

# Submission to DfE 'Schools that work for everyone' consultation

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## ABOUT THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

1. This submission is made by the National Secular Society (NSS). The NSS is a not-for-profit organisation founded in 1866, funded by its members and by donations. It campaigns for an open society where all are free to practise their faith, change it, or to have no faith at all. The NSS advocates separation of religion and state and promotes secularism as the best means of creating a society in which people of all religions or none can live together fairly and cohesively.

Our response will focus on the proposed changes to faith-based admissions and new faith-based academies.

## SUMMARY

2. We are alarmed that a Government ostensibly seeking to "promote inclusivity and community cohesion" plans to facilitate the opening of a new wave of faith schools by allowing such schools to select all of their pupil intake on the basis of faith.
3. Religious selection in schools is discriminatory, entrenches religious segregation in wider society, and often leads to ethnic and socio-economic segregation too.
4. In a society as diverse as ours, rather than facilitating segregation along religious lines, we urge the Government to do everything it can to ensure that children of all faiths and

none are educated together in inclusive schools. Government policy should seek to break down barriers, not erect them.

5. Schools can play a pivotal role in fostering social cohesion. Inclusive schools break down barriers and mistrust, and promote genuine understanding between children (and parents) from different backgrounds. Instead these proposals needlessly foster sectarianism. We reject the Government's assertion that these proposals will "promote inclusivity". Facilitating a new generation of 100% religiously selective schools is, by definition, inimical to this aim.
6. A proliferation of faith schools will impede the integration of religious minorities, damage social cohesion, increase levels of discrimination in state funded schools, undermine children and young people's religious freedoms and further undermine the ability of many parents to find a suitable school for their children.

#### QUESTION 1: ARE THESE THE RIGHT ALTERNATIVE REQUIREMENTS TO REPLACE THE 50% RULE?

7. No. The 50% rule is the only meaningful effort to promote diversity and address the problems caused by faith-based schooling. The limitation on places allocated on the basis of faith sends out the important message that state funded schools should be shared spaces, open and inclusive of children of all faith and belief backgrounds.
8. With regard to promoting inclusion and community cohesion in minority faith schools, we do recognise the ineffectiveness of the 50% faith-based admissions cap. This is due to the inherent divisiveness of organising children and young people's education around religious identities. The proposed "strengthened safeguards" to replace the 50% cap will do little, if anything, to promote inclusivity.
9. There is however evidence to suggest that the cap has had a positive impact on promoting ethnic diversity in Christian schools, with the cap making a significant contribution to the integration of Asian pupils in Christian schools.<sup>1</sup>
10. In our view, religious discrimination in the provision of education is an outmoded and undesirable practice that should be eliminated. Allowing more fully religiously selective

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<sup>1</sup> <https://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016-09-15-FINAL-Ethnic-diversity-in-religious-Free-Schools.pdf>

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schools will inevitably increase already unacceptable levels of discrimination in our schools. The greater the proportion of school places allocated on a discriminatory basis, the greater the discrimination against those pupils not of the religion of these schools, including the majority who are not religious. A more enlightened change that would increase cohesion, a stated objective of the Government, would be to reduce the 50% cap to zero, perhaps on a phased basis, rather than remove it.

11. Professor Ted Cantle, widely regarded as the UK's leading authority on community cohesion and intercultural relations, has described the 50% cap as "the only measure of any substance, really in the history of the modern education system that has directly sought to address the segregation that has been and continues to be caused by religious selection in schools".
12. We note the, admittedly guarded, references to the argument advanced by the Catholic Education Service that opening a Catholic school which cannot choose to admit children on a purely faith based basis would be a breach of canon law. This is disputed by canon law scholars and by the fact that Catholic schools operate in many countries without religious discrimination in admissions. We hope that the Government has not been influenced by this questionable justification.
13. If the Government wants the Catholic Church to assist with creation of new school places in the state sector, there is no reason why it should be wholly on its terms. The Government should consider making religious involvement in the provision of publicly funded education conditional on the schools religious groups run being non-discriminatory.
14. It is also worth noting that the wish to discriminate without limit is not universally shared amongst faith communities. Lobbying from the Catholic Education Service and the Chief Rabbi for the cap to be removed prompted a group of 68 Rabbis to publish an open letter to the Secretary of State calling on the Government not to remove the cap<sup>2</sup>. As Linda Woodhead, Professor of Sociology of Religion at Lancaster, has argued, the

