

Fair Admissions Campaign

Briefing: recent research on 'faith' schools and religious selection

The following briefing details the research on 'faith' schools and religious selection that has been published since the Government's announcement that it proposed to remove the current 50% cap.

Faith Schools, Pupil Performance and Social Selection - Education Policy Institute

The report finds that when compared to schools with no religious character at a national level, 'faith' schools **'educate a lower proportion of disadvantaged children'** and **'a lower proportion of pupils with special educational needs'**, and **'enrol a larger proportion of high attaining pupils'**. It also finds that the difference in attainment between faith schools and schools with no religious character **'is largely eliminated after controlling for prior attainment and pupil characteristics'**. It concludes:

*'while encouraging more faith schools to open may help the government to meet its requirements to provide sufficient school places, the proposed policy is unlikely to yield school places that are of a significantly higher quality than that offered by non-faith schools. Furthermore... **there is a risk that these small gains would come at the price of increased social segregation**'.*

Selective Comprehensives 2017 - The Sutton Trust

The report examines admissions to high-attaining non-selective schools for disadvantaged pupils, and makes an important distinction regarding the comparison of schools' social selectivity, one that is often lost on the proponents of 'faith' schools/religious selection. It notes:

*'While faith schools in the top 500 [by GCSE results] have only marginally lower average FSM intakes than those with no religious affiliation, if you compare faith schools with their catchment area [clearly the right comparison to make], a much different picture emerges... **Faith schools are among the most socially selective category of top school, more than three times as socially selective compared to their catchment area than non-faith schools**'.*

The report concludes that lifting the 50% cap is **'likely to make [faith schools] even more unrepresentative of their local areas, reducing the number of good school places available to pupils across the socio-economic spectrum. The admissions process for faith schools should instead be opened up so that their admissions are fairer and begin to reflect their local population'**.

Understanding School Segregation in England: 2011 to 2016 - The Challenge, SchoolDash, and the ICoCo Foundation

This report examines the level of segregation within schools by comparing the ethnic make-up and free school meal eligibility of their intake to those of the ten schools closest to them. The analysis finds that 'faith' schools are significantly more segregated along both ethnic and socio-economic lines than other types of school. More specifically:

- *'Faith schools at primary are more ethnically segregated than schools of no faith...when compared with neighbouring schools. This is particularly pronounced for Catholic schools.'*
- *'At primary level, faith schools are more likely to cater to more advantaged students... The relationship at secondary level is similar but not as strong.'*
- *'The collective impact of faith schools, particularly the predominant Catholic and Church of England schools which are by far the most numerous, needs to be examined. As an example, in one London Borough the 17 faith primary schools that have somewhat diverse intakes, take between one and five times the proportion of White British [pupils] compared to the area and this substantially reduces the potential for other schools to become more mixed.'*

London Education Report 2017 - Mayor of London

The Mayor's annual report reveals that *'The areas in which the lowest proportion of pupils secured their first choice primary schools were Kensington and Chelsea (68.3 per cent) and Hammersmith and Fulham (71.9 per cent)'*. It also notes that *'a more pressing issue than securing a top preference is when pupils do not get a place at any school of their preference'*, revealing the same two boroughs as the worst performing in London in this regard. K&C and H&F are home to the highest proportion of school places subject to religious selection criteria of all London boroughs, **suggesting that religious selection is significantly impacting on parents' access to their preferred/local school.**

Ethnic diversity in religious Free Schools - British Humanist Association

This research draws on the same underlying data used by the Department for Education in its *Schools that work for everyone* green paper to compare the ethnic diversity of 100% religiously selective schools to that of religious free schools subject to the 50% cap. It finds that ethnic integration in schools, particularly Christian schools, has significantly improved as a result of the cap:

- *15% of pupils at CofE free schools are 'Asian ethnic origin', compared to just 6% at fully selective CofE schools*
- *19% of pupils in 'other Christian' free schools are Asian, compared to just 3% of pupils at fully selective other Christian schools*
- *63% of pupils at CofE free schools are white, compared to 78% at 100% selective CofE schools*
- *55% of pupils at other Christian free schools are white, compared to 85% at the 100% selective other Christian schools*

The report notes that whilst this effect is seen to a lesser extent in minority religious free schools (for obvious reasons of parental selection), there are far fewer pupils at minority religious schools than there are at Christian free schools. **The conclusion is therefore that to focus on minority religious schools, as the green paper does, is to ignore the fact that the cap has both boosted integration in the vast majority of cases and vastly improved the access of Asian families to their local schools.**