

challenging religious privilege

03 June 2015

Nick Gibb MP  
Minister of State for Schools  
Sanctuary Buildings  
20 Great Smith Street  
London SW1P 3BT

Cc Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP

Dear Mr Gibb

### **New measures to turn around failing schools**

We are keen to find out what mechanisms will in place to ensure that non-faith schools will not acquire a religious designation or faith ethos when struggling local authority schools in England are converted into academies.

We are particularly concerned about plans to scrap the requirement for academy sponsors to consult with school communities, including parents. We hope you will share our view that parents have the right expect an education that doesn't run counter to their beliefs.

Given England's religiously diverse population – around half of whom self-identify as non-religious (by-far the single largest group), any increase in the proportion of religiously designated or faith ethos schools is likely to seriously impede parents' ability to secure such an education.

As I'm sure you will be aware, this is already becoming a problem with parents being allocated places at faith-based free schools in numerous part of the country against their wishes.

Forcing a faith-based education on young people, regardless of their or their parents' wishes would be at odds with principles of fairness and equality. Respecting young people's right to religious freedom is part of, and not separate from, looking after their best interests.

The academisation of local authority controlled schools would also increase the risk of faith-based organisations gaining greater control over school curriculums, admissions arrangements and employment practices – leading to even greater discrimination in our education system than already exists.

We therefore look forward to receiving assurances that upon conversion, no non-religiously designated school would be permitted to acquire a religious designation or faith ethos.

Yours sincerely,  
Stephen Evans  
Campaigns Manager

national  
secular  
society

25 Red Lion Square  
London WC1R 4RL

TEL: 020 7404 3126

FAX: 0870 762 8971

EMAIL: [enquiries@secularism.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@secularism.org.uk)

WEB: [www.secularism.org.uk](http://www.secularism.org.uk)