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<sup>2</sup> <http://accordcoalition.org.uk/2016/07/21/progressive-rabbis-defend-religious-discrimination-cap/>

Government's changes to faith schools side with hard-line religion whilst undermining the religious centre ground.<sup>3</sup>

15. Religious selection. A wealth of evidence suggests that faith-based selection leads to social selection which unfairly benefits middle class and better-off parents, and has the indirect result of disadvantaging community schools.<sup>4</sup>
16. New research from the Education Policy Institute shows that the intake of pupils in faith schools are not, on average, representative of their local areas or of the national picture<sup>5</sup>. This research clearly demonstrated that the demographics of pupils in faith schools are very different from those in non-faith schools.
17. Their analysis found that faith schools educate a lower proportion of disadvantaged children (12.1% eligible for free school meals at Key Stage 2 versus 18.0%; 12.6% at Key Stage 4 versus 14%). It also found that faith schools also educate a lower proportion of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) (16.8% at Key Stage 2 versus 19.7%; 14.4% at Key Stage 4 versus 16.6%); and that faith schools enrol a larger proportion of high attaining pupils (28.4% at Key Stage 2 versus 23.7%; 27.4% at Key Stage 4 versus 24.5%).
18. This is supported by previous research from the Institute for Public Policy which found that where schools apply religious selection criteria "they are ten times more likely to be highly unrepresentative of their surrounding area"<sup>6</sup> and research from the Runnymede Trust in their report into faith schools and community cohesion.<sup>7</sup> Research by SchoolDash this year also showed that after accounting for local social economic variances, faith schools (including CofE schools, albeit to a lesser extent) have an under representation of poorer pupils.<sup>8</sup>
19. In 2013 the Fair Admissions Campaign published a map of all state schools in England, which demonstrated that faith-based schools were socially selecting pupils that were less

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<sup>3</sup> <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/religionpublicsphere/2016/09/the-governments-changes-to-faith-schools-sides-with-hardline-religion/>

<sup>4</sup> [www.accordcoalition.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Databank-of-Independent-Evidence-on-Faith-Schools-April-2014.pdf](http://www.accordcoalition.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Databank-of-Independent-Evidence-on-Faith-Schools-April-2014.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [http://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Pupil\\_characteristics\\_and\\_performance\\_at\\_faith\\_schools.pdf](http://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Pupil_characteristics_and_performance_at_faith_schools.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> School Admissions Report: Fair Choice for Parents and Pupils', Institute for Public Policy Research, 2007

<sup>7</sup> Right to Divide? Faith Schools and Community Cohesion', Runnymede Trust, 2008,

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.schooldash.com/blog-1608.html#20160802>

likely than the local average to be on free school meals and that this trend was stronger in schools with higher levels of religious selection. In the same year a report found that parents of more affluent backgrounds were more than 80% more likely than average to fake religiosity in order to get into good selective faith schools<sup>9</sup>.

