluntary aided schools (most of which were religious) were shown to admit fewer Bangladeshi and Pakistani students, who were more likely to be Muslim, and to have a higher proportion of black students, who were more likely to be Christian.

[Link to journal](#)

Church schools “divide society”

D. MacLeod (14 October 2008), The Guardian.

A poll conducted by the Church of England found high levels of support for faith schools, but also found that a significant proportion (45%) of respondents who agreed that church schools were different from schools run by a local authority believed that children from better-off backgrounds were more likely to get places.

[Link to article](#)

Social Selectivity of State Schools and the Impact of Grammars

The Sutton Trust (October 2008).

This study examines issues of selection in the UK's education system and shows that the majority (54) of England's top 100 socially selective schools are faith schools (compared to just 18 in 100 nationally). The report backs calls for religious schools to consider straightforward 'binary' criteria to decide which pupils should be admitted on faith grounds (such as 'a signature from a religious leader to demonstrate commitment to a particular faith'), as well as other methods, such as the use of banding and ballots, to create a fairer admissions system. The report further notes that: 'An alternative would be simply for faith schools to be open to any family who wants their child to be educated in line with the tenets of that particular religion'.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

Religious schools in London: school admissions, religious composition and selectivity

R. Allen and A. West (2009), Oxford Review of Education, 35(4): 471–494.

See entry in Performance and Selection for summary.

Secondary school admissions in England: Admission forums, local authorities and schools

P. Noden and A. West (2009), Education Research Group, London School of Economics and Political Science, Commissioned by the Research and Information on State Education Trust.

This report presents the findings of the second part of a research project commissioned by the Research and Information on State Education (RISE) Trust. The report sets out examples of

how admission forums and local authorities have responded to recent changes in the law relating to secondary school admissions. The research for the report examines admission arrangements and the operation of admission forums in five local authority areas. The study finds examples of breaches of the admissions code and a number of ‘suspicious’ practices in the case of faith schools, noting in conclusion that: ‘it is not obvious that schools setting their own oversubscription criteria is of benefit to the local community’. The authors note that: ‘most of the schools with a religious character in the case study areas (both Church of England and Catholic) applied religious oversubscription criteria’, and claim that: ‘At schools that are not “inclusive”, we might take the view that the schools are performing an additional function – for example, passing on the faith or sustaining a religious community’.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

Legislative Scrutiny: Equality Bill (second report); Digital Economy Bill House of Lords/House of Commons Joint Committee on Human Rights, Fourteenth Report of Session (2009–10), House of Lords Paper 73. House of Commons Paper 425 (March 2010).

This report, produced by the House of Lords/House of Commons Joint Committee on Human Rights, examines two issues that were initially raised in its autumn 2009 report on the *Equality Bill*, namely: (1) school admissions, and (2) employment by organisations based on religion or belief.

The report criticises the view that faith schools need to discriminate in their admissions criteria to maintain their distinctiveness. Highlighting evidence on the ethos of Church of England primary schools, the report found that many had successfully preserved their ‘ethos’ even when they did not have faith-based admissions criteria (although it was accepted that this argument was stronger for non-Church of England faith schools, since parents who wished their child to be educated in other faiths had a much smaller pool of schools to choose from). As a result, the report notes that: ‘the exemption permitting faith schools to discriminate in their admissions on grounds of religion or belief may be overdrawn’.

The report also criticised the government's view that parents with religious convictions would find it increasingly difficult to access faith schools if those schools were deprived of the ability to prioritise applicants based on their faith. Noting that Article 2 of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (ECHR) does not give parents a right to a place for their child at a school of their faith, and that, while parents had the right to send their child to a faith school, there was no requirement for the state to provide them, the report concluded that: 'we do not find the argument persuasive'. Respect for parents' religious and philosophical convictions was 'not a good justification for allowing faith schools to prioritise applicants for admission on the basis of their faith'.

The report further notes that reserving a certain proportion of posts for individuals who adhere to the religious beliefs and ethos of a faith school might open the way to claims of employment discrimination (via a breach of the Framework Equality Directive 200/78/EC) since 'the reservation of such posts is not restricted to circumstances where it can be shown that a genuine, legitimate and justified occupational requirement to adhere to a particular religious belief can be said to exist'.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

Children and Young People's Views of Education Policy

Office of the Children's Commissioner (March 2011).

This report examines the views of young people on their time at school and finds large opposition to the use of religion as a criterion for school admissions. Just 20% of children and young people feel that religion should be used in this way, while 64% feel that it should not (with 16% unsure). The study notes that participants 'tended to hold strong views against selection on religious grounds', with focus group statements calling the use of religion in admissions criteria 'racist' and a case of 'discrimination'. The report concludes that: 'Selection on the basis of religion appears to be a concern to many young people. There may therefore be value in exploring further why young people feel this is the case and ensuring that their views on this issue are conveyed as part of the review of the School Admissions Code'.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

This survey also appears in Opinion Polls.

Faith Schools

Accord Coalition / ComRes (November 2012).

A survey conducted by ComRes for the Accord Coalition in November 2012 found that the large majority of respondents (73%) did not believe that state-funded schools (including faith schools) should be permitted to discriminate against prospective pupils in their admissions policies (just 19% thought that they should be allowed to do this).

Q.1. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? State funded schools, including state funded faith schools, should not be allowed to select or discriminate against prospective pupils on religious grounds in their admissions policy.

Strongly agree: 50%

Slightly agree: 23%

Slightly disagree: 10%

Strongly disagree: 9%

Don't know: 9%

[Link to source](#)

This survey also appears in Opinion Polls.

The admissions arrangements of faith schools and the Equality Act 2010

D. Rosenberg and R. Desai (2013), Education Law Journal, 14(2): 93–99.

This article discusses the legal context of admissions procedures involving faith as a criterion and highlights cases in which admissions policies based on faith can cause cases of discrimination. These include grounds of disability (e.g. if a person is unable to attend a church to accumulate sufficient “points”) and race (e.g. if a Church of England school is based in an area with a significant non-white Muslim population) and sexuality (e.g. if a school applies a criteria requiring church attendance but the church in question is intolerant of homosexuality). On this latter point the authors note that ‘it would be difficult for a school to justify retaining any strict attendance criteria (e.g. ‘regular attendance at X church’) in its oversubscription criteria, if X church adopted a discriminatory approach to homosexuality, since this would effectively exclude pupils from schools based on their parents’ sexual orientation’.

A PDF copy of this article is available to download from the Fair Admissions Campaign. [Click here to access.](#)

Fair access: Making school choice and admissions work for all

R. Allen, J. Clifton (2013), Excellence and Equity: Tackling Educational Disadvantage in England’s Secondary Schools, Institute for Public Policy Research.

This chapter examines issues around school choice and its impact on the life chances of children. The author argues that faith schools should be permitted to admit up to 50% of their pupils using a faith criterion (and ‘substantially less where it is clear the religious community is not large enough to support this level’), but discusses a variety of ways in which admissions could be simplified. Recommendations include strict limitations on the religious criterion to prevent faith schools from asking intrusive questions (e.g. about marital status, the place of child’s baptism etc.) that might reveal information about the social background of the family and enable ‘covert’ selection.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

Geographies of transition and the separation of lower and higher attaining pupils in the move from primary to secondary school in London
R. Harris (2013), *Transitions*, 38(2): 254–266.

See entry in *Performance and Selection* for summary.

The moral imperative: the case of the English education system

S. Spangenberg and B. McIntosh (2014), *Policy Futures in Education*, 21(5): 730–740.

This article analyses the English school education system and its relationship with social preferences. Although it does not focus on faith schools *per se*, the paper has direct relevance to debates around faith schooling that centre on issues of selection and admissions. The authors contend that the current segmented education system, including the division between non-religious and faith schools, ‘guides parents into conformity and pursuing segregation-creating educational paths for their children’. While they do not advocate the abolition of faith schools (claiming, rather, that they should be converted into multi-faith schools, with religious education and practice included in the curriculum), the authors do call for a restriction of parental school selection in order to provide equality of opportunity and social mobility. As they put it: ‘Children should be placed directly into schools (either comprehensive or selective) irrespective of their parents’ wishes, income, faith or social class membership’.

A PDF copy of this paper can be downloaded from ResearchGate. [Click here to access.](#)

The admissions criteria of secondary Free Schools

R. Morris (2014), *Oxford Review of Education*, 40(3): 389–409.

See entry in *Social Cohesion* for summary.

A New Settlement: Religion and Belief in Schools

C. Clarke and L. Woodhead (2015), Westminster Faith Debates.

This report examines a range of issues around the role of religion in the education system. The authors maintain that the abolition of faith schools is not desirable or feasible, but also claim that: ‘reforms could be beneficial and should be properly explored’. They claim that the use of religious criteria for admission to a faith school has given rise to ‘a number of serious problems’, noting that it ‘unfairly advantages churches and Christians whose energies are directed inwards to their own worshipping community rather than outwards to the whole local community, or wider society’, ‘takes as much or more account of the practice and wishes of parents than of the child whose education is at stake’, ‘discriminates against children whose families have no faith practice’ and ‘may advantage those who are able to afford to attend regular worship’.

The authors claim that while ‘families who are regular worshippers have a legitimate right to expect their children should have some priority in admission to schools which share their faith’, ‘all steps to fairer admissions systems, and the elimination of abuses of the types that we have described, are very important’. Thus: ‘In the longer term more effort should be given to devising fairer admissions policies to faith schools’ (suggestions include random selection).

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

What parents want: school preferences and school choice

S. Burgess et al. (2015), The Economic Journal, 125: 1262–1289.

This article examines parental preferences for schools in England, using an array of survey, administrative, census and spatial data. It shows that most families have strong preferences for schools based on academic performance, socio-economic composition (preferring schools with a lower proportion of pupils from low income households) and proximity to the home (tending to prefer schools that are closer). Although the study does not directly address the issue of faith schools, it has clear relevance to some of the key themes in the faith schools debate, showing,

first, that the desire to send children to schools because of their religious ethos is not a central preference for parents, and second, that school preferences are focused on accessibility (which is hampered by religious admission requirements). As the authors write: ‘Most of the variation in preferences for school quality across socio-economic groups arises from differences in the quality of accessible schools rather than differences in parents’ preferences’. The article concludes by noting that: ‘school policy needs to be aware of and minimise the potential for sorting along social lines’.

A PDF copy of this paper is available from the institutional repository at the University of Bristol. [Click here to access](#).

An Unholy Mess: How Virtually All Religiously Selective State Schools in England are Breaking the Law

British Humanist Association report for the Fair Admissions Campaign (2015).

This report examines the admissions policies of religiously selective state secondary schools. The sample includes all such schools that were located in local authorities where the local authority’s name began with the letter ‘B’. This amounted to a total of 70 schools – 13% of the overall total of 535 religiously selective secondary schools in England. The study focuses on intakes between reception and year ten and finds that 69 of the 70 schools in the sample were in breach of the Admissions Code, providing evidence of ‘widespread non-compliance’.

The survey also finds that almost 90% of schools asked for information from parents that they did not need (including ‘details of religious observance in a different or more detailed way than was required for the oversubscription criteria’), that around 85% were improperly publishing their admission arrangements (publishing them too late and/or removing previous arrangements too early) and over a third were ‘placing conditions on the consideration of applications other than those in the oversubscription criteria – either by asking for information that was not later considered, or by asking parents and children to support the ethos of the school’. The report further notes that over a quarter of schools were ‘religiously selecting in ways not allowed in guidance from their religious authorities’, and almost a fifth were ‘requiring practical or financial support to associated organisations – through voluntary

activities such as flower arranging in churches or, in the case of two Jewish schools, in requiring membership of synagogues (which costs money)’. The report also finds that: ‘A number of schools were found to have broken the Equality Act 2010 in directly discriminating on the basis of race or gender’.

The report concludes by calling for the abolition of religious selection by state schools. Other recommendations include: providing greater guidance for schools on complying with the Admissions Code, revising the code to avoid areas of confusion, setting up an independent monitoring body to enforce compliance with the code and creating an external body to set school admissions policies.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

Living with Difference: Community, Diversity and the Common Good
Report of the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life, The Woolf Institute, Cambridge (December 2015).

See entry in Performance and Selection for summary.

Caught out: Primary schools, catchment areas and social selection
R. Allen and M. Parameshwaran (April 2016), The Sutton Trust.

This research brief examines selection in primary schools. The authors argue that faith schools have a higher rate of social selection than non-faith schools. They write that: ‘It is generally true that non-religious schools are not particularly socially selective and that Roman Catholic and other religious primary schools are, regardless of governance status. This reflects the fact that these religious schools consistently apply religious admission criteria’. The authors claim that: ‘there needs to be greater scrutiny of legacy criteria at existing schools, ensuring that any religious admissions criteria and processes are straightforward and fair to all’.