20. In 2016 the social mobility charity The Sutton Trust found that: "Church schools are shunning the poorest children as the middle classes tighten their grip on the best school places". Their '*Caught Out*' report found that religiously-selective schools were more likely to be highly socially selective – having at least 10% fewer pupils on free school meals compared to their local area, and that generally the higher the level of religious selection the more likely they were to be highly socially selective<sup>10</sup>.
21. The policy proposals set out by the Department for Education in *Schools that work for Everyone* have the stated aim of creating more "good school places" and the green paper claims faith schools "consistently achieve higher performance in exam results".
22. All the evidence suggests that a religious character is no magic formula when it comes to academic excellence. Faith schools' apparent academic success comes from their ability to select on the basis of faith, which can also act as a form of socio-economic selection. We have not seen any evidence suggesting this not to be correct.
23. The above Education Policy Institute research, which tested the green paper's premise that the majority of faith schools are high-performing, have good Ofsted ratings, and support increased social mobility, concluded that given that the average faith school admits fewer pupils from poor backgrounds than the average non faith school, there is a risk that increasing the numbers of faith schools would come at the price of increased social segregation, with a risk of lower social mobility.
24. It also found that pupils in faith schools seem to do "little or no better than in non-faith schools" once attainment and progress figures are adjusted for disadvantage<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.suttontrust.com/researcharchive/parent-power/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.suttontrust.com/researcharchive/caught-out/>

<sup>11</sup> [http://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Pupil\\_characteristics\\_and\\_performance\\_at\\_faith\\_schools.pdf](http://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Pupil_characteristics_and_performance_at_faith_schools.pdf)

25. This chimes with comments made in 2011 by Dr John Pritchard, formerly Bishop of Oxford and then Chair of the Church of England's Board of Education, who admitted that religious schools only outperform others due to their selection policies favouring better-off families. He even suggested that the Church should move towards a 10% cap on religious discrimination in admissions<sup>12</sup>.
26. By unnecessarily relaxing admissions rules to satisfy the demands of faith-based education providers, such as the Catholic Education Service, the Government risks recklessly neglecting the civic purpose of state education, which should include preparing children for their role as equal citizens of a multicultural, religiously diverse liberal democracy.
27. Although the moral argument against faith-based admissions stands on first principles (it is wrong for state to discriminate against people because of their religion or belief) there are also serious concerns about religiously selective schooling leading to religious (and ethnic) segregation. If we don't want Britain to be religiously and ethnically segregated, our schools shouldn't be.
28. In her review into opportunity and integration, Dame Louise Casey found that "segregation appears to be at its most acute in minority ethnic and minority faith communities and schools"<sup>13</sup>.
29. This was also the finding of a Demos report in 2015 which found many minority faith schools are effectively mono-ethnic<sup>14</sup>.
30. The Government's own consultation paper illustrates this point. It reveals that in minority faith schools (Islam, Judaism, Sikhism and Hinduism) the ethnic make-up is formed of pupils from predominantly similar ethnic (and very likely religious) backgrounds. Hindu (91% | 97%), Muslim (80% | 98%) and Sikh (89% | 98%) schools are disproportionately made up of pupils from Asian and BME backgrounds – (Asian% | BME%).

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<sup>12</sup> [www.tes.com/news/tes-archive/tes-publication/c-e-opens-school-gates-non-believers](http://www.tes.com/news/tes-archive/tes-publication/c-e-opens-school-gates-non-believers)

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/574565/The\\_Casey\\_Review.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/574565/The_Casey_Review.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> "some (minority) faith schools effectively exclude other ethnic groups"  
[www.integrationhub.net/module/education/#3-other-aspects-of-school-life](http://www.integrationhub.net/module/education/#3-other-aspects-of-school-life)

31. The Government must be mindful of the potential harm that faith schools can inflict upon society and the communities they are supposed to serve. In his speech in Birmingham on countering extremism, the former prime minister David Cameron said:
- "It cannot be right... that people can grow up and go to school and hardly ever come into meaningful contact with people from other backgrounds and faiths. That doesn't foster a sense of shared belonging and understanding – it can drive people apart."*
32. The Government's muddled thinking over faith schools is illustrated by its own guidance on "Promoting fundamental British values" in schools. DfE guidance calls it "unacceptable" for schools to "promote discrimination against people or groups on the basis of their belief, opinion or background". How then, at the same time, can the Government advocate for schools to be allowed to do just that with regard to their admissions arrangements?
33. Implementing policies that facilitate the separation of children based on the characteristic of religious belief impedes progress on promoting respect and tolerance for those of other religions and beliefs.
34. It is hypocritical of schools to teach "mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs" if, at the same time they discriminate against pupils with different faiths and beliefs in their admissions. You do not teach integration - you do it.
35. As well as segregating ethnic minorities in some schools, this harms social cohesion and reduces opportunities for intercultural education by removing them from mainstream community schools<sup>15</sup>.
36. Evidence suggests that more ethnically balanced and non-segregated classrooms promote greater inclusion of and tolerance to 'out groups'<sup>16</sup>. A 2014 survey of more than 10,000 13 to 17-year-olds found that "Providing opportunities to get to know other pupils with a range of faith values, is good preparation for later life, including going to

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<sup>15</sup> [www.accordcoalition.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Racial-discrimination-by-religiously-selective-faith-schools-a-worsening-problem.-FAC-Accord.-Dec-2015.pdf](http://www.accordcoalition.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Racial-discrimination-by-religiously-selective-faith-schools-a-worsening-problem.-FAC-Accord.-Dec-2015.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> [www.eprints.ioe.ac.uk/21124/](http://www.eprints.ioe.ac.uk/21124/) | [www.pnas.org/content/111/11/3996](http://www.pnas.org/content/111/11/3996)

university. Mixing at school or college also encourages an interest in diversity and helps to reduce prejudice".<sup>17</sup>

37. Although some Christian faith schools (particularly Catholic schools) are more ethnically diverse than the national average, this masks that they tend to be less religiously diverse than (and more likely to exclude poor and ethnic minority pupils from) their local areas.
38. In 2013, research revealed that religiously selective Church of England schools admitted far fewer children from 'Asian' backgrounds than their local areas would have suggested. In Catholic schools (all of which are religiously selective) one in eight had no children from 'Asian' backgrounds at all. Whilst religiously selective schools make up 16% of the education system in England, they make up 59% of the 100 worst performing schools in terms of inclusion of children who don't speak English as their first language<sup>18</sup>.
39. While not all faith schools directly discriminate in admissions, it is sometimes argued that if faith schools are not permitted to apply 100% religious selection that they would, "lose their distinctive character" and popularity with some parents<sup>19</sup>. However, analysis of Church groups' own assessment of how 'their' schools promote their religious ethos shows that many faith schools with little or even no religious discrimination in admissions are regularly judged to be satisfactory, even outstanding in this regard<sup>20</sup>.
40. While religious discrimination has long been part of the UK school system, it is worth noting that this is very unusual internationally. The UK is one of only 4 OECD countries (along with the Republic of Ireland, Estonia and Israel) to allow state schools to discriminate on religion in admissions<sup>21</sup>.
41. Removal of the cap may have a number of additional negative consequences. If faith schools are given greater freedoms to turn their schools into exclusively religious communities, as will happen under these proposals, this may well lead to them

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2014/02/study-reveals-teens-views-on-faith-and-religious-education>

<sup>18</sup> [www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2016/09/09/religious-selection-in-school-admissions-is-utterly-deleterious/](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2016/09/09/religious-selection-in-school-admissions-is-utterly-deleterious/)

<sup>19</sup> [www.secularism.org.uk/news/2014/05/mps-call-for-catholic-schools-to-be-given-greater-freedoms-to-discriminate-in-admissions](http://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2014/05/mps-call-for-catholic-schools-to-be-given-greater-freedoms-to-discriminate-in-admissions)

<sup>20</sup> [www.corablivingwithdifference.files.wordpress.com/2015/12/living-with-difference-community-diversity-and-the-common-good.pdf](http://www.corablivingwithdifference.files.wordpress.com/2015/12/living-with-difference-community-diversity-and-the-common-good.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> [www.oecd-](http://www.oecd-)

[ilibrary.org/docserver/download/5k9fq23507vc.pdf?expires=1474627313&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=74AD70A09E900B6AA8710E7CC3908352#page=15](http://ilibrary.org/docserver/download/5k9fq23507vc.pdf?expires=1474627313&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=74AD70A09E900B6AA8710E7CC3908352#page=15)



promoting a more aggressive or 'robust' religious ethos, undermining parental rights and children and young people's religious freedoms.

42. We do acknowledge that the cap has not prevented minority faith schools from being religiously and ethnically segregated. However, removing the 50% cap will do nothing to address this issue. Neither will the other ineffective and tokenistic measures suggested in the consultation paper. We will consider each proposal in turn.

**PROPOSED RECOMMENDATION: REQUIRING FAITH SCHOOLS TO PROVE THAT THERE IS DEMAND FOR SCHOOL PLACES FROM PARENTS OF OTHER FAITHS**

43. This is not a new proposal. Under the **existing arrangements** for opening schools, *all* free schools, including those with a designated faith or faith ethos, are required to demonstrate how they will be "attractive to parents and pupils from outside your faith community".
44. This requirement to be inclusive is, according to the DfE, already "tested rigorously at every stage of assessment and 'pre-opening' as well as after schools open". However, even under these strict conditions we have a situation whereby minority faith schools are highly segregated mono-religious environments where pupils have no meaningful contact with people of different backgrounds and faiths.
45. It is therefore not, as the consultation paper argues, the effectiveness of the 50% faith-based admissions cap that is questionable with regard to promoting inclusion and community cohesion – it is the religious ethos itself, particularly with regard to minority faith schools, that deters parents of other faiths or none from applying to these schools.
46. Given that this measure is already supposed to be in place, we are highly sceptical as to whether it will be enforced in the future.
47. With regard to the more popular Christian schools, it is difficult to see how requiring schools to demonstrate that families of other religions/beliefs would want to access the school can possibly be consistent with allowing the school to exclude those same families. There is something questionable about school demonstrating demand from

local parents of other faith and belief outlooks, only to then exclude the children of those parents on the basis of their beliefs.

48. It is also important not to conflate support for a good new local school with explicit support for a specifically faith-based one. Generally speaking, the vast majority of parents want a good local school, rather than one with a religious ethos, as shown in the survey below.
49. Due to their selective admissions arrangements, some church schools have gained a reputation for being 'high-performing'. Parents indicating support for a church school are likely to be indicating their desire for a school with good academic standards rather than a school that seeks to transmit a particular religious ethos.
50. In 2013 YouGov asked more than 4,000 adults what factors would influence their school choice. "Academic standards" and "Location of the school" (77% and 58%) came top. Meanwhile "Grounding of pupils in a faith tradition" and "Transmission of belief about God" (5% and 3%) came last<sup>22</sup>.
51. In practice, this proposal may primarily affect minority faith schools - for which there is little demand from parents of other faiths, or of not faith, who make up the majority of parents.
52. The National Secular Society has often been asked to assist parents allocated undersubscribed minority faith schools by their local authority (normally due to already insufficient places in community schools) against their wishes.
53. The consultation paper talks about increasing choice for parents. In our experience, the proliferation of faith schools limits choice for the increasing proportion of parents, already a majority, who do not profess a faith and do want a faith-based education for their children. In this way an increase in faith schools would limit choice and usurp parental rights. In some parts of the country a lack of diversity of provision and a shortage of places means parents are left with little other option than a faith school. Whilst parents' religious and philosophical convictions should be respected in the

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<sup>22</sup> [www.d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus\\_uploads/document/4n6d3tnayp/YG-Archive-University-of-Lancaster-Faith-Matters-Debate-results-180613-faith-schools.pdf](http://www.d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/4n6d3tnayp/YG-Archive-University-of-Lancaster-Faith-Matters-Debate-results-180613-faith-schools.pdf)

education provision that the state offers, this is far from always being the case. For all the above reasons, increasing faith-based education is therefore unreasonable, discriminatory and divisive and should be resisted.

54. The bottom line is that schools with a religious character will have inherent difficulties in being "inclusive" and appealing to parents who don't share the faith of the school.

PROPOSED RECOMMENDATION: ESTABLISH TWINNING ARRANGEMENTS WITH OTHER SCHOOLS NOT OF THEIR FAITH.

55. There simply is no substitute for ongoing real world interactions between pupils in integrated schools in the same school for every school day. Drawing on the large body of research into the social psychology of prejudice, a study on social cohesion, diversity and education policy by Professor Irene Bruegel of South Bank University concluded that "day-to-day contact between children who can more easily see each other as equals has far more chance of breaking down barriers between communities, than school twinning and sporting encounters". There is therefore a danger that such schemes might be counter-productive and encourage pupils to see each other as members of separate (religiously defined) groups.<sup>23</sup>

56. Ultimately, we believe this proposal also to be tokenistic and that it will have no significant impact.

PROPOSED RECOMMENDATION: CONSIDER SETTING UP MIXED-FAITH MULTI-ACADEMY TRUSTS, INCLUDING BECOMING A SPONSOR FOR UNDERPERFORMING NON-FAITH SCHOOLS.

57. This is a multi-faith answer to a problem requiring a secular solution. We consider this to be an impotent proposal that will do nothing to safeguard inclusivity and could further undermine access to a non-faith/secular education.

PROPOSED RECOMMENDATION: CONSIDER PLACING AN INDEPENDENT MEMBER OR DIRECTOR WHO IS OF A DIFFERENT FAITH OR NO FAITH AT ALL ON THE GOVERNING BODY OF NEW FAITH FREE SCHOOLS.

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<sup>23</sup> [www.secularism.org.uk/uploads/social-cohesion-sharing-crisps-with-someone-different.pdf](http://www.secularism.org.uk/uploads/social-cohesion-sharing-crisps-with-someone-different.pdf)

58. An outside perspective on the boards of faith-based schools could be a way of ensuring that religious interests do not totally dominate and that the needs (and education rights) of the whole school community are protected. Academisation has already greatly reduced oversight of religious schools, allowing religious bodies to take a much more direct and less restricted role in the management of schools. Encouraged by the Government in the name of 'efficiency', the role of local authority and parental governors has been greatly reduced. This has meant religious influence has been less 'balanced out' than in the past.

59. We are however concerned that this change is again tokenistic and could simply lead to religious enthusiasts of different stripes on each other's boards. It could also lead to calls for religiously appointed governors on the boards of community schools – an avenue of influence that is already being opened up by multi academy trusts and partnership agreements.

60. A better solution may be to limit foundation governors (those appointed for religious reasons) to 20% (the maximum proportion of reserved teachers in VC schools). This would allow the school to promote a religious ethos while ensuring that they also have to take account of other relevant interests. Funding agreements should also restrict religious organisations (or anyone else) from appointing the same governor to numerous school boards – as the Government has already indicated should be discouraged.

**Q: HOW ELSE MIGHT WE ENSURE THAT FAITH SCHOOLS ESPOUSE AND DELIVER A DIVERSE, MULTI-FAITH OFFER TO PARENTS WITHIN A FAITH SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT?**

61. Making faith schools, particularly minority faith schools, appealing to those that don't share the belief of the schools is a difficult circle to square.

62. The wording of this question implies that the Government might be content for the faith schools it funds to only be appealing to people of various faiths. This approach marginalises non-religious parents, who constitute the majority of parents, by either reducing their choice of school or by failing to respect their right to raise their children in accordance with their own philosophical convictions.

63. It is not enough for the schools to only be appealing to people of faith. DfE guidance on 'How to apply to set up a free school', states: "Schools can help to overcoming segregation by fostering a sense of shared belonging and understanding through meaningful contact between people of different backgrounds and faiths"<sup>24</sup>. This must include children from non-religious backgrounds. Applying a faith test to school admissions is therefore clearly inimical to this aim.
64. There is also no evidence to suggest that parents are attracted to a 'multi-faith offer'. In addition to the research cited earlier, which shows that very few parents choose a school on religious considerations, data from the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) reveals that the most important factors to parents when choosing a school are location, standards of teaching and discipline<sup>25</sup>. Parents also value an inclusive ethos. A multi-faith offer implies an excessive emphasis on religion that is likely to alienate non-religious parents and those that regard religion and a private matter for families. An inclusive ethos and multi-faith ethos are not one and the same.
65. If the Government is serious about ensuring that faith schools are inclusive of pupils of all religion and belief backgrounds, it should consider **reducing or eliminating the wide exemptions from equality law that faith schools enjoy**.
66. There is a general exception, which applies to all schools, to the religion or belief provisions of the Equality Act which allows all schools to have acts of worship or other forms of collective religious observance.
67. Rather than exempting schools from equality legislation, we would urge the Government to repeal the exemptions and consider placing a duty on all schools, including those run by faith groups, to ensure that all aspects of the school day are inclusive of all pupils, regardless of their religion or belief, including non-belief. Faith schools may make provision for voluntary worship if pupils request this, but collective worship, which is inappropriate in any multi-faith setting, should be prohibited.

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[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/541945/How\\_to\\_apply\\_to\\_set\\_up\\_a\\_free\\_school\\_guidance.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/541945/How_to_apply_to_set_up_a_free_school_guidance.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/pdf/how-do-parents-choose-school-sec-ed.pdf>

68. If the Government is adamant on allowing schools to hold acts of 'collective worship', it could narrow the exception to ensure that it is not exploited to impose an overbearing religious ethos in schools.
69. Many faith schools hold multiple acts of worship throughout the day. In recent years we've seen classroom worship introduced, prayer corners in classrooms and regular visits from priests. Placing limitations on the extent to which schools can impose worship and assert a religious ethos may make such schools more suitable for and attractive to parents and pupils who do not share the faith of the school.
70. Schools with a religious character also have exceptions for how they provide education to pupils and in the way they allow access to other aspects of school life which are not necessarily part of the curriculum. The Government may wish to consider to what extent these exemptions make faith schools less appealing to those of other faiths and beliefs.
71. The Government should also consider rethinking the freedoms given with regard to the way in which faith schools deliver the curriculum.
72. For example, in its statement of Islamic ethos, the Al-Hijrah School in Birmingham states: "teaching and learning in all subjects is Islamised." The Islamic Ethos of Al-Hijrah School is evident in "greeting, gestures, conduct, dress, manners, language and vocabulary, etiquette, civility, social interaction, discipline, behaviour, art, cultural icons and ambience."<sup>26</sup> It is not hard to see why such schools are unappealing to non-Muslims.
73. The Government should also consider reviewing the arrangement for religious education in faith schools. The model funding agreement specifies that an Academy with a religious designation must provide RE in accordance with the tenets of the particular faith specified in the designation.
74. Furthermore, under current arrangements religious education isn't inspected by Ofsted, but by inspectors appointed by the school's governing body in consultation with the appropriate 'religious authority'.

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<sup>26</sup> <http://alhijrahschool.co.uk/wp-content/themes/zeenoble/images/Ethos-of-Al-Hijrah-School-Policy.pdf>

75. We believe it to be problematic that churches, temples and mosques are able to determine what Britain's young people are being taught in publicly funded schools. If faith schools wish to appeal to pupils from families of different faith and belief backgrounds, the religious education they provide should be broad and balanced and cover a variety of religious, non-religious and secular philosophies and worldviews.
76. Ofsted should also be empowered to inspect the way in which religious education is taught in faith schools. No part of publicly funded education should be shielded from scrutiny. The point of schools is to expand pupils' horizons, not limit them. If a narrow religious education curriculum is standing in the way of promoting inclusivity or impeding the ability of pupils to become well-informed, open-minded and tolerant citizens, then that needs to be addressed – and Ofsted are best placed to do that.

## CONCLUSION

77. The Government is utterly deluded if it believes that the measures contained in this consultation paper will make minority faith schools more integrated, inclusive and appealing to those who do not share the religion of the school.
78. A further expansion of religiously selective faith schools is the antithesis of inclusive education. Whilst these proposals may create extra capacity in the schools system, they will do so by sacrificing equality and social cohesion. We urge the Government to abandon them.