A PDF copy of this brief is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

Secondary school admissions in London 2001 to 2015: compliance, complexity and control

A. West and A. Hind (2016), Clare Market Papers (20), London School of Economics and Political Science.

This paper analyses the admissions criteria and practices used by London secondary schools between 2001 and 2015. It finds that converter academies with a religious character are less likely to refer to siblings, distance, children with special educational needs and medical/social need in their admissions criteria, but that a high proportion refer to religious criteria. In addition, eight out of ten converter academies require the completion of a supplementary information form, which is frequently used to confirm religion or religious denomination, and highlight the need to obtain a reference from a priest. In a similar way, sponsored academies with a religious character are more likely to use supplementary information forms and a third require a reference from a priest. The uses of banding and random allocation are more common in academies without a religious character. The authors conclude by recommending that admissions processes be simplified and that: ‘No schools should carry out their own admissions ... as the incentives for schools to “choose” the most desirable pupils are great. Opportunities to “select in” and “select out” are particularly great when parents complete supplementary information forms detailing reasons for choices, and where parents and families may be “known” to the school’.

A PDF copy of this paper is available to download from the institutional repository at the London School of Economics. [Click here to access.](#)

Poverty of opportunity?

T. Hannay (2 August 2016), SchoolDash.

This blog post for SchoolDash examines the issue of economic deprivation among children, and the way in which different types of schools either enable or hinder opportunities for students from poorer families. The analysis shows that, in certain faith schools (especially Roman Catholic and non-Christian faith schools) poorer pupils are under-represented, after taking account of the levels of poverty in their local areas.

Looking at schools in terms of their religious denomination shows that Church of England schools have ‘little overall bias’, but Roman Catholic schools ‘admit fewer poor pupils than their locations would suggest’. At the secondary school level, the data show that faith schools take ‘less than their fair share of poorer pupils while non-religious schools take correspondingly more’. There are also significant differences in the various types of religious school. Non-Christian faith schools have the largest bias, with a deprivation intake score relative to their local population of -46.9% (although the sample size is very small). Among large sample sizes, the most significant bias is found in Roman Catholic schools, with a score of -16.2%. Faith schools as a general category have a score of -9.7%. Church of England schools have a score of +1%. Non-faith schools have a score of +2.6%.

For primary schools, the results are similar. Non-Christian faith schools have an intake bias score of -55.2%, Roman Catholic schools have a score of -10.5%, faith schools in general have a score of -7.3% and Church of England schools have a score of -5.5%. In contrast, non-faith schools have a score of +7.8%.

[Link to source](#)

Ethnic diversity in religious Free Schools

Humanists UK (September 2016).

This report by Humanists UK examines issues of ethnic segregation in religious free schools. Using school ethnicity data from the January 2016 school census, it shows that Christian schools using 100% religious selection are less ethnically diverse and have a much greater proportion of children classed as being of ‘white origin’ than schools using the 50% cap for religious selection or using no religious selection at all. Data for secondary school admissions (provided by the Fair Admissions Campaign) show that:

63% of pupils at Church of England free schools are white, compared to 78% in 100% selective Church of England schools.

55% of pupils at other Christian schools are white, compared to 85% at 100% selective Christian schools.

15% of pupils at Church of England free schools are Asian, compared to 6% at 100% selective Church of England schools.

19% of pupils in other Christian free schools operating under the 50% cap are Asian, compared to just 3% of pupils at the 100% selective other Christian schools.

[Link to source](#)

Research into Religiously Selective Admissions Criteria

Fair Admissions Campaign (2017).

See entry in Social Cohesion for summary.

Mixed Signals:

The Discrepancy Between What the Church Preaches and What it Practises About Religious Selection at its State-Funded Schools. ***A report by the Accord Coalition for Inclusive Education for the Fair Admissions Campaign (November 2017).***

See entry in Social Cohesion for summary.

Joint Civil Society Report to the United Nations

Universal Periodic Review of the United Kingdom (3rd Cycle), Human Rights Check UK, The British Institute of Human Rights (2017).

This report draws on a range of consultation events and a nationwide call for evidence, engaging over 175 Civil Society Organisations, to explore a range of human rights issues. On the issue of children's rights, the report expresses concern about the impact of religion in the UK's education system. It notes that the requirement for all children in state schools to take part in collective worship in England and Wales raises 'concerns about the inadequacy of withdrawal rights', given that 'children with sufficient understanding are not able to withdraw themselves'. On the issue of faith schools directly, the report highlights 'concerns about the ability of state-funded religious schools to lawfully discriminate against non-religious families by selecting pupils based on religion'.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

Selective Comprehensives 2017: Admissions to high-attaining non-selective schools for disadvantaged pupils

C. Cullinane et al. (2017), The Sutton Trust.

This report looks at the social composition of the top 500 comprehensives in England. It finds that faith schools are over-represented in the category of top schools, as measured by overall GCSE performance, comprising 33.4% of the top 500 comprehensives and 19.7% of secondary schools as a whole. However, the report also finds that faith schools perform less well when using measures based on progress, and that, while the top performing faith schools took a similar (if slightly lower) proportion of children eligible for free school meals to the top performing non-faith schools (at 9.1% compared to 9.5%), the gap compared to their local neighbourhoods was substantially higher. The report notes that faith schools were 'more than three times as socially selective compared to their catchment area than non-faith schools, with an average 6% FSM gap, compared to 2%'. The gaps for the top performing Anglican and Catholic schools were found to be similar, at 5.7% and 6.7% respectively. The report claims that the reason for this is that, because faith schools are able to recruit a significant proportion

of pupils on a religious basis, ‘they typically draw substantially from outside their neighbourhood catchment areas, particularly in the case of Catholic schools’.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

Impact of religious selection on parental choice

Humanists UK (20 June 2017).

This analysis of Department for Education statistics on primary and secondary school applications and offers for September 2017 finds that: ‘on average, the proportion of parents offered their first choice secondary school was significantly lower in areas with a high proportion of religiously selected places. More specifically, for every 1% increase in the proportion of secondary school places subject to religious selection, there is a 4.2% increase in parents missing out on their first choice school’.

[Link to source](#)

No Room at the Inn

Humanists UK (2017).

This report from Humanists UK publishes the findings of a study into the admissions policies of all 210 Church of England secondary schools listed on the government’s register of schools in England. It notes a degree of variation in the levels of discrimination in admissions processes, finding that almost every state Catholic and Jewish school in England allocates all of their places on the basis of religious selection, but that generic Christian schools (adhering to a ‘Christian ethos’ but having no particular denomination) allocated just 11% of places according to a religious test in 2013. The study finds that 69% of Church of England state secondary schools have admissions policies that religiously discriminate, with this figure rising to 75% when current and former voluntary controlled schools (which have no control over their admission arrangements) are excluded. It also shows that 25% of Church of England state

secondary schools use religious selection criteria in allocating all of their places, that 45% select a majority of their pupils with reference to religion and that one in four give priority to children from religious families other than the Church over children from non-religious families. The report further notes that the number of religiously selected places at Church of England secondary schools has increased in the last five years, contrary to the Church's repeated claim to run schools that are open and inclusive.

The report concludes by noting that: 'In both policy and practice, Church schools continue to discriminate along religious lines, and a great many do so to the exclusion of all other religions and beliefs'.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

Secondary school choice and selection: Insights from new national preferences data

M. Wheldon (August 2018), Research report, Government Social Research, Department for Education.

This report uses data from the secondary schools admissions process to examine the ways in which parents' decision-making when choosing schools, and their experience of gaining admission to chosen schools, differs in different English cities, and for different demographic groups within those cities. The analysis provides evidence that disadvantaged and minority ethnic pupils appear to be less likely to be admitted into own-admissions authority schools, and particularly faith schools.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download from the institutional repository at University of Central London. [Click here to access.](#)

Parent Power 2018: How parents use financial and cultural resources to boost their children's chances of success

R. Montacute and C. Cullinane (September 2018), The Sutton Trust.

This report, published by the Sutton Trust, is the follow-up to a previous *Parent Power* report, published in 2013. Focusing on the ability of parents to use their cultural and material resources in order to exert influence within the education system, it highlights wide inequalities and shows how parents with experience, networks and financial resources are at a considerable advantage. Although the report focuses on the education system in a general sense, it touches on the inequalities prevalent in the faith schools admissions process. The report points out that 31% of parents attended church services specifically to get their child into a religious school but just 16% of adults approve of parents getting involved in local religious activities in order to help their children into a high-performing faith school.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

The choice delusion: how faith schools restrict primary school choice in England

National Secular Society (2018).

This report highlights the lack of accessible non-faith schools for parents that desire them, as well as the restrictive and discriminatory admissions rules at faith schools. It shows that faith schools limit primary school choice for parents who do not want a faith-based education for their children, or do not share the faith of a particular school in their area.

The research finds that almost three in ten families across England live in areas 'where most or all of the closest primary schools are faith schools'. This problem is particularly acute in rural areas. In 43.4% of rural areas, restrictions on non-faith school choice are categorised as 'high' or 'extreme', and 53% of rural primary schools are faith-based. The report also shows that 20.6% of pupils who missed out on their first choice of a non-faith primary school in September 2018 were assigned a faith school.

These findings have significant implications. They show that faith schools do not respect the desires of parents who do not wish for their children to receive a religious education and also highlight issues around indoctrination and discrimination. As the report puts it:

‘A school environment which either indoctrinates, inculcates or immerses children in a religious worldview intrinsically preferences the needs of those who share this worldview, and to a greater or lesser extent fails those who do not... By directing the child towards a religious worldview, such schools provide an environment in which the child’s choice – their right to develop their own beliefs is to a greater or lesser degree restricted’.

The report recommends that the Department for Education monitor faith-based restrictions on school choice and suitability across England, calls on local authorities to identify areas of particular faith-based restrictions on school choice and suitability, and argues that faith-based discrimination in admissions should be phased out, starting with all new schools and academies and extending to all state schools over a reasonable period.

A PDF copy of this report, along with updated figures for 2019 and 2020, is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

Non-Religious Need Not Apply

Humanists UK (2018).

This report analyses the admissions policies of all 637 secondary state schools with a religious character in England (focusing on the published admissions arrangements for the 2019/2020 academic year). The report finds that 40% of all state faith secondary schools in England discriminate against non-religious families by prioritising religious families over those who are non-religious, and that 60% of Catholic state secondary schools discriminate against the non-religious specifically (a figure that is significantly higher than all other school types). The report also finds that a quarter of Church of England state secondary schools prioritise children from different faiths over those from families who are non-religious, that a fifth of Muslim

schools and one in six Jewish schools discriminate against the non-religious specifically, and that 5% of ‘other Christian’ schools discriminate against the non-religious in their admission arrangements. No state-funded Hindu or Sikh schools single out the non-religious in this way.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

New Settlement Revised: Religion and Belief in Schools

C. Clarke and L. Woodhead (July 2018), Westminster Faith Debates.

This report updates an earlier Westminster Faith Debates report from 2015. It restates many of the previous conclusions but makes a variety of new recommendations. The authors claim that ‘faith schools have an important place in our society and school system’ and that the goal of government policy ‘should be to help faith schools to flourish, in a way that promotes a tolerant and inclusive society which is well informed about religion and belief’. A number of critical areas are also highlighted. The authors restate their earlier view that ‘the country needs to move strongly in the direction of reducing the number of schools ... which include faith as a criterion for admission’, and claim that, while it is ‘entirely appropriate’ for faith schools to ‘have their own ethos’, there is ‘no reason at all’ why this should depend on selection criteria. They also note that employment policies have in some cases ‘led to injustice’ (although ‘in principle’ they claim that ‘it is reasonable to employ some people who understand and accept the religion in the school in which they teach’).

The report makes a variety of recommendations. These include requiring faith schools to promote inclusivity, developing closer relationships between schools and local faith communities, establishing twinning arrangements with schools not of their faith and ‘placing an independent member or director who has a different religion or belief on the governing body’. The report also recommends that the use of faith as an admission criterion should be reduced and that employment practices be kept ‘under review, given legitimate concerns about their necessity and their effects’.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

Selective Comprehensives Great Britain: Access to top performing schools for disadvantaged pupils in Scotland, Wales and England

J. Van den Brande, J. Hillary and C. Cullinane (March 2019), The Sutton Trust.

This report builds on earlier work by the Sutton Trust examining socio-economic inequalities within the education system. It finds that faith schools are traditionally associated with strong academic performance and are over-represented among the group of top-rated schools, but that they also consistently under-represent the rates of disadvantage in their catchment areas.

The report shows that, in England, 20% of all comprehensives are faith schools, but 33% of the top-performing comprehensives are faith schools. In Wales, the figures are 13% and 9%. In Scotland, the figures are equal, at 15% each. The report also observes that faith schools have a considerable gap between their intakes of pupils eligible for free school meals compared to the levels in their catchment areas. In England there is a gap of 6% between the free school meals rate in the catchment areas of faith schools compared to their actual intake. In Wales, the gap rises to 10%. The gap in Scotland (where secondary denominational schools are restricted to Roman Catholic schools) is around 2%.

The authors offer several reasons to explain this gap. They include the admissions policies of the school, difficulties in accessing the school (e.g. low income families might lack private transport, which can be a barrier especially in parts of Scotland and Wales), differences between the faith of the school and the faith of the disadvantaged families living in the catchment area, and the willingness and ability of parents of higher socio-economic backgrounds to navigate complex admissions rules. While the authors note that: ‘We cannot tell conclusively from our data analysis why this FSM gap exists for faith schools’, the report nevertheless finds that faith schools ‘are among the most socially selective of schools’ and recommends that: ‘The admissions process for faith schools should be opened up so that their admissions are fairer, and reflect their local population, while maintaining their ethos’.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

The importance of adjusting for pupil background in school value added models

A study of Progress 8 and school accountability in England. G. Leckie and H. Goldstein (2019), British Educational Research Journal, 45(3): 518–537.

This paper uses Progress 8 scores to assess the extent to which schools aid the progress of their pupils. It finds that ‘pupils in religious schools typically make more progress than those in schools with no religious character’, with Muslim, Sikh and Jewish schools showing an especially high level of progress. However, when using Adjusted Progress 8 scores designed to account for age, gender, ethnicity, language status, special educational needs, eligibility for free school meals and deprivation, ‘the results for these schools change markedly’. The authors observe that for faith schools, ‘high average pupil progress reduces substantially once the educationally advantaged nature of their pupils is taken into account’.

A PDF copy of this paper is available from the institutional repository at the University of Bristol. [Click here to access.](#)

School Places: A Fair Choice? School Choice, Inequality and Options for Reform of School Admissions in England

S. Burgess, E. Greaves and A. Vignoles (February 2020), The Sutton Trust.

This report examines the admissions process for schools in England and argues that faith schools are frequently among the most socially selective schools, partly due to the complex faith criteria that they use. It finds evidence showing that faith schools enrol pupils who are both more socio-economically advantaged and have higher ability than pupils in the neighbourhood around the school. Although the authors do not call for the abolition of faith-based criteria, they do promote simplified criteria, using a binary measure of religious observance, combined with measures of physical distance and random ballots, to make the process more straightforward and reduce barriers to entry.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

Fairer school admissions: Social segregation in schools: the view from parents & teachers

Research Brief, The Sutton Trust (February 2020).

See entry in Performance and Selection for summary.

VALUES AND MORALITY

Many widely held moral principles are promoted by both faith and non-faith schools, the latter without framing these through an exclusively religious ethos. However, the evidence in this section shows that the promotion of religious values often runs contrary to ideals of equality in areas such as sexual orientation and reproductive rights. While supporters contend that educating children within a religious tradition fosters moral learning, critics argue that this reflects a desire to advance the interests of particular religious institutions.

The Way Ahead: Church of England Schools in the New Millennium
Church of England, GS 1406, Church House Publishing, London (2001).

This report outlines the Church of England's vision for its schools and makes a number of recommendations for ways in which the Church can deepen and expand its school provision. The views contained in the report can be seen to support the claims of those who see faith schools as engaging in practices amounting to indoctrination. It states, for instance, that the aim of Church schools should be to: 'Nourish those of the faith; Encourage those of other faiths; Challenge those who have no faith'. A section called 'The Church's need to reach the young' explains that: 'The Church has a major problem in attracting young people to its services'. This is described as a source of 'much concern' that 'bears directly on the future of the Church'. The report goes on to lament the limited provision of the Church at the level of secondary schools, noting that: 'This means that we are losing contact with most of the Church primary school children just at the time of life when they need answers to their questions and support in their faith'.

The report further states that: 'The justification for Church schools lies in offering children and young people an opportunity to experience the meaning of the Christian faith'. It claims that Church schools should not be 'agents of proselytism', but nonetheless calls on Church schools to 'offer the children an experience of the Christian faith, both through the everyday life of the school and through inclusive forms of worship'. The report adds that: 'The policy of inclusiveness extends also to children of no faith where, without seeking to convert these children to the faith, the school offers the practice of faith, worship and a school life founded

on Christian values, all of which give the children an opportunity to make an informed choice that they might otherwise not experience’.

The report goes on to lament a lack of Christian teachers needed to promote Christian values, stating that: ‘in an increasingly secular society the seedbed of young Christians from whom Christian teachers can be drawn needs to be nourished. Unless the Church can act successfully to find the teachers needed ... nothing will be achieved’.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

Against faith schools: a philosophical argument for children’s rights

R. Marples (2005), International Journal of Children’s Spirituality, 10(2): 133–147.

This paper claims that faith schools are incompatible with the rights of children and the society to which they belong. It argues that while the Universal Declaration of Human Rights asserts that parents have the right to ensure ‘education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions’, no such rights exist. The idea of parental rights is seen as a form of property claim and is a breach of a child’s moral and cognitive autonomy. The author states that: ‘Those who would frustrate, either intentionally or unwittingly, a child’s capacity for independent thought, are denying the child right to flourish’, and claims that the purpose of a faith school is to engage in a form of indoctrination, wherein a certain religious view is promoted over all others. As such, faith schools ‘represent a real and serious threat to children’s autonomy, especially their emotional autonomy’ and are ‘incompatible with the aims of education required by a liberal democracy’.

[Link to journal](#)

Independent Christian schools and pupil values: an empirical investigation among 13–15-year-old boys

L. J. Francis (2005), British Journal of Religious Education 27(2): 127–141.

This study compares the attitudes of teenage boys attending 114 non-denominational state-maintained schools and 19 independent Christian schools. Data are taken from a survey administered to all year 9 and year 10 classes throughout England and Wales. The study finds clear values differences between the pupils attending the two types of school. Pupils attending the Christian school report higher levels of personal wellbeing (such as a higher level of purpose in life) in certain areas, although overall, pupils at non-denominational schools report being happier at school by 73% to 66%. The two groups show similar results on issues such as worries about school work, concerns about exams and the importance of hard work.

Clear differences are found in levels of religious belief and moral attitudes, with pupils attending the Christian schools showing a higher level of biblical literalism and a greater degree of moral conservatism. In all, 85% of pupils in Christian schools claim to believe in God (compared to 40% of pupils in non-denominational schools), 89% believe that ‘Jesus really rose from the dead’ (compared to 28% of pupils at non-religious schools), 82% agree that ‘God made the world in six days and rested on the seventh’ (compared to 19%) and 67% hold the view that Christianity is ‘the only true religion’ (shared by just 13% of pupils at non-denominational schools).

On moral issues, 64% of pupils attending Christian schools claim that it is wrong to have sex outside marriage (compared to 13% of non-denominational pupils), 70% think that homosexuality is wrong (compared to 21%), 73% feel that abortion is wrong (the figure for pupils at non-religious schools is 39%) and 41% say that divorce is wrong (a view held by 15% of pupils at non-religious schools).

While the author holds a positive view of these findings (claiming that pupils attending Christian schools ‘are more likely to be protected from boys who hold liberal attitudes toward alcohol, tobacco and sex’), the figures can be interpreted as evidence for the view that religious school seek to inculcate their pupils with a particular worldview. Indeed, the author notes that: ‘In many ways the distinctiveness of the “Christian” community is being reproduced within the Christian school’.

[Link to journal](#)

Spiritual development in church schools – a survey of Welsh head teachers’ perceptions

G. Davies (2007), International Journal of Children's Spirituality, 12(3): 307–324.

This article reports on a survey of attitudes towards ‘spiritual development’ by the head teachers of church primary schools in Wales. Although there is a shared agreement on the meaning of the term ‘spiritual development’, with high levels of agreement on statements such as developing ‘an ability to relate to others’ (100%), ‘a sense of community’ (99%) and ‘a personal identity’ (98%), explicitly Christian elements are also strongly present. In total, 83% of head teachers agree with the view that spiritual development for pupils in church schools should mean ‘developing Christian beliefs’ and 79% agree that it should refer to ‘exploring Christian spirituality’. In contrast, the view that this means ‘exploring the spiritual within non-Christian faiths’ is accepted by 53% of respondents.

The survey also finds that 66% of head teachers feel that church schools ‘should provide opportunities for spiritual development in all subjects of the curriculum and not just RE and worship’, and 54% agree that ‘spirituality cannot be divorced from religion’. Just 9% of head teachers agree with the view that: ‘Promoting spiritual development should be left to the home and the church and not be the province of schools’.

[Link to journal](#)

Never mind the evidence: Blair's obsession with faith schools

D. Gillard (2007), Education in England.

See entry in Performance and Selection for summary.

Legal issues for faith schools in England and Wales

P. Petchey (2008), *Ecclesiastical Law Journal*, 10: 174–190.

This article considers the question of whether political criticism of faith schools could give rise to legal challenges under human rights legislation. The paper discusses a range of human rights laws, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and argues that ‘legal challenges are to be expected’. The author notes that the debate around faith schools raises ‘profound questions as to the proper scope of education in a liberal society as well as to difficult questions of social justice’, and claims that the political settlement on faith schools might not stand up to legal scrutiny, not least on issues around indoctrination.

[Link to journal](#)

Intercultural education: religion, knowledge and the limits of postmodernism

D. Coulby (2008), *Intercultural Education*, 19(4): 305–314.

*See entry in *Social Cohesion* for summary.*

Religious control of schooling in England: diversity and division

S. Ward (2008), *Intercultural Education*, 19(4): 315–323.

*See entry in *Social Cohesion* for summary.*

Religion, modernity and social rights in European education

E. Zambeta (2008), Intercultural Education, 19(4), 297–304.

See entry in Social Cohesion for summary.

Catholic schools in Scotland and divisiveness

S. J. McKinney (2008), Journal of Beliefs and Values, 29(2): 173–184.

See entry in Social Cohesion for summary.

Religion and belief discrimination and the employment of teachers in faith schools

L. Vickers (2009), Religion and Human Rights 4: 1–20.

This article considers the extent to which the right to freedom of religion for teachers is sufficiently protected in English schools, focusing on the Employment Equality (Religion and Belief) Regulations 2003 and the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998. The author argues that the current legislative framework ‘provides inadequate protection for the right of teachers to enjoy freedom of religion and belief’ and maintains that the ability of faith schools to discriminate on employment grounds (for instance, voluntary controlled faith schools can appoint a head teacher and up to a fifth of its teaching staff using a religious criteria, ensuring that they are of the same faith as that promoted by the school) reduces the available career and employment opportunities available to teachers that do not adhere to the faith of the school. Given the preponderance of Christian faith schools in the UK, the effect is that ‘Christian teachers may come to enjoy significant advantages in career terms over staff of other faiths, or those with no religion’.

A PDF copy of this paper is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

An investigation of the new independent Christian schools: what kind of citizens are they producing?

S. Baker (2009), Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Warwick.

This Ph.D. thesis investigates the views of 695 pupils attending 25 new independent Christian schools in England in 2006. The thesis notes that: ‘religion is the primary *raison d’être* of the schools’ existence’, and the data highlight high levels of religious beliefs among their students. These findings show that ‘the schools are achieving their aims of enabling pupils to develop and retain the belief system and moral position taken by their parent bodies and founding churches’. The survey used by the thesis found that: 67% of pupils at new independent Christian schools read the Bible at least once a month, 73% prayed every week and 77% attended church at least once a month. In addition, 85% said they believed in God, 82% said they believed in the Holy Spirit, 85% believed in Jesus Christ and 73% agreed with the view that Christianity was ‘the only true religion’ (just 18% agreed with the view that ‘that there is truth in all religions’).

The survey also found evidence of biblical literalism: 84% of pupils believed that ‘Jesus really rose from the dead’, just 27% agreed with the statement that the earth was ‘billions of years old’, 57% agreed with the view that ‘God made the world in six days of 24 hours’ (with just 7% agreeing that evolution created everything ‘over millions of years’) and just 5% agreed with the view that ‘Everything in the world was made by natural forces – it was not designed’. A further 71% believed that: ‘God formed man out of the dust of the Earth’, 81% believed that: ‘There was once a world-wide flood as described in the Bible’ and 81% believed that: ‘The world was once perfect but has been affected by sin’. High levels of religious conservatism were also demonstrated: 68% of pupils claimed that homosexuality was wrong, 69% thought that abortion was wrong, just 22% disagreed with the view that divorce was wrong, just 20% believed that: ‘Gay couples should be allowed to care for children’ and just 15% thought that ‘Gay couples should be allowed to marry’.

Although the author offers a positive take on the survey, she also notes that: ‘To those opposed to faith-based schooling, the schools would appear to be providing a setting designed to fulfil predictions of indoctrination and of social divisiveness’.

A PDF copy of this thesis is available on ResearchGate. [Click here to access.](#)

Faith in the Classroom

A report of the Sea of Faith Commission on Faith Schools (2009).

This report, from the Sea of Faith Commission on Faith Schools, provides a strongly critical contribution to the public debate. Although the commissioners were unable to reach a unanimous agreement on whether or not faith schools ought to be completely abolished (it being noted that such a move could undermine parental freedom) the report is nevertheless strongly critical of faith schools. It argues that they ‘separate children by religion, select staff for religious acceptability, indoctrinate children, restrict access to good school[s] for non-religious families and service the political purposes of their religious body’. The authors go on to argue that state-funded schools should not be able to control their own admissions, and that faith schools in receipt of state funding should lose the right to select pupils on religious grounds.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

Responses of three Muslim majority primary schools in England to the Islamic faith of their pupils

J. Ipgrave, J. Miller and P. Hopkins (2010), Journal of International Migration and Integration 11: 73–89.

See entry in Social Cohesion for summary.

A tale of two schools: comparing and contrasting Jacobus Fruytier Scholengemeenschap in the Netherlands and Bradford Christian School in England

M. Pike (2010), Journal of Beliefs and Values, 31(2): 181–190.

This study draws on interview and observation data to compare the aims, admission policies and curriculum of two ‘strong’ Christian schools, one in the Netherlands and one in England. The paper highlights the heterogeneity of faith schools, arguing that they need to be judged on the specific beliefs that they seek to promote (thus ‘moderate’ faith schools can be more intolerant than ‘strong’ faith schools, if the belief system of the ‘strong’ school includes aspects of tolerance). The author claims that while the evidence from the two schools involved in the study does not support claims of indoctrination (the idea that ‘strong’ faith schools believe they have a right to pass on their beliefs to their pupils), respect for the religious autonomy of pupils should be a critical determinant of state support. Thus, the paper concludes that: ‘Arguably, only those schools recognising the inherent autonomy of their students in religious matters should receive the support of the liberal state. We should also want to know the extent to which their students would be encouraged to choose to be tolerant of others’.

[Link to journal](#)

Christian distinctiveness in Church of England schools

H. Jelfs (2010), Journal of Beliefs and Values, 31(1): 29–38.

This study examines notions of ‘distinctiveness’ in Church of England schools. It uses data collected from a survey of 45 church schools together with ethnographic case studies of three primary schools, involving the analysis of school documents, participant observations and semi-structured interviews with head teachers, teachers, chairs of governors and parish priests. The findings suggest that ‘distinctiveness’ is understood by school members in two ways: first, by developing and maintaining ‘strong links with the Church and a significant religious dimension in the corporate life of the school’, and second by ‘seeking to establish a way of life

informed by Christian beliefs’. This includes ‘a belief that Christian faith offers a foundation for the lives of children and young people’.

The paper claims that Church of England schools have not kept pace with the changing cultural and social context of twenty-first century Britain, noting that ‘schools do not have a clear understanding of how their Christian character relates to the core pedagogical practices of teaching, learning, and curriculum’. Nevertheless, while the article is supportive of faith schools, the findings of this study can be seen to challenge claims that faith schools act inclusively and can be interpreted as supporting the view that they seek to promote a particular religious worldview.

[Link to journal](#)

Christ at the Centre: Why the Church Provides Catholic Schools

M. Stock (2012), Catholic Truth Society, London.

This report by the Catholic Truth Society sets out rationale for the provision of schools by the Roman Catholic Church. It highlights a number of motives, some of which can be interpreted as a concern to promote a particular worldview. The report notes, for example, that: ‘The first key reason why Catholic schools are established ... is to be part of the Church’s mission in education, to place Christ and the teaching of the Catholic Church at the centre of people’s lives ... First and foremost every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth’. Describing this as an ‘evangelising mission’, the report adds that: ‘To put Christ and the teachings of the Catholic Church at the centre of the educational enterprise is the key purpose of Catholic schools’. Other principal objectives included the promotion of policies ‘that reflect and embody the teaching of Christ and the Catholic Church’ and which ‘through external and internal symbols and displays, manifest the centrality of Christ and the Catholic faith’.

The report adds that ‘the admission criteria of Catholic schools should be formulated in such a way that Catholic children and young people are always given priority in the allocation of school places over and above all other applicants’. The author notes: ‘A Catholic school is

never simply a school for those who choose it. A Catholic school is always, first of all, a school for Catholics’.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

Defining and assessing spiritual health:

A comparative study among 13- to 15-year-old pupils attending secular schools, Anglican schools, and private Christian schools in England and Wales. ***L. J. Francis, G. Penny and S. Baker (2012), Peabody Journal of Education, 87(3): 351–367.***

This study examines the views of pupils attending three different types of schools: publicly funded schools without a religious character, state-funded schools with an Anglican character, and new independent Christian schools (not publicly funded). The findings highlight substantial differences between the levels of ‘spiritual health’ experienced by pupils within these types of schools.

Pupils in non-religious and Anglican schools show strong similarities on a range of personal and communal issues (for instance 65% of pupils in non-religious schools and 64% of pupils in Anglican schools feel that their life has a sense of purpose, 71% and 72% say life is worth living and 62% and 64% are concerned about poverty in the developing world). Pupils in new Christian schools show higher agreement on some of these statements: 82% feel as though their life has a sense of purpose and 82% express concerns about poverty in the developing world.

The survey also finds that pupils attending religious schools have much higher levels of belief in God. Just 22% of pupils in non-religious schools express belief in God, compared to 35% of pupils in Anglican schools and 87% of pupils in independent Christian schools. The respective figures for belief in life after death are 36%, 40% and 75%. The proportions agreeing with the statement that ‘the church seems irrelevant to life today’ are 32%, 30% and 9%.

The authors claim that these findings challenge the view that Anglican schools engage in indoctrinatory practices, although the higher levels of religious belief can be interpreted as highlighting the extent to which religious schools do promote particular kinds of faith-based

worldviews. Indeed, in the case of independent Christian schools, the authors note that the findings appear to be consistent with the aims of these schools, ‘which seek to create a radical alternative educational environment different from that found in schools without a religious character within the state-maintained sector’. The similar responses from pupils on personal and communal issues in non-religious and Anglican schools can also be seen to offer a challenge to the view that Anglican schools offer a distinctive educational experience beyond the promotion of religious beliefs.

[Link to journal](#)

The Church School of the Future Review

Church of England, Archbishops’ Council Education Division (March 2012).

This report outlines Church of England thinking on the future of its schools. It highlights the challenges faced, discusses the defining characteristics of a Church of England school, and considers strategies for promoting their growth. A survey of participants in the review found that 57.7% feel the current agenda in education poses a ‘highly significant’ (16%) or ‘significant’ (41.7%) risk to the Church of England school system. A further 26.1% consider it to be a medium risk, and 10.1% a slight risk. A section called ‘Secularist attack’ also notes ‘a concerted attack on the core elements of the Church school identity. Most of the challenges and claims made are without foundation or are matters of principle on which disagreement is always possible’.

While the report denies that Church of England schools are ‘faith schools’, on the grounds that they are for the whole community, it goes on to highlight a variety of ways that its schools can be used to promote an Anglican worldview. It notes, for instance, that: ‘Distinctiveness is about more than organisational arrangements and designation as a school of religious character. It must include a wholehearted commitment to putting faith and spiritual development at the heart of the curriculum and ensuring that a Christian ethos permeates the whole educational experience’. It goes on to say that every child should have ‘a life-enhancing encounter with the Christian faith and the person of Jesus Christ’, and that this notion applies ‘equally to children of the faith, of other faiths and of no faith’.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

The School Report: The experiences of gay young people in Britain's schools in 2012

Stonewall (2012).

This report by Stonewall examines the experiences of gay young people attending school in 2012. The report finds that on the issue of bi- and homophobic bullying, faith schools fared worse than other types of school. The proportion of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) pupils reporting that their school said homophobic bullying was wrong was 50%, while the figure for faith schools was 37%. In faith schools, 36% of LGB pupils said that teachers did not challenge the use of homophobic language (compared to 26% in non-faith schools), while 22% said that teachers and other school staff made homophobic comments (the figure for non-faith schools was 17%). Just 25% of LGB pupils at faith schools said that their schools responded quickly to cases of homophobic bullying (compared to 31% for non-faith schools).

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

What can international comparisons teach us about school choice and non-governmental schools in Europe?

J. Dronkers and S. Avram (2015), Comparative Education, 51(1): 118–132.

This paper uses comparable cross-national data for all member states of the European Union to study a variety of educational arrangements. It notes that the main argument for religious schools has been the assumption that they would socialise their pupils in religious values and attitudes. Parents therefore had the right to send their children to subsidised faith schools to ensure the socialisation of their children in the values of their religion. However, the study finds (possibly due to secularisation) that religious schools are no longer keen on, or successful

in, moulding the attitudes and beliefs of the students attending them. This process has potentially significant effects, making the confessional character of a school less relevant and undermining the *raison d'être* of the government subsidising faith schools.

[Link to journal](#)

The promotion of British values: sexual orientation equality, religion, and England's schools

R. M. Vanderbeck and P. Johnson (2016), International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family, 30(3): 292–321.

See entry in Social Cohesion for summary.

Shh ... No Talking: LGBT-inclusive Sex and Relationships Education in the UK

Terrence Higgins Trust (July 2016).

See entry in Social Cohesion for summary.

What is it like to be a student in a religious school?

S. Tuastad (2016), Religion and Education, 43(1): 60–76.

This study provides a review of peer-reviewed articles on faith schooling published over a ten-year period in American, Canadian, European, and Australian journals. The review finds that faith schools tend to produce higher levels of academic performance, but that in egalitarian systems 'the differences after the 1990s were almost nonexistent'. The review also shows that students attending faith schools are not disadvantaged in terms of their political learning, but

that in terms of social and cultural attitudes they are ‘more traditional in their world-views’. The author concludes that the literature on faith schooling provides evidence of disadvantage, noting that some schools resemble ‘total institutions’ and that ‘for knowledge of a variety of cultural lifestyles and exposure to a multiplicity of trends, religious totality may in theory be obstructive. This may be problematic from a liberal political perspective’.

[Link to journal](#)

School Report: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bi and Trans Young People in Britain’s Schools in 2017

Stonewall (2017).

See entry in Social Cohesion for summary.

Adolescent moral judgement: A study of UK secondary school pupils

D. L. Walker et al. (2017), British Educational Research Journal 43(3): 588–607.

The paper examines the development of character and virtues in an educational setting, based on a study of moral dilemma tests involving year 10 pupils from 31 secondary schools in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The study finds that pupils attending faith schools achieve slightly better scores than pupils attending non-faith schools, but also finds small (if significant) gaps for schools depending on their proportion of pupils that were eligible for free school meals. Overall, the study reveals no clear links between high moral scores and any specific type of school. The authors conclude that ‘character – or in this case its moral judgement component – may be thriving in a variety of school types and in different ways ... high scores on the measure are not associated with a particular type of school’.

[Link to journal](#)

A PDF copy of this paper is available from the LSHTM institutional repository. [Click here to access.](#)

“No offence to God but I don’t believe in Him”: religion, schooling and children’s rights

P. J. Hemming (2017), *Ethnography and Education*, 13(2): 154–171.

The study draws on data from a research project on rural church schools, which involved in-depth fieldwork in two Anglican primaries in 2014, to explore the issue of faith schools and children’s rights. Although the study was generally favourable towards faith schools, it highlighted problematic aspects of faith schooling for non-religious pupils. First, it found that a small number of pupils ‘expressed disinterest in, or dislike of, Christian themed songs and stories or RE lessons, linking this back to their own non-religious positions’. Second, ‘the most problematic issue for a larger number of non-religious pupils was prayer, which was often experienced as awkward or meaningless if individuals did not believe in God’. Pilot fieldwork for the study found similar views at other schools. Third, the article notes that: ‘The most concerning finding was that many of these children were under the impression that they were required to pray in order to avoid being disciplined by teachers ... As such, religious practices were perceived to be intertwined with school rules and behaviour management’. While the author finds little evidence to suggest that the schools involved in the study were indoctrinating their pupils with problematic values, these findings nevertheless raise important issues for the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion for pupils who are of a different faith, or no faith, from that represented by the school.

A PDF copy of this paper is available from the institutional repository at the University of Brighton. [Click here to access.](#)

Most state Jewish schools enforce religious dress

National Secular Society (21 November 2017).

Research by the National Secular Society has shown that almost 60% of state-funded Jewish schools in England compelled pupils to wear religious clothing as part of the school uniform. Out of 49 state-funded Jewish schools, 29 were found to list specifically Jewish items of clothing as part of the compulsory school uniform on their website, mostly for boys. Some schools expected religious clothing to be worn outside school grounds, while travelling to and from the premises. Others imposed religious dress and modesty standards on external visitors. The NSS said that: ‘Forcing children to wear religious clothing is forcing them to take the identity of a particular religion, regardless of what the child may personally believe. It means that children lose their fundamental right to freedom of belief’.

[Link to article](#)

Systems of Indoctrination: Accelerated Christian Education in England

J. Scaramanga (2017), UCL Institute of Education, unpublished Ph.D. thesis.

This Ph.D. thesis examines the use of Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) in private Christian schools. Based on a qualitative study of students attending such schools, it finds that: ‘While some participants found their ACE experience beneficial, the majority experienced inadequate education, sexism, homophobia, excessive punishment, and discrimination against those considered “ungodly”. Many participants described continued effects of indoctrination despite their rejection’. The study notes that: ‘private religious schools frequently discriminate on the basis of religion for both staff and students ... this makes the development of an indoctrinatory system more likely’.

An ACE school is described as ‘a place where the religious ethos permeates every aspect of the school day ... The Bible is quoted frequently, as justification for almost everything that happens in the school’. The author highlights critical issues of indoctrination, noting that ACE undermines students’ autonomy and hence their ability to flourish in later life. Thus: ‘Much of what it is to attend an ACE school is to be deeply absorbed in a subculture where almost everyone espouses the same beliefs and values. Friendships with non-Christians are discouraged except for the purpose of evangelism, and unbelievers are regarded warily’. This

produces a view ‘of learning as consisting only of rote regurgitation, at the expense of critical thought, creative expression, problem solving, inquiry, or group interaction’.

A PDF copy of this thesis can be downloaded from the University of Central London. [Click here to access.](#)

Education, queer theology, and spiritual development: disrupting heteronormativity for inclusion in Jewish, Muslim and Christian faith schools

S. Henry (2018), International Journal of Children's Spirituality, 23(1): 3–16.

This article considers the approach to sexuality and sexual identity taken by Jewish, Muslim and Christian schools. Although the author is in favour of faith schools, the article highlights a critical problem with the way in which faith schooling currently engages with LGBTQ identity issues, claiming that ideas of inclusivity do little to dissolve boundaries between an in-group religious membership defined in terms of adherence to heteronormative ideals and the non-heterosexual ‘other’. This approach, the author claims, merely reproduces a binary embedded logic of heteronormativity by reiterating ‘the hospitable gesture of the (theistic) host’. In conclusion, the author calls for the application of queer theology to reframe ideas of spiritual development in faith schools in fluid and non-deterministic terms. In this fashion, ‘the experience of spiritual development of, say, a Catholic student in an inclusive Catholic faith school would be one where the preservation of Catholic affiliation is not necessarily a priority: the priority would be a queer appreciation for transcendence, not repetition’.

[Link to journal](#)

How to regulate faith schools

M. Clayton et al. (2018), Impact: Philosophical Perspectives on Education Policy.

This paper address two arguments that are typically presented by supporters of faith schools, namely: (1) that parents have the right to decide how – and with whom – their children are educated, and (2) that schools with a religious character tend to be good schools. The authors maintain that parents’ rights over their children’s education do not include the right to send them to a school that is so continuous with the culture at home that it risks depriving them of the capacity for autonomy, and nor do they forbid the state’s acting to develop the civic and moral capacities that are required for a healthy, tolerant liberal democracy.

The authors further contend that the suggestion that faith schools are better than their non-faith counterparts involves, at best, a limited view about the educational goods that schools ought to produce. Human rights law means that parents must indeed be free to decide their children’s education in the light of their own religious and philosophical commitments, but that does not imply that the state should support religious schooling that risks children’s autonomy and it does not prevent the state requiring children to learn about alternative ways of life as well as about their own and others’ moral and civic status as free and equal persons, even where doing so runs counter to parents’ preferences.

This paper can be downloaded freely from the journal. [Click here to access.](#)

Unsafe Sex Education: The Risk of Letting Religious Schools Teach Within the Tenets of Their Faith

National Secular Society (April 2018).

This report examines the Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) policies of 634 state-funded faith schools in England in 2018. It shows that 77% of those schools with an SRE policy were delivering the subject ‘according to the teachings of the school’s religious ethos, rather than in a secular, impartial manner’, that ‘SRE policies could not be found on the websites for nearly half of the schools’, and that: ‘In many faith schools, SRE is delivered primarily through the Religious Education (RE) curriculum or equivalent’. The report shows that the primary goal of SRE at many faith schools is: ‘To impart religious values about sex and relationships’, and identified a host of problems in the way that faith schools taught SRE. This included the use of policies to promote marriage as ‘an ideal state’, claims that ‘sex outside of marriage is wrong’,

that ‘being married with children is an ideal’, that ‘contraception and abortion are wrong’, that ‘homosexual acts are wrong’ and that ‘homosexuality itself is “disordered”’.

The report concludes that: ‘Teaching SRE from a religious perspective is generally the norm at state secondary faith schools in England’, and makes a number of recommendations. These include a call for SRE to ‘be based on recommendations from healthcare and educational professionals, not religious scripture’, for it to be ‘impartial, consistent between schools and consistent with the Equality Act’, and for SRE policies to be readily accessible on the websites of all state schools.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

What is the point of religious education?

M. Clayton and D. Stevens (2018), *Theory and Research in Education*, 16(1): 65–81.

This paper centres on the issue of religious education, although the general argument is applicable to faith schools to the extent that they seek to promote a particular religious worldview. The paper presents a philosophical objection to the idea of religious education, arguing that the promotion of religion breaches the ‘acceptability requirement’, namely that: ‘a government’s justification of its educational policy must be acceptable to all reasonable citizens over which it has dominion’. Fostering toleration and civic unity are important educational aims, but so too is the need to equip pupils with the intellectual ability to make serious, considered and well-reasoned ethical choices. The authors go on to claim that ‘every child has an entitlement to an education that develops his or her understanding of different conceptions of the good so that he or she has the resources to develop his or her own view, reflect upon it in an informed manner, and rationally pursue it’. They conclude that educational systems should teach ethics and moral philosophy rather than the study of religious doctrines.

[Link to journal](#)

A PDF copy of this paper can be downloaded from Sage Publications. [Click here to access.](#)

Faith schools and the cultivation of tolerance

A. Mason (2018), *Theory and Research in Education*, 16(2): 204–225.

This article has a generally positive view of faith schools but argues that they ought to be more stringently regulated. The author claims that there is insufficient support for the view that schools with a religious character are considerably sub-optimal for cultivating the virtues of tolerance among their pupils compared to non-faith alternatives, but calls for regulatory reform of both state-funded and privately funded faith schools. The article argues that faith schools should be required to provide a civic education that is well designed to help cultivate in children an appreciation of the importance of the virtues of tolerance and a capacity for critical reflection, and that they ought to present other religions and their adherents in a respectful and fair-minded way. This is the case even if faith schools aim to nurture in children a particular faith, and even if they are permitted to give some priority in admissions to children from families that share that faith. The author also argues that faith schools should be required to be welcoming to children from other faith backgrounds and be required to ensure that they achieve some degree of diversity in so far as the applications they receive permit them to do so.

[Link to journal](#)

Christian ethos secondary schools in England and Wales: a common voice or wide diversity?

L. J. Francis, A. Casson and U. McKenna (2018), *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, 1–18.

This study draws on quantitative data to compare the beliefs and attitudes of pupils attending 10 Christian ethos secondary schools and 71 schools without a religious character. The study finds similarities in some areas (such as views on whether religion was a force for good, beliefs in evolution and attitudes towards homosexuality) but reveals substantial differences between the social and moral outlook of the two groups. These include:

** 49% of students attending Christian ethos schools profess to have a belief in God, compared to 26% of pupils in non-religious schools.*

** 46% of students attending Christian ethos schools state a belief in Jesus Christ, compared to 22% of pupils in non-religious schools.*

** 41% of pupils at Christian schools say they believe in the Holy Spirit, compared to 17% of pupils in non-religious schools.*

** 46% of students attending Christian schools hold the view that it is wrong to have sex under the legal age, compared with 31% in non-religious schools.*

** 29% of students in Christian schools say that it is wrong to get drunk, compared with 20% of students in schools without a religious character.*

** 73% of students in Christian schools are concerned about the poverty of the developing world, compared with 62% in schools without a religious character.*

** 69% of students in Christian ethos schools say that they are often worried about their school work, compared with 57% in schools without a religious character.*

Although the authors are positively inclined towards a role for faith in the education system, and point out that faith schools cannot be treated as a homogenous category, these findings can nevertheless be interpreted as evidence that faith schools inculcate (at least to some degree) religious values amongst their pupils

A PDF copy of this paper is available from the institutional repository at the University of Warwick. [Click here to access.](#)

Made in God's Image: Challenging homophobic and biphobic bullying in Catholic Schools

St. Mary's, London (2018).

This document from the Catholic Education Service (put together by St Mary's, London) provides guidance for Catholic schools on how to deal with bi- and homophobic bullying. It calls for inclusiveness, noting that: 'Catholic teaching on homosexuality is not founded on, and can never be used to justify "homophobic" attitudes'. However, the document goes on to add that: 'No school, or individual teacher, is under a duty to support, promote or endorse marriage of same sex couples', and that:

Where individual teachers are concerned, having a view about something does not amount to discrimination. So it should not be unlawful for a teacher in any school to express personal views on sexual orientation provided that it is done in an appropriate manner and context (for example when responding to questions from pupils, or in an RE or Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PSHE) lesson).

Appendix A to the document details responses to a survey of 49 Catholic schools in England and Wales. The respondents were either heads (13), deputy heads (17), assistant heads (14), or other (5). While 96% of respondents said that their school had 'an existing anti-bullying policy that includes strategies for combating homophobic bullying', other responses highlighted serious shortcomings on this issue: 41% said that their school did not 'have access at KS3 to resources/materials that would help to challenge homophobic bullying' (Q.2), 59% said that they were not 'presently using materials at KS3 to address homophobic bullying' (Q.3), 84% said that they did not 'have any policies or questionnaires on homophobic bullying' that they had worked on or trialled that they 'would be willing to share with full acknowledgement given to the school' (Q.6), and 90% did not 'have any case studies on homophobic bullying that [they] could share anonymously for guidance to other Catholic schools' (Q.7).

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

Education policies and teacher deployment in Northern Ireland: Ethnic separation, cultural encapsulation and community cross-over

M. Milliken, J. Bates and A. Smith (2019), British Journal of Educational Studies, (no issue at time of writing).

See entry in Social Cohesion for summary.

Assessing student attitudes toward Christianity in Church in Wales primary schools: does aided status make a difference?

L. J. Francis, D. W. Lankshear and E. L. Eccles (2020), British Journal of Religious Education, 42(1): 56–64.

The study examines the connection between attending Anglican schools in England and Wales and attitudes toward Christianity. It measures the attitude toward Christianity of 4581 pupils aged 8 to 11 in 87 Church in Wales primary schools, comparing the responses of pupils attending voluntary controlled schools with those attending voluntary aided schools, which have a greater control over their organisation and teaching.

Noting that the majority of Anglican church primary schools in England and Wales are serving single school areas, and that the majority of students attend these schools for reasons of proximity ('not because their parents have deliberately chosen to send them to a church school'), the study finds that, controlling for sex, age and frequency of church attendance, voluntary aided status is associated with a more positive attitude toward Christianity.

The authors conclude that: 'If one of the aims and objectives of Anglican schools is to promote a positive view of Christianity these data suggest that aided schools are more effective than controlled schools in promoting this outcome'.

A PDF copy of this paper is available from the institutional repository at the University of Warwick. [Click here to access.](#)

***Untitled. General Synod, Children and Youth Ministry
GS 2161 (January 2020).***

This paper discusses the declining participation in Christianity in young people, especially the under-16s, and highlights the Church of England's strategic thinking that one way to rectify this decline is through the use of faith schools. The paper notes that: 'Decline among under 16s is much faster than decline among all other generations' and that: 'We have many opportunities as a Church to engage with children and young people through schools'. The report 'calls on the whole church to address how we can draw stronger links between schools, churches and families' and concludes by suggesting that one way in which the Church could address its decline is to 'help churches establish stronger links with church schools'.

A PDF copy of this report is available to download. [Click here to access.](#)

OPINION POLLS

Opinion poll evidence challenges the claim that faith schools are popular with parents and communities, showing strong and consistent opposition to the idea of state-funded faith schools, from religious and non-religious citizens alike. There is significant variation between the phrasing of questions and between religious denominations. Opposition to religious selection or discrimination in faith schools is particularly strong.

Understanding public attitudes in Britain towards faith schools

B. Clements (2010), *British Educational Research Journal*, 36(6): 953–973.

*See entry in *Social Cohesion* for summary.*

YouGov / ITV Tonight

(April 2004).

A poll conducted by YouGov found that 29% of parents in Britain would consider using dishonest means to gain entry into high-performing schools, including moving house, 15% admitted considering falsifying their address, and 20% said that they would lie or exaggerate their religious affiliation if they thought that doing so would help their child get into the school.

[Link to source](#)

Guardian Opinion Poll

ICM (August 2005).

A poll conducted for *The Guardian* by ICM in August 2005 found that almost two thirds of respondents (64%) did not think that the government should be expanding the number of state-funded faith schools.

Q.9. The government is expanding the number of state funded faith schools, including Muslim schools. Which one of the following statements do you most agree with?

Schools should be for everyone regardless of religion and the government should not be funding faith schools of any kind: 64%

Faith schools are an important part of our education system and if there are Anglican, Catholic and Jewish state-funded schools there should also be Muslim ones: 25%

Faith schools are an important part of our education system but the government should not be funding Muslim schools: 8%

Don't know: 4%

[Link to source](#)

Attitudes to Living in Britain – A Survey of Muslim Opinion

GfK NOP Social Research for Channel 4 Dispatches (April 2006).

A survey of Muslim opinion conducted by NOP for Channel 4 *Dispatches* found divided opinion on the issue of schooling, with equal proportions favouring faith schools and non-faith state schools.

Schooling preference

Muslim school that follows National Curriculum: 43%

Popular state school with good results: 44%

Don't know:

13%

[Link to source](#)

Faith Schools

Populus (October 2006)

A poll conducted by Populus in October 2006 found that a majority of respondents (62%) thought that faith schools were divisive, and that most people would not be happy for their child to attend a faith school in which they were outnumbered by pupils of a different faith to their own.

Faith schools are divisive because they prevent children from different religious backgrounds from getting to know and understand each other

Agree: 62%

Disagree: 33%

Refused/Don't know: 5%

I would be happy for my child to go to a faith school of a different religion from my own, even though they would be outnumbered by children from other religions

Agree: 46%

Disagree: 50%

Refused/Don't know: 4%

[Link to source](#)

Non-believers

J. Crace (5 December 2006), The Guardian.

See entry in Choice and Admissions for summary.

YouGov Survey Results

(February 2007).

A poll by YouGov in February 2007 found that more than half of respondents did not approve of the expansion of faith schools.

Do you approve or disapprove of the growth in the number of faith schools in this country?

<i>Approve</i>	<i>10%</i>
<i>Disapprove</i>	<i>52%</i>
<i>Neither</i>	<i>28%</i>

[Link to source](#)

Ballots in School Admissions

The Sutton Trust (May 2007)

See entry in Choice and Admissions for summary.

YouGov Survey Results

(July 2007)

A further YouGov survey in July 2007 found that more than half of respondents were ‘not in favour’ of faith schools.

Thinking generally, would you say that you are in favour or not in favour of faith schools?

<i>In favour</i>	<i>31%</i>
<i>Not in favour</i>	<i>52%</i>
<i>Don't know</i>	<i>17%</i>

[Link to source](#)

YouGov / Sunday Times Survey Results

April 2008

A YouGov poll for the Sunday Times, conducted in April 2008 in the wake of criticism of faith schools by the then Education Secretary, Ed Balls, found that half of respondents were in favour of stronger government measures to deal with restrictive admissions processes.

Ed Balls the schools minister has criticised faith schools over unfair admissions procedures. Which of these statements comes closer to your views?

The government is right to get tough on schools that erect hidden barriers that discourage poorer families from applying: 50%

Labour should stop undermining often excellent faith schools and leave heads to run their schools as they see fit: 38%

[Link to source](#)

YouGov / Accord Coalition, Survey Results

(June 2009).

A survey conducted by YouGov and the Accord Coalition in June 2009 found that most respondents agreed with the view that state-funded faith schools were bad for community cohesion, that they should not be permitted to operate discriminatory recruitment policies, and that they should teach a wide-ranging syllabus.

State funded schools that select students by their religion undermine community cohesion.

Strongly agree: 25%

Agree: 35%

Disagree: 12%

Strongly disagree: 7%

All state funded schools should operate recruitment and employment policies that do not discriminate on grounds of religion or belief.

Strongly agree: 37%

Agree: 35%

Disagree: 7%

Strongly disagree: 3%

All state funded schools should teach an objective and balanced syllabus for education about a wide range of religious and non-religious beliefs.

Strongly agree: 33%

Agree: 41%

Disagree: 6%

Strongly disagree: 3%

[Link to source](#)

Faith Schools Survey for Channel 4

ICM (August 2010).

In August 2010 an ICM survey for Channel 4 found that a majority of respondents (60%) felt that it was wrong for parents to pretend to belong to a religion in order to get their child into a faith school (37% disagreed) and a similar figure (59%) did not believe that the government should not be funding faith schools of any kind. These results were broadly replicated when breaking the responses down according to religious affiliation: a majority of Christians, Muslims, Sikhs and Jewish respondents did not think that parents should mislead about their religion in order to get their child into a faith school. A majority of Christians, Hindus and Sikhs did not think there should be state funding for faith schools of any kind.

Q.3. Which one of the following statements do you most agree with?

You cannot blame parents for doing whatever they can to get their child in their preferred school: 37%

It is wrong for parents to pretend they belong to a religion in order to get their child into a faith school: 60%

Don't know: 3%

[By religion]

You cannot blame parents for doing whatever they can to get their child in their preferred school:

Christian: 37%

Muslim: 36%

Hindu: 72%

Sikh: 19%

Jewish: 23%

Other: 49%

It is wrong for parents to pretend they belong to a religion in order to get their child into a faith school:

Christian: 60%

Muslim: 64%

Hindu: 28%

Sikh: 81%

Jewish: 77%

Other: 48%

Q.5. The government is expanding the number of state funded faith schools, including Muslim schools. Which one of the following statements do you most agree with?

Faith schools are an important part of our education system and if there are Anglican, Catholic and Jewish state-funded schools there should also be Muslim ones: 27%

Faith schools are an important part of our education system but the government should not be funding Muslim schools: 10%

Schools should be for everyone regardless of religion and the government should not be funding faith schools of any kind: 59%

Don't know: 4%

[By religion]

Faith schools are an important part of our education system and if there are Anglican, Catholic and Jewish state-funded schools there should also be Muslim ones.

Christian: 29%

Muslim: 64%

Hindu: 25%

Sikh: 28%

Jewish: 58%
Other: 32%

Faith schools are an important part of our education system, but the government should not be funding Muslim schools.

Christian: 12%
Muslim: 0%
Hindu: 18%
Sikh: 0%
Jewish: 0%
Other: 8%

Schools should be for everyone regardless of religion and the government should not be funding faith schools of any kind.

Christian: 54%
Muslim: 36%
Hindu: 57%
Sikh: 72%
Jewish: 0%
Other: 60%

Don't know

Christian: 4%
Muslim: 0%
Hindu:
Sikh: 0%
Jewish: 42%
Other: 0%

[Link to source](#)

YouGov / Daybreak, Survey Results

(September 2010).

A YouGov/Daybreak survey in September 2010 found that school performance was the factor highest rated by parents when considering schools for their children. The religion of the school was rated as an important factor by fewer than one in ten people.

Which, if any, of the following are/were important to you when choosing which school to send your child/children to? (Please select up to three)

<i>Performance of the school:</i>	66%
<i>How easy it was to get to:</i>	34%
<i>The area the school was in:</i>	33%
<i>Where my child wanted to go:</i>	24%
<i>Facilities:</i>	23%
<i>Class sizes:</i>	23%
<i>Curriculum:</i>	22%
<i>Religion of the school:</i>	9%
<i>Where my child(s) friends went:</i>	9%
<i>Extracurricular activities on offer:</i>	7%
<i>That it is a same/mix-sex school:</i>	4%
<i>Other:</i>	5%
<i>Don't know:</i>	4%

[Link to source](#)

YouGov / NUT Survey Results

(December 2010).

A poll by YouGov and the NUT in December 2010 found that just 16% of respondents considered a faith-based organisation to be an ‘appropriate group’ to run a school, far behind other groups, such as local councils (52%), teachers (42%) and non-profit charities (30%).

Suppose there was to be a new school built in your area that your child or children could attend. Which, if any, of these groups would be an appropriate group to run a school? Please tick all that apply.

<i>Local councils:</i>	<i>52%</i>
<i>A group of teachers:</i>	<i>42%</i>
<i>Non-profit charity:</i>	<i>30%</i>
<i>A group of parents:</i>	<i>25%</i>
<i>Faith based group:</i>	<i>16%</i>
<i>Private company:</i>	<i>15%</i>
<i>None of the above:</i>	<i>6%</i>
<i>Other:</i>	<i>1%</i>

[Link to source](#)

Children and Young People’s Views of Education Policy

Office of the Children’s Commissioner (March 2011).

See entry in Choice and Admissions for summary.

Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science (UK)

Religious and Social Attitudes of UK Christians in 2011 (February 2012).

In 2012 an Ipsos MORI poll of UK adults identifying as ‘Christian’ in the 2011 census, conducted with the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science, found that respondents showed more support for state-funded Christian faith schools than for those of

another religion: 54% strongly supported or tended to support state-funded schools for their denomination, 53% supported them for any Christian denomination and 44% supported them for non-Christian faiths.

To what extent do you support or oppose the following in the UK?

Q.30. State-funded schools for your denomination

<i>Strongly support:</i>	20%
<i>Tend to support:</i>	34%
<i>Neither support nor oppose:</i>	26%
<i>Tend to oppose:</i>	10%
<i>Strongly oppose:</i>	6%
<i>Don't know:</i>	2%

Q.31. State-funded schools for any Christian denomination

<i>Strongly support:</i>	17%
<i>Tend to support:</i>	36%
<i>Neither support nor oppose:</i>	27%
<i>Tend to oppose:</i>	9%
<i>Strongly oppose:</i>	6%
<i>Don't know:</i>	3%

Q.32. State-funded schools for any religion, whether Christian or non-Christian

<i>Strongly support:</i>	13%
<i>Tend to support:</i>	31%
<i>Neither support nor oppose:</i>	27%
<i>Tend to oppose:</i>	15%
<i>Strongly oppose:</i>	8%
<i>Don't know:</i>	4%

[Link to source](#)

Faith Schools', Accord Coalition / ComRes

(November 2012).

See entry in Choice and Admissions for summary.

YouGov / Prospect Survey Results

(January 2013).

A survey by YouGov and Prospect conducted in January 2013 found that most people (49% overall) expressed support for the idea of making all state schools secular and prohibiting them from having any special links to religious organisations (38% opposed).

Here are some proposals regarding state schools. In each case, do you support or oppose the proposal?

Make all state schools secular, and stop them having special links with the Christian, Jewish, Muslim or any other religion

Total support ***(49%)***

Strongly support: 24%

Tend to support: 25%

Total oppose ***(38%)***

Tend to oppose: 23%

Strongly oppose: 15%

Don't know: 14%

[Link to source](#)

YouGov / University of Lancaster Survey Results

(June 2013).

In June 2013 a survey of Catholic adults by YouGov/University of Lancaster found that 57% would be 'likely' to send their child to a faith school (just 29% saying that it was 'unlikely'). The promotion of religious beliefs and practices came low down in the list of factors that respondents were asked to select as influencing their choice of school. Just 19% rated 'Grounding of pupils in a faith tradition' as an important factor. Just 8% rated 'Transmission of belief about God'. Top of the list was 'Academic standards' (with 75%) and 'Location of the school' (with 46%).

If you were thinking about if you were planning on sending your child to a school in your local area, which two or three, if any, would influence your choice? (Please tick up to three)

<i>Academic standards:</i>	<i>75%,</i>
<i>Location of the school:</i>	<i>46%</i>
<i>Discipline records in the school:</i>	<i>38%</i>
<i>Ethical values:</i>	<i>30%</i>
<i>Grounding of pupils in a faith tradition:</i>	<i>19%</i>
<i>Prestige of the school:</i>	<i>17%</i>
<i>Transmission of belief about God:</i>	<i>8%</i>
<i>Something else:</i>	<i>4%</i>
<i>Don't know:</i>	<i>8%</i>

Imagining now that you had a child and were choosing a school for them... How likely or unlikely would you be to send your child to a faith school?

<i>Very likely:</i>	<i>31%</i>
<i>Fairly likely:</i>	<i>26%</i>
<i>Fairly unlikely:</i>	<i>15%</i>
<i>Very unlikely:</i>	<i>14%</i>

YouGov / University of Lancaster Survey Results

(June 2013)

In June 2013 a poll conducted by YouGov and Lancaster University found that a clear majority of people (59%) would be unlikely to send their child to a faith school. Most people (by a margin of 45% to 32%) also felt that faith schools should not be funded by the state, although a small majority (by 42% to 38%) were supportive of state funding for Church of England schools.

Imagine now that you had a child and were choosing a school for them... How likely or unlikely would you be to send your child to a faith school?

<i>Very likely:</i>	9%
<i>Fairly likely:</i>	15%
<i>Fairly unlikely:</i>	21%
<i>Very unlikely</i>	38%

State-supported 'faith schools' make up around a third of schools in Britain. Most are church schools (e.g. Church of England, Roman Catholic) and the rest (around 1%) are non-Christian (e.g. Jewish, Muslim, Hindu). Do you [think] the Government should or should not provide funding for the following faith schools?

<i>The government should provide funding for these:</i>	32%
<i>The government should not provide funding for these:</i>	45%
<i>Don't know:</i>	23%

Catholic faith schools

<i>The government should provide funding for these:</i>	36%
<i>The government should not provide funding for these:</i>	43%

Don't know: 21%

Church of England faith schools

The government should provide funding for these: 42%

The government should not provide funding for these: 38%

Don't know: 20%

[Link to source](#)

YouGov for Westminster Faith Debates (Lancaster University)

(September 2013).

Almost identical results were found in a survey conducted by YouGov for Westminster Faith Debates in September 2013. It was found that most people (45% to 32%) did not approve of state funding for faith schools, and that most people (59% to 24%) were unlikely to send their child to a faith school. The survey also found that 'grounding pupils in a faith tradition' and 'transmission of belief about God' were the lowest rated reasons in people's decision about where to send their child, with just 5% and 3% respectively (the top reason being 'academic standards', with 77%).

Q.1. State-supported 'faith schools' make up around a third of schools in Britain. Most are church schools (e.g. Church of England, Roman Catholic) and the rest (around 1%) are non-Christian (e.g. Jewish, Muslim, Hindu). Do you think the government should or should not provide funding for faith schools?

The Government should provide funding for these: 32%

The Government should not provide funding for these: 45%

Don't know: 23%

Q.3. Imagining now that you had a child and were choosing a school for them ... How likely or unlikely would you be to send your child to a faith school?

<i>Very likely:</i>	9%
<i>Fairly likely:</i>	15%
<i>Fairly unlikely:</i>	21%
<i>Very unlikely:</i>	38%

Q.4. If you were thinking about sending your child to a school in your local area, which two or three, if any, would influence your choice? (Please tick up to three)

<i>Academic standards:</i>	77%
<i>Location of the school:</i>	58%
<i>Discipline records in the school:</i>	41%
<i>Ethical values:</i>	23%
<i>Prestige of the school:</i>	19%
<i>Grounding of pupils in a faith tradition:</i>	5%
<i>Transmission of belief about God:</i>	3%
<i>Something else:</i>	5%
<i>Don't know:</i>	9%

[Link to source](#)

YouGov survey for the Jewish Chronicle

(April 2014)

According to a YouGov poll conducted for the Jewish Chronicle in April 2014, two thirds of respondents (67%) felt that state-funded faith schools should not be permitted to teach creationism, and the overwhelming majority (82%) felt that state-funded faith schools should not be allowed to refrain from any form of sex education in lessons (only 9% said that they should be permitted to do so).

Some faith schools wish to adapt their curriculum so that pupils are taught in accordance with the school's religious outlook. Thinking about those faith schools within the state

system and funded through taxation, do you think they should have the freedom to do the following or treat this issue like most other state secondary schools?

Teach “creationism” – that the world was created in broadly its present form by God – as a legitimate scientific theory, on a par with the theory of evolution.

<i>Yes, they should have the freedom to do this:</i>	<i>18%</i>
<i>No, they should treat this issue like most other state schools:</i>	<i>67%</i>
<i>Not sure:</i>	<i>15%</i>

Refrain from any form of sex education in school lessons.

<i>Yes, they should have the freedom to do this:</i>	<i>9%</i>
<i>No, they should treat this issue like most other state schools:</i>	<i>82%</i>
<i>Not sure:</i>	<i>8%</i>

[Link to source](#)

Opinium Research Results

(June 2014).

A poll conducted by Opinium in June 2014 found that a majority of respondents (58%) were opposed to faith schools being funded by the state (with 23% of respondents holding the view that faith schools should be banned entirely). Of those who did not support state funding for faith schools, a clear majority (70%) said that they did not think that the taxpayer should be funding religion, and 60% said that faith schools promoted division and segregation.

Q.1. Which, if any, of the following statements would you say best describes your view of ‘faith schools’

<i>I have no objection to faith schools existing but they should not be funded by the state (i.e. private schools may be faith schools but not state schools):</i>	<i>35%</i>
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<i>Faith schools should be banned entirely:</i>	23%
<i>I have no objection to faith schools existing and being funded by the state:</i>	30%
<i>Don't know:</i>	12%

Q.2. You said that you objected to faith schools being funded by the state or existing entirely. Why is this?

<i>The taxpayer should not be funding religion:</i>	70%
<i>They promote division and segregation:</i>	60%
<i>They are contrary to the promotion of a multicultural society:</i>	41%
<i>They promote radicalisation/extremism around faith:</i>	41%
<i>Other reason:</i>	5%
<i>Don't know:</i>	1%

[Link to source](#)

Religion and attitudes towards faith schools

B. Clements (28 September 2014), British Religion in Numbers.

This post on the website British Religion in Numbers (BRIN) examines a range of social survey data, drawn from British Social Attitudes (BSA), that have been conducted to ascertain the extent to which faith schools have public support, and to see whether the perceptions of the general public match the claims that have been made by those campaigning on either side of the faith schools debate.

BSA figures from 1989 found that support for faith schools was low. In response to a question on whether they would prefer to send their child to a religious school of their own faith or a mixed religious school, a single religious school was the preferred option for 32.7% of Catholics, 13.7% of Anglicans, 15.7% of 'other Christian' denominations and 10.2% of people with 'no religion' (these figures were higher for respondents who frequently attended a place of worship: here the figures rose to 44.7% of Catholics, 15.9% of Anglicans and 22.3% of other Christian denominations). In contrast, mixed religious schools were the preferred option for

48.9% of Catholics, 67.4% of Anglicans, 66% of other Christians and 69.9% of people with no religion (the respective figures of those expressing ‘no preference’ were 17.1%, 17.7%, 17.4% and 18.7%).

Comparing questions from 2003 and 2007 British Social Attitudes questions on faith schools shows a decline in support (figures show the proportion of respondents who ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ with the statement).

Government should fund non-Christian faith schools (2003/2007)

	2003	2007
<i>Anglican</i>	38.3%	32.9%
<i>Catholic</i>	56.1%	49%
<i>Other Christian</i>	43.1%	35.2%
<i>Other Religion</i>	66.8%	65.9%
<i>No Religion</i>	41.3%	35.8%

Government should fund single religion schools

	2003	2007
<i>Anglican</i>	28.2%	24.8%
<i>Catholic</i>	51.1%	38.7%
<i>Other Christian</i>	32.4%	21.8%
<i>Other Religion</i>	46.1%	36.3%
<i>No Religion</i>	16%	13.8%

Single religion schools have a better quality of education (2003 / 2007)

	2003	2007
<i>Anglican</i>	23.5%	21.6%
<i>Catholic</i>	40.5%	35.7%
<i>Other Christian</i>	21.2%	22.4%
<i>Other Religion</i>	28.3%	30.8%
<i>No Religion</i>	12.5%	12.6%

Single religion schools give children a better sense of right and wrong (2003/2007)

	2003	2007
<i>Anglican</i>	29.8%	28.9%
<i>Catholic</i>	46.6%	39%
<i>Other Christian</i>	32.0%	25.9%
<i>Other Religion</i>	34.1%	29.9%
<i>No Religion</i>	13.4%	11.9%

[I] support schools that are linked to a particular religious denomination (2007 only)

<i>Anglican</i>	33.3%
<i>Catholic</i>	58.4%
<i>Other Christian</i>	31.2%
<i>Other Religion</i>	34.5%
<i>No Religion</i>	21.2%

These figures show that Catholics and members of non-Christian religions are more supportive of government funding for faith schools (again, these figures are higher for more frequent attenders and for respondents expressing a higher degree of religiosity). As Clements writes: ‘The general pattern is for those who express a greater degree of religiousness to be more supportive of government funding of faith schools and to have more positive appraisals of what they offer pupils compared to other schools’. The lowest levels of support come from people with ‘no religion’. The data also show that fewer than half of respondents in all religious groups agree that faith schools provide a better quality of education than non-faith schools, and nor do they support the view that faith schools provide a better sense of right and wrong.

BSA data from 2008, for the question:

Some schools are for children of a particular religion. Which of the statements on this card comes closest to your views about these schools[?]

No religious group should have its own schools

<i>Anglican</i>	36.3%
<i>Catholic</i>	21.6%
<i>Other Christian</i>	37.9%
<i>Other Religion</i>	44.4%
<i>No Religion</i>	48.3%

Some religious groups but not others should have their own schools

<i>Anglican</i>	16.5%
<i>Catholic</i>	13.9%
<i>Other Christian</i>	14.1%
<i>Other Religion</i>	5.7%
<i>No Religion</i>	12.8%

Any religious group should be able to have its own schools

<i>Anglican</i>	44.6%
<i>Catholic</i>	63.6%
<i>Other Christian</i>	44.1%
<i>Other Religion</i>	48.8%
<i>No Religion</i>	36.8%

[Link to source](#)

Muslim Poll

ComRes (February 2015)

According to a poll of Muslims taken by ComRes for the BBC, most respondents would not want to send their child to a state Muslim school.

Table 25 Q.3. Do you agree or disagree with these statements about life in Britain ...?

I would like my children to go to a Muslim state school if I had the choice

Agree: 31%

Disagree: 66%

Don't Know: 3%

[Link to source](#)

Schools', OnePoll for ITV

(March-April 2015).

A poll conducted for ITV by OnePoll found high levels of resistance from parents (of around two thirds) to the idea of practising a religion they didn't believe in or having their child baptised in order to gain entry to a better school.

2. Would you be willing to practise a religion you don't believe in to get your child into a good school?

Yes and I have done this: 12.6%

Yes and I would do this if I had to: 23.7%

No: 63.7%

4. Would you/have you had your child baptised just so they are eligible to go to a better school?

Yes and I have done this: 11.1%

Yes and I would do this if I had to: 23%

No: 65.9%

[Link to source](#)

C4 / Juniper survey

ICM (*April/May 2015*).

A poll of Muslims for Channel 4 News found divided opinions on issues of integration and schooling. Half of respondents said that they wanted to be fully integrated with non-Muslims in all aspects of life, while 45% also said that they wanted to send their child to a school with ‘strong Muslim values’.

Table 31 Q.10. If you had the choice, which one of the following would you consider to be the ideal way for you to lead your life in Britain today?

I would like to fully integrate with non-Muslims in all aspects of life: 49%

I would like to integrate on most things, but there should be separation in some areas, such as Islamic schooling and laws: 29%

I would like to integrate on some things, but I would prefer to lead a separate Islamic life as far as possible: 17%

I would like to live in a fully separate Islamic area in Britain, subject to Sharia Law and government: 1%

Table 32 Q.11. I would now like you to imagine that you are preparing to send your children to school. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

I would prefer to send my child to a school with strong Muslim values:

Strongly agree: 21%

Tend to agree: 24%

Neither/nor: 26%

Tend to disagree: 14%

Strongly disagree: 13%

Don't know: 2%

[Link to source](#)

YouGov / Ideate Research Ltd

(September 2015).

A poll conducted by YouGov and Ideate Research in September 2015 found wide variations in people's attitudes towards faith schools depending on the religion of the school. Although a majority of respondents (76%) believed that Christian faith schools should be permitted (with just 16% saying they should not be allowed), the figure for Jewish schools fell to 60% (with 28% saying they should not be allowed) and for Muslim schools the figure fell to 46% (with 44% saying that they should not be allowed).

Do you think faith schools associated with the following religion should or should not be allowed in the UK? (Please select the option that best applies)

Christianity

<i>I think they should be allowed in the UK and receive state funding:</i>	<i>44%</i>
<i>I think they should be allowed in the UK but not receive state funding:</i>	<i>32%</i>
<i>I think they should not be allowed in the UK:</i>	<i>16%</i>

Islam

<i>I think they should be allowed in the UK and receive state funding:</i>	<i>12%</i>
<i>I think they should be allowed in the UK but not receive state funding:</i>	<i>34%</i>
<i>I think they should not be allowed in the UK:</i>	<i>44%</i>

Judaism

<i>I think they should be allowed in the UK and receive state funding:</i>	16%
<i>I think they should be allowed in the UK but not receive state funding:</i>	44%
<i>I think they should not be allowed in the UK:</i>	28%

[Link to source](#)

Young People's Voices

Integrated Education Fund (September 2015).

In a two year project the Integrated Education Fund involved more than 2,000 people aged 16-24 through opinion polls, focus groups, political hustings and round-table discussions. These examined young people's feelings about education and social cohesion in Northern Ireland. Independent polling company LucidTalk was commissioned by the IEF to carry out an attitudinal survey of people in Northern Ireland aged between 16 and 24, during the spring of 2014.

How would you rate the following statement: 'An education system where children of all faiths and none go to the same schools would be an important step in combating sectarianism in Northern Ireland'?

<i>Strongly Agree</i>	45.4%
<i>Agree</i>	38.3%
<i>No Opinion</i>	8.6%
<i>Disagree</i>	7.3%
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	0.3%

Would you have liked your school experience to have included more pupils from different traditions and backgrounds?

<i>Yes</i>	66.6%
<i>No Opinion</i>	21.1%
<i>No</i>	12.4%

The same report looked at the summer 2014 survey from the Northern Ireland Social and Political Archive's Access, Research, Knowledge project, undertaken by a sample of 1,034 16 year olds in NI. They found that:

The majority (59%) would choose a mixed religion school, more than twice the number (26%) who would choose a school with pupils of a single religious background.

[Link to source.](#)

The Challenge

YouGov (November 2015).

This survey from YouGov finds that a clear majority of respondents (64%) agreed that school children ought to participate in activities with children from different faiths. This is a problematic finding for supporters of faith schools, given the extent to which those schools promote homogeneity of faith in their educational cohorts.

For the following question, by "school child", we mean children aged 16 or under in full-time education and by "group activities", we mean activities such as sport, theatre, outdoor learning experiences etc.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? "Every school child should participate in group activities with children from different faith/ethnic backgrounds to their own, either in school and/ or in their local community."

<i>Strongly agree:</i>	26%
<i>Tend to agree:</i>	38%
<i>Neither agree nor disagree:</i>	21%
<i>Tend to disagree:</i>	7%
<i>Strongly disagree:</i>	4%
<i>Don't know:</i>	4%

[Link to source](#)

Fear & HOPE 2016

R. Ford and N. Lowles (2016), Hope Not Hate.

This report draws on survey data from Populus and examines a range of attitudes and identity issues in England. On the subject of faith schools, the report found that a majority of people from all ethnic groups favoured close monitoring of faith schools in the context of promoting British values.

[i] support close monitoring of faith schools, including Muslim faith schools

Agree: 70%

Oppose: 7%

Support

Muslim: 50%

BAME: 61%

White: 71%

[Link to source](#)

Faith Schools Survey

Populus/Accord Coalition, October 2016

In October 2016 a poll conducted by Populus and the Accord Coalition found that a large majority of respondents (74%) did not believe that state-funded faith schools ought to be allowed to select or discriminate against prospective students on religious grounds in their admissions policy. Clear majorities rejecting religious selection were also found in every single religious category contained in the sample.

Table 2 Q.2. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? ‘State funded schools, including state funded faith schools, should not be allowed to select or discriminate against prospective pupils on religious grounds in their admissions policy.’

Strongly agree: 47%

Slightly agree: 26%

Slightly disagree: 9%

Strongly disagree: 6%

Don’t know: 13%

By religion (NET agree / disagree)

Church of England, Anglican, Episcopal: 69% / 17%

Roman Catholic: 63% / 27%

Methodist: 62% / 21%

Christian (other): 69% / 23%

Muslim: 82% / 5%

Hindu 82% / 0%

Jewish: 58% / 20%

Sikh: 74% / 26%

Buddhist: 79% / 9%

None: 76% / 11%

[Link to source](#)

What Muslims Want

A survey of British Muslims by ICM on behalf of Policy Exchange (December 2016).

This survey follows an earlier ICM survey of Muslim opinion in 2015 and provides a more extensive and updated exploration of Muslim views. As with the previous survey, the results show divided views on educational issues. The survey finds that most (53%) Muslims want to

fully integrate with non-Muslims in all aspects of life, but also shows that 52% would prefer to send their child to a school with strong Muslim values. At the same time, just 26% of respondents claim that people should receive their faith education from schools.

Table 2.4 Q.15. *If you had the choice, which one of the following would you consider to be the ideal way for you to lead your life in Britain today?*

I would like to fully integrate with non-Muslims in all aspects of life: 53%

I would like to integrate on most things, but there should be separation in some areas, such as Islamic schooling and laws: 37%

I would like to integrate on some things, but I would prefer to lead a separate Islamic life as far as possible: 6%

I would like to live in a fully separate Islamic area in Britain, subject to Sharia Law and government: 1%

Table 3.1 Summary: Q.20.

I would now like you to imagine that you are preparing to send your children to school. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

I would prefer to send my child to a school with strong Muslim values

Strongly agree: 16%

Tend to agree: 36%

Neither/nor: 23%

Tend to disagree: 15%

Strongly disagree: 6%

Don't know: 4%

Table 3.9 Q.21. *If you had to choose, should children receive their faith education in their own homes or other people's houses, in schools or in mosques?*

<i>Homes:</i>	24%
<i>Schools:</i>	26%
<i>Mosques:</i>	48%
<i>Don't know:</i>	3%

[Link to source](#)

Unsettled Belonging: A survey of Britain's Muslim communities

M. Frampton, D. Goodhart and K. Mahmood MP (2016), Policy Exchange.

This report claims to present 'the most extensive survey to-date of British Muslim opinion'. It finds that a large majority of British Muslims (69%) favour a secular education, which adheres to a shared national curriculum. Just 26% hold the view that a faith education should come from the classroom.

The study found that Muslims expressed higher support for religious-based clothing and gender segregation within state education, and that 53% would prefer to send their children to a school with strong 'Muslim values'. This compared to just 20% of the non-Muslim control group who expressed a preference for sending their children to a school with 'strong religious values' (with which 47% disagreed). At the same time, however, the report also found that Muslim values were thought to be entirely compatible with 'secular' (non-faith-based) education. The report notes that: 'This came through very strongly in the focus groups. Time and again, when asked about education, the priority for our respondents was quality of education, rather than any demand that it be specifically-Islamic'. The study also found that just 26% of British Muslims believed that faith should be taught inside the classroom (48% felt that children should learn Islam in the mosque, and 24% felt that this was something that should take place at home). The report concluded that: 'British Muslims retain an essentially "secular" outlook on the subject of education and this is likely related to views about the purpose of that education'.

[Link to report](#)

Religious Schools Survey

Populus (May 2017).

According to a survey by Populus in May 2017, the vast majority of respondents (80%) favoured the imposition of a cap on the number of places that could be given to pupils belonging to the religion of the school, and leaving 50% of places for children of other faiths or no faith. The view that faith schools should be able to allocate all their places to children of the same faith as the school was most popular among Jewish and Muslim respondents (with 55% and 43% agreeing respectively).

Q.1. There is currently debate about new state funded faith schools showing preference for, or discriminating against, prospective pupils on faith grounds and the religious background of children. Since 2010 nearly all new state funded schools in England have been permitted to select up to half their pupils on the basis of religion, but no more than 50%. The other places must be left open to children whose parents choose to apply, regardless of what beliefs they have or do not have. Some support this approach, such as to help ensure schools admit a more mixed group of pupils, whereas others think such schools should be able to concentrate on children of the same faith. Thinking about new state funded faith schools showing preference for, or discriminating against, prospective pupils on religious grounds, which of these comes closest to your view?

New state funded faith schools should be allowed to religiously select up to a maximum of 50% of pupils on the basis of faith: 80%

New state funded faith schools should be allowed to select up to 100% of their pupils on the basis of faith: 20%

[Of those selecting the 100% option] 'Which of the following religious groups do you consider yourself to be a member of?'

Christian – Church of England/Anglican/Episcopalian: 21%

Christian – Roman Catholic: 23%

<i>Christian – Methodist:</i>	16%
<i>Christian – Other denomination:</i>	22%
<i>Muslim:</i>	43%
<i>Hindu:</i>	19%
<i>Jewish:</i>	55%
<i>Sikh:</i>	28%
<i>Buddhist:</i>	29%
<i>Other:</i>	14%
<i>None:</i>	15%

[Link to source](#)

YouGov / Times Survey Results

(December 2017).

A poll carried out by YouGov and the *Times* in December 2017 found that most respondents (46% to 29%) did not believe that the government should provide funding for faith schools.

State-supported ‘faith schools’ make up around a third of schools in Britain. Most are church schools (e.g. Church of England, Roman Catholic) and the rest (around 1%) are non-Christian (e.g. Jewish, Muslim, Hindu). Do you think the Government should or should not provide funding for faith schools?

<i>Should:</i>	29%
<i>Should not:</i>	46%
<i>Don’t Know:</i>	25%

[Link to source](#)

Education in NI, Opinion tracker poll

Lucid Talk (February 2018).

A poll commissioned by the Integrated Education Fund reiterated the strong public support for integrated education, as opposed to schools largely divided along religious grounds.

QUESTION 4: If your child/ren's school, (or if you're not a parent your local school), was to propose becoming an officially integrated school, would you support this proposal?

<i>Yes</i>	<i>67.2%</i>
<i>No</i>	<i>20.3%</i>
<i>Don't know/Not Sure</i>	<i>12.4%</i>

QUESTION 9: Taking into account that there are more than 50,000 empty school places in NI, would you support cross-community mergers of schools to rationalise the education system and to save money in Northern Ireland?

<i>Yes</i>	<i>78.2%</i>
<i>No</i>	<i>12.7%</i>
<i>Don't know/Not Sure</i>	<i>9.1%</i>

A summary of the poll is available. [Click here for access.](#)

YouGov survey results

(March 2018).

In March 2018 a survey conducted by YouGov found that most people in the UK were opposed to parents attending church with the intention of getting their child into a religiously affiliated school.

Do you think is it acceptable or unacceptable for parents to attend Church specifically to get their child into an affiliated school?

<i>Acceptable:</i>	22%
<i>Unacceptable:</i>	56%
<i>Don't know:</i>	22%

[Link to source](#)

British public opposes religious influence in education, poll finds
Censuswide/National Secular Society (11 June 2018).

A Censuswide poll commissioned by the National Secular Society found that the overwhelming majority of respondents were opposed to the idea of religious selection and inclusive religious education in schools. Just 17% agreed with the statement that: ‘Publicly funded schools should be able to select pupils on the grounds of their religious beliefs’. Just 29% agreed that faith schools should be able to select on the same basis. Just 14% of respondents disagreed with the statement: ‘State-funded faith schools should be obligated to teach RE in a way that is inclusive of all religious and non-religious belief systems’.

[Link to source](#)

Belfast: A city still divided two decades after the Good Friday Agreement
Sky Data (April 2019).

A poll commissioned by Sky News, to mark twenty years of the Belfast Agreement, found that 69% of respondents support integrated education, as opposed to schools largely divided along religious grounds.

A summary of the poll is available. [Click here for access.](#)

Teachers are losing their religion – part two

Teacher Tapp (August 2019).

Teacher Tapp is a daily research app used by thousands of teachers working in English schools. A majority of teachers (59%) support an end to new faith schools or ending state funding of existing faith schools (51%). There was a significant variation between religious and non-religious teachers:

Teachers who would like to see no new faith schools open, by their own religious status:

<i>Total</i>	<i>59% Agree</i>	<i>41% Disagree</i>
<i>Active religious</i>	<i>27% Agree</i>	<i>73% Disagree</i>
<i>Less active religious</i>	<i>43% Agree</i>	<i>57% Disagree</i>
<i>Not religious</i>	<i>73% Agree</i>	<i>27% Disagree</i>

Teachers who would like to see an end to state funding of faith schools, by their own religious status:

<i>Total</i>	<i>51% Agree</i>	<i>49% Disagree</i>
<i>Active religious</i>	<i>12% Agree</i>	<i>88% Disagree</i>
<i>Less active religious</i>	<i>29% Agree</i>	<i>71% Disagree</i>
<i>Not religious</i>	<i>69% Agree</i>	<i>31% Disagree</i>

As in many other surveys, opposition to religious selection or discrimination in faith school admissions ran ahead of generalised opposition to faith schools. All groups were more likely to oppose religious selection, however there was significant variation by the teachers' personal religiosity and the type of school they worked at.

Proportion of teachers who think state schools should be allowed to select on religion, by their own religious status:

<i>Total</i>	<i>18% Agree</i>	<i>70%</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>12% Not sure</i>
<i>Active religious</i>	<i>36% Agree</i>	<i>43%</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>21% Not sure</i>
<i>Less active religious</i>	<i>20% Agree</i>	<i>59%</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>21% Not sure</i>
<i>Not religious</i>	<i>4% Agree</i>	<i>81%</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>15% Not sure</i>

Proportion of teachers who think state schools should be allowed to select on religion, by their school type:

<i>Anglican</i>	<i>15% Agree</i>	<i>66% Disagree</i>	<i>19% Not sure</i>
<i>Catholic</i>	<i>36% Agree</i>	<i>41% Disagree</i>	<i>23% Not sure</i>
<i>Non-religious</i>	<i>10% Agree</i>	<i>75% Disagree</i>	<i>15% Not sure</i>

Some faith school supporters argue that organising a school around religion creates a space where teachers and pupils, regardless of their own religion or belief, feel more able to discuss such issues. However, the research shows that more teachers feel more comfortable discussing religion in non-faith schools.

Religious and non-religious teachers in non-faith schools in England both feel comfortable discussing religion (76% of both groups agree that they are comfortable). Figures diverge in faith schools, where 69% of non-religious and 85% of religious teachers feel comfortable discussing religion.

Indeed, a majority of all teachers would rather teach in a non-faith school, though there is significant variation among teachers who are personally religious and between school types:

75% of non-religious teachers in non-faith schools in England would prefer not to teach in a faith school.

Of non-religious teachers in faith schools 46% would prefer working in a non-faith school.

Among religious teachers 23% in non-faith schools prefer working in a non-faith school.

A summary of the poll is available. [Click here for access.](#)

For comments, corrections and additions please contact